

Harry Wharton and the Lad from Lancashire. Grand School Tale in this issue.

THE Magnet ^{1d} 2

No 58.

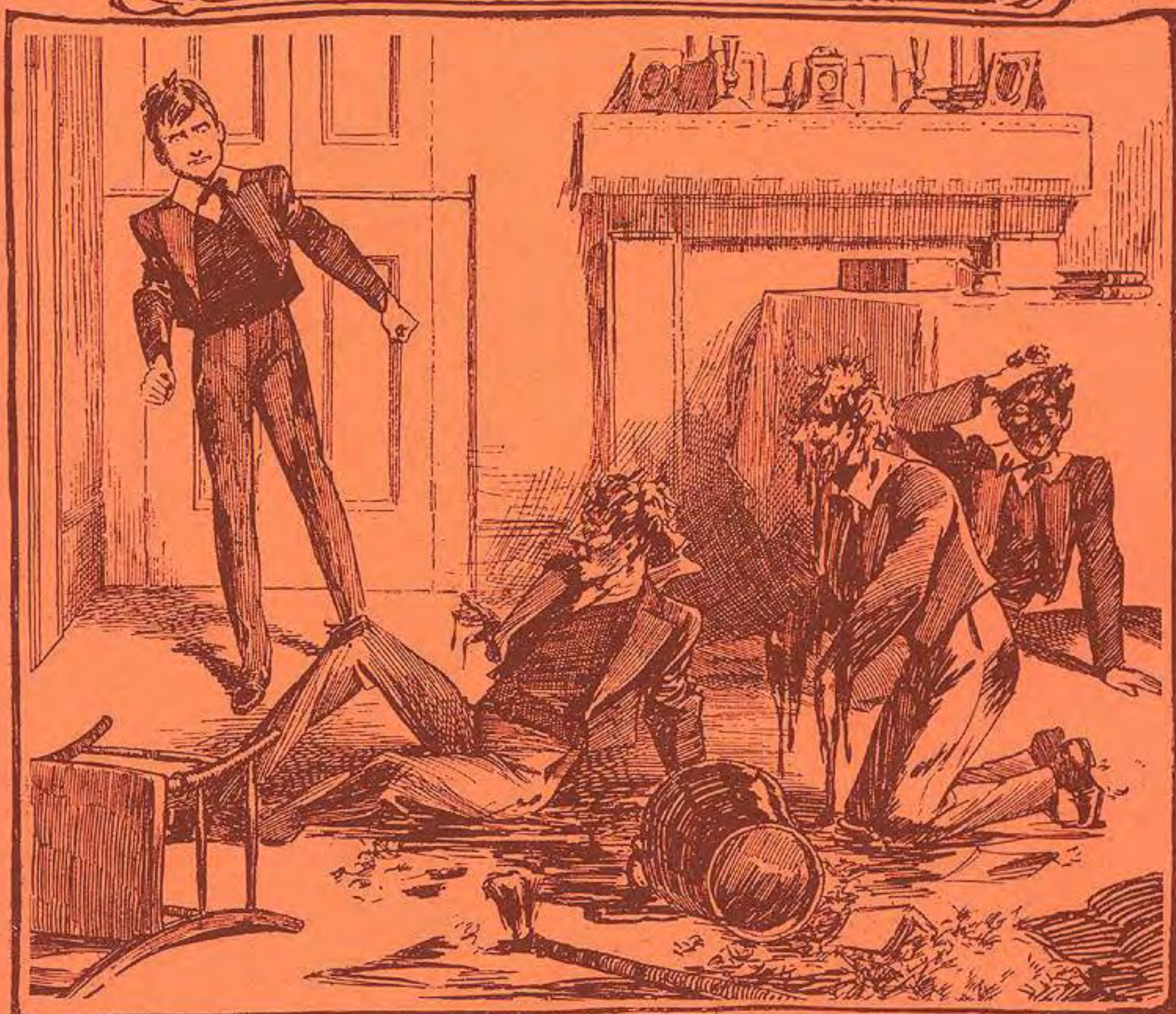
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Vol. 2.

COMPLETE
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FOR ALL

CUT BY THE FORM.

By
FRANK
RICHARDS



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THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Riggers.

"Is he coming, Bulstrode?"

"Not yet."

"Look out——"

"I'm looking out, fathead! Keep quiet."

It was very dark in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. As a rule, two gas-jets burned in the passage, but they had been extinguished now.

The three or four juniors who crouched in an alcove half-way down the passage were invisible to one another and to anybody who might pass. It was an ambushade.

Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, was watching in the darkness, and the other fellows were in the alcove behind him, ready to rush out at a signal.

Bulstrode was looking along the passage towards No. 1 Study.

Cut by the Form

A Grand, Long, Complete School
Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

A glimmer of light came from under the door, visible from where Bulstrode stood.

"He's a jolly long time!" growled Stott. "Perhaps he's staying to tea with Harry Wharton."

"I don't suppose so. I know he went to borrow a Greek lexicon," said Bulstrode. "We'll give him Greek!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, you ass, Snoop! If he hears you cackling he'll know we're here."

"Oh, all right, Bulstrode! I——"

"Don't jaw."

And there was silence in the passage. Bulstrode keenly watched the streak of light from under Harry Wharton's door. He was waiting for that door to open, and for Mark Linley to come out.

There was a long grudge against Mark Linley among a certain section of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form. That he had come to the old school on a scholarship which he had won by hard work ought to have been a recommendation, but Bulstrode and his friends chose to regard it as quite the reverse. A fellow who had worked in a Lancashire mill for a living was, in their opinion, quite out of place in the Greyfriars Lower Fourth.

Linley was a keen student, a keen footballer, and a fine fellow in many ways; but some of the Form refused to see it. Some had made a set against him from the moment he came to Greyfriars, and he was still "cut" by several fellows in the Form.

Linley had taken it all quietly. He was very pleasant to those who were decent to him, and avoided the others—worked

hard, and played hard, and won the respect of the better sort of fellows. But Bulstrode and his friends were not willing to give up their grievance. And the fact that No. 1 Study backed up Linley was quite sufficient to set Bulstrode against him, if there had been nothing else.

More than once Linley had been "ragged" in various ways, but things had sometimes turned out uncomfortably for the raggers. But Bulstrode was not done yet. He had conceived the scheme of tarring and feathering the lad from Lancashire, as a strong hint that it would be better for him to get out of Greyfriars.

Even the boldest of the Removites shrank a little from the scheme, but Bulstrode had his way, as he usually did in such matters, and so the ambushade was laid.

They had timed it carefully. Snoop had watched Linley for some time, and found that he was going to Harry Wharton's study to borrow a Liddell and Scott. The ambushade in the passage followed. Bulstrode had turned the gas out, and it was pretty certain that Linley would walk along in the darkness fairly into the trap without knowing that it was laid.

All was ready in Bulstrode's study for the punishment to be inflicted upon the Lancashire lad when he was captured. It only remained to capture him.

"I say, Bulstrode," murmured Skinner.

"Don't jaw!"

"Yes, but look here, you'll have to be careful. If they hear anything in Wharton's study we shall have that lot on to us."

"They mustn't hear anything, duffer! I'll collar the cad as he comes by, and jam this coat over his head, and you can grip him. We'll have him into my study in a jiffy."

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Silence again! There was a sound of a door-handle turning, and Bulstrode gave an excited whisper to his followers.

"He's coming! Lock out!"

The door of No. 1 Study swung open. The light gleamed out into the passage, and in the light stood the well-set figure of Mark Linley.

He seemed surprised to see the passage dark, but he did not stop. He closed the door behind him, and came along unsuspectingly.

The hearts of the juniors beat more quickly as his footsteps rang nearer.

There was a certain risk in the affair, for if Linley was able to call out, there was no doubt that the chums of No. 1 Study would come to the rescue.

And if Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came upon the scene, the raggers would be pretty certain to get most of the ragging.

Nearer and nearer!

The unsuspecting lad came abreast of the alcove, and Bulstrode sprang upon him. Linley reeled back with a stifled exclamation. But the coat was over his head, and the cry was muffled. In a second more the Removites were grasping him, and he was swung off his feet.

"Got him!" muttered Bulstrode, with grim satisfaction.

There was a cry in the shadows. It came from Snoop.

"Shut up, you fool!"

"He—he's banged me on the nose!"

"Serve you right! Shut up, and bring him in!"

Mark Linley, vainly struggling in the grasp of four pairs of hands, and half-suffocated by the coat round his head, was whisked along the passage and into Bulstrode's study. A junior who was working at the table there jumped up in surprise. It was Hazeldene, who shared the study with Bulstrode.

"What on earth—" he began.

"Hold your row!" said Bulstrode. "Lock the door! Where's that tar?"

"Who have you got there?"

"It's Linley! We're going to tar and feather him."

"Hang it all, Bulstrode! That's going a bit too far."

"Mind your own business! Lock the door, Snoop!"

"I'm not going to have a hand in it," said Hazeldene quickly.

"Let me get out! You fool, there'll be a row about this!"

"Get out if you like, but mind—not a word."

"Oh, that's all right! It's no business of mine."

Hazeldene left the study, and Snoop locked the door. Mark Linley was struggling still, but he had no chance against so many. There was a tar-pot standing in the grate. It had been purloined from a shed which Gosling the porter was tarring that day. A pillow lay in a chair, ready to be torn open. All was ready, but Mark Linley was not a tame victim.

He wrenched his head free of the enveloping coat, and glared about him. His eyes were blazing, and his temper, usually quiet and calm, was evidently at white heat.

"You—you cads!" he shouted. "Let me go!"

Bulstrode chuckled.

"No fear! Hold him tight, you kids! Look here, Linley! Do you see that tar-pot?"

"Yes, I see it."

"And that pillow?"

"Yes. What about it?"

"Well, my boy, we're going to tar and feather you; but we'll let you off on one condition," said Bulstrode loftily. "You've been told before that you're not wanted at Greyfriars. This is a public school, and not a home for the deserving poor."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Skinner.

"You may be all right in the mill you belong to," went on Bulstrode, "but you're not wanted at Greyfriars. You understand?"

"I understand perfectly."

"Well, if you promise to leave quietly at the end of the term—"

"I would be cut in pieces first," said Linley quietly. "You are a cad, Bulstrode; and a coward, too, or you wouldn't attack a fellow four to one! I gave you a licking once. I'm ready to give you another!"

Bulstrode gritted his teeth.

"'Nuff said!" he exclaimed abruptly. "We'll go ahead, and I dare say you'll find out that there are more comfortable places for you than the Greyfriars Remove. Yank that tar-pot out here, Stott."

"Right you are!"

The tar-pot was dragged into the middle of the room.

Snoop slit the pillow with a penknife, and the contents rolled out in a heap on the floor.

"Now, then—the tar first."

Mark Linley struggled desperately. The four juniors grasped him, and dragged him towards the tar-pot.

But so desperate were the efforts of the Lancashire lad that they had all their work cut out to hold him.

"Look out!" yelled Bulstrode.

Linley's foot crashed against the tar-pot.

It rolled over, the contents streaming out on the carpet and mixing with the feathers. Bulstrode made an effort, and hurled Linley into the midst of the spilt tar.

But the Lancashire lad clung to him like a cat, and dragged him down also, and they rolled in the tar.

"Oh!" roared Bulstrode. "Ow! Leggo! Oh!"

They rolled over and over, and the other juniors, fearful of being dragged into the horrible mess of tar and feathers, loosened their hold on Mark and jumped away.

The Lancashire lad had only one foe to tackle, and he proved that he was quite able to take care of himself on fair terms.

He grasped Bulstrode firmly, and rolled the Remove bully over again, and jammed his face fairly into the tar and feathers.

Bulstrode gave a muffled shriek.

As he tore his head away from the sticky mass, his features had disappeared in a mass of tar and feathers, and he was blinded and almost suffocated.

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

Mark Linley sprang to his feet.

His flashing glance fell upon the other raggers, and they sprang back from him. He looked dangerous.

But Linley's blood was up now.

"Come on!" he shouted.

They did not come on. They were more afraid of the sticky, sugary tar than of the fists of the Lancashire lad. But they were not to escape. Mark was so tarry already that he could scarcely become more tarry. He rushed on Skinner and dragged him down, plunging him fairly into the tar, and sending him sprawling across the gasping and stuttering Bulstrode.

Stott and Snoop made a simultaneous rush for the door.

The ragging of the Lancashire lad was not turning out exactly as they had intended. He was getting tarred and feathered, but so was everybody else, and the study was getting into a fearful state.

They grabbed at the locked door at the same moment, but Mark was upon them in a second. He grasped Stott, and hurled him upon Skinner, and then turned upon Snoop. But Snoop had the door open now, and was leaping out into the

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passage. Mark's boot was planted behind him, and he fairly flew.

The Lancashire lad turned round to look at the three ragers struggling up from the floor.

They were in a fearful state of tar and feathers and fury. Mark was as badly off himself; he was smeared all over with tar, and his clothes were utterly spoiled. He stood looking at the ragers for a moment with blazing eyes, and then, controlling himself, he turned and left the study.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Called Over the Coals.

"I SAY, you fellows—— My only hat! Ha, ha, ha!" Billy Bunter stared into Bulstrode's study in amazement, and burst into a yell of laughter.

The fat junior had just come upstairs, and, finding the passage in darkness, he had looked in at the first open door to borrow a match to light the gas. He found Bulstrode, Stott, and Skinner staggering up, smothered with tar and feathers, and looking as shocking a sight as had ever been seen within the ancient walls of Grayfriars.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bunter.

"Get out!" exclaimed Bulstrode fiercely, and he picked up a cricket-stump.

The fat junior scuttled out, and darted down the passage, still yelling with laughter.

He burst into No. 1 Study like a hurricane, with an impetus that he could not control, and dashed right into the table, at which four juniors were sitting at work.

The table went flying, and so did a variety of books and papers, and inks and pens, and there was a yell of wrath from four throats.

"I'm sincerely sorry," gasped Bunter, as four wrathful juniors clutched him. "I—I—I'm sincerely sorry, but—but——"

"You young ass! See what you've done?"

"I—I—I couldn't help it! Ha, ha, ha! Ow! Don't shake me like that, Bob Cherry. You'll make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them."

"What do you mean by bolting in here like a wild jabber-wock?" roared Bob Cherry, still shaking the fat junior.

"Ow! Bulstrode's after me!"

Bob Cherry looked towards the door. There was no sign of Bulstrode. He had not followed Billy Bunter far.

Bunter, finding that he was not pursued after all, became a little more reassured. He wriggled loose from the chums of the Remove, and then stood holding his sides chuckling.

The chums looked at their wrecked exercises on the floor, and then at the chuckling junior, and made a simultaneous movement towards him.

Bunter promptly dodged.

"Hold on! I'm sincerely sorry; but it was so funny, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"It won't seem so funny to you when I've jolly well rubbed your chivvy in the ink," growled Bob Cherry.

"Hold on! I wasn't laughing at that. It's Bulstrode."

"What's the matter with Bulstrode?"

"Come and see."

Billy Bunter's explosions of mirth excited curiosity in No. 1 Study, and they followed the fat junior down the passage.

Safe with the Famous Four, Bunter returned boldly enough to the dangerous quarter. The sounds of angry voices were proceeding from Bulstrode's study.

The juniors looked in at the open door.

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums roared with laughter. They could not help it. The carpet was in a terrible state with tar and feathers. Bulstrode, Skinner, and Stott were smothered, and they were shouting furiously at one another. The disaster had naturally been followed by a quarrel among the unsuccessful ragers, and they were "slanging" one another at the top of their voices.

They turned round and glared at the chums as they heard them at the door. Their blackened faces were inexpressibly funny to look at, and No. 1 Study roared again.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" gasped Bob. "Have you been having an argument with that tar-pot? What's the trouble, anyway?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Bulstrode.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, get out, do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bulstrode made a rush at the door; but he hesitated to tackle the four, and he slammed the door instead. The laughter of the juniors rang along the passage, and speedily attracted other fellows to the spot.

And every moment after that Bulstrode's door was opened by some curious investigator, who sent a yell of laughter into the study, and then fled.

"What can the trouble be?" said Harry Wharton, as they walked away. "What on earth can Bulstrode have been doing with a tar-pot and a lot of feathers in his study?"

"Tarring and feathering one another," grinned Nugent.

"That's what they've been doing, whether they intended it or not."

"The tarfulness and the featherfulness are terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Ah, what is this?"

There was a patter of rapid footsteps in the passage.

The gas had been relighted now, and the chums as they turned their heads saw a breathless junior racing along.

It was Snoop. He signed to them frantically to get out of the way, and they stood aside, and he dashed on.

After him came a junior whose features were almost concealed by black smears of tar, and whose clothes were tarry and feathery from head to foot.

"Great Scott, who's that?"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"It's Linley!"

Mark Linley ran on. He was evidently in pursuit of Snoop, and Snoop was trying hard to escape. He dodged and doubled in the upper passage, and made a break for the stairs. But down the stairs on his track went the Lancashire lad.

The chums of the Remove stared at them in blank astonishment.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Wharton, in perplexity. "It's not like Linley to get his rag out like that. And how did he get into that state?"

"Great Scott! Look!"

"My hat!"

The chums, looking over the bannisters, could see a gowned form on the first landing. It was that of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove. But Snoop, in his headlong flight, did not see him. He rushed fairly into his arms, and Mr. Quelch caught him by the collar and stopped him with a jerk.

"Ow!" roared Snoop. "Leggo! Oh! I—I—I—Mr. Quelch!"

"What does this mean? Dear me, what is that?"

Mark Linley burst upon the scene the next moment. He stopped abruptly at the sight of Mr. Quelch, panting and breathless.

The Form-master looked at him blankly.

"What—who are you? Is it Linley?"

"Yes, sir," gasped Mark.

"What are you doing in that state?"

Linley was silent.

The Form-master looked from one boy to the other, and something of the truth glimmered upon his mind.

"Ah! I presume Snoop was responsible for your getting into that state, Linley, and you were—ah—going to punish him?"

Still the Lancashire lad did not speak. He had certainly been going to give Snoop his due share of the tar and feathers, as was only just, but he had nothing to say to the Form-master. He knew that if Bulstrode's scheme became known it would be serious for the bully of the Remove, and though Mark Linley had suffered many a grievance at the hands of the Remove bully, he was the last fellow in the world to sneak.

Mr. Quelch looked at him hard, and then turned to the gasping Snoop.

"Snoop!"

His voice came like a hailstone.

"Snoop!"

"Ye-e-e-es, sir."

"What does this mean? How did Linley get into this state?"

"I—I—I——"

"You were responsible for it?"

"N-n-n-n-no, sir, it—it—it—it was Bulstrode."

Mark Linley's lip curled scornfully. He would have been flogged before he would have betrayed his enemy. Snoop had betrayed his friend without a scruple.

"Ah!" said Mr. Quelch quietly. "I might have guessed that, I think. Where is Bulstrode?"

"In—in his study, sir."

"Follow me there, both of you."

The juniors obeyed. Three or four fellows were chuckling outside Bulstrode's door. Micky Desmond had just opened it and looked in, and retreated, shrieking with laughter. The ragers were trying to scrape the tar off, but without much success.

"Faith, and it's a soight," said Micky. "I—hallo—cave!"

And the sightseers scuttled off as the Remove-master came in sight.

Mr. Quelch walked up to the door, and threw it open.

"Get out, you silly beast!" roared Bulstrode. "I'll—oh!"

I beg your pardon, sir, I—I thought it was Desmond!"

Mr. Quelch looked sternly at the tarry juniors.

"I shall require a full explanation of this," he said quietly.

"Whose idea was it to bring the tar into the study, Bulstrode?"

The Remove bully assumed a dogged expression. His eyes fairly blazed as they turned on Mark Linley. He jumped to the not unnatural conclusion that Mark had brought the Form-

master to the study. Bulstrode had a great deal of dogged pluck, and he was not afraid to own up and "face the music."

"Mine, sir," he replied, with a touch of defiance in his manner.

"And why was it brought here?"

"We meant to tar and feather that rotter, sir."

"Are you alluding to Linley?"

"Yes, sir."

"And why do you allude to him as a 'rotter'?"

"He's a rank outsider, sir."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"I presume you mean that you dislike him because he is here on a scholarship, and has previously worked for his living? Is that it?"

"I—I—"

"Have you any other cause of complaint against him?"

"I—I suppose not. This isn't the proper place for fellows who have worked in a mill. He's a cad, of course."

"There are thousands of fellows who have worked in mills, Bulstrode, who are better boys, and will be better men, than you can possibly be. I am afraid I must say that it is you who are a cad and a snob into the bargain. I cannot help despising you, Bulstrode. I am ashamed to have such a boy in my Form."

Bulstrode turned red under the tar. Mr. Quelch had a bitter tongue when he chose to let it go.

"You have acted in a callous and cowardly way, Bulstrode. You have been guilty of petty spite and malice. You have persecuted a boy who has given you no cause of offence. I am afraid that it is only the natural dislike of a mean nature for a manly one that has caused you to dislike Linley."

Skinner clucked.

The expression of Bulstrode's tarry face was a study.

But Skinner was grave again immediately, as the Form-master's eye turned on him for a moment.

"Now," resumed Mr. Quelch, looking at Bulstrode again, "I should severely punish such a freak as this in any case. Under the circumstances, I shall administer the severest punishment in my power, Bulstrode, I shall report this matter to the Head, and you will be called up to-morrow morning for a flogging."

The Remove bully's bravado left him instantly.

A caning he could have stood with dogged courage; but a public flogging at the hands of Dr. Locke was a different matter.

"Oh, sir!"

"I cannot let you escape more easily than that, Bulstrode. I must impress the lesson fully on your mind. The other culprits I shall cane myself, and they can come to my study as soon as they are clean. I shall expect them in an hour's time."

And Mr. Quelch turned towards the door.

Mark Linley went out of the study with a troubled expression. It was in a sense through him that Bulstrode was to be flogged, and it troubled him. In the passage he ventured to stop Mr. Quelch.

"If you please, sir—"

"Go on, Linley," said the Remove-master, kindly enough.

"Could you—could you—I—I don't mean it for cheek, sir—but—could you let Bulstrode off a bit more lightly, sir?" stammered Mark, hurriedly. "I—I can't help feeling it's partly my fault."

Mr. Quelch shook his head.

"No, Linley. I honour you for speaking up for one who has only injured you; but the malignancy Bulstrode has shown must have a fitting punishment."

He strode on, with rustling gown. It was useless to say more, and Mark knew it. And the Lancashire lad went on slowly and miserably enough to his own study.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Sneak.

THERE was a full minute of silence in Bulstrode's study after Mr. Quelch had gone. The four juniors were stricken with dismay. Bulstrode was pale where the tar did not obscure his skin; and Skinner and Stott were very grim. Snoop was trembling. He had betrayed Bulstrode, and for the moment he did not reflect that the Remove bully was unaware of it. He waited for the storm, not even daring to make a movement to quit the study, lest it should bring the bully's wrath down upon him the sooner.

It was Stott who broke the grim silence.

"I say, it's rough on you, old man."

"Beastly rough!" said Skinner. "I don't see why Quelch wanted to take so serious a view of it. After all, it was only a joke."

"And how the deuce did he know anything about it, either?" asked Skinner. "He couldn't have known unless—"

"I suppose he saw the crowd of fellows out there, and—"

"Not a bit of it!" said Skinner. "He knew all about it before he came in; and he brought in Linley and Snoop with him. How did it happen, Snoop?"

Bulstrode, who had not spoken yet, turned to Snoop, with a blaze in his eyes that told of the savage rage in his breast.

"Yes, how did it happen?" he asked. "Did Linley fetch Quelch here on purpose, Snoop?"

Snoop drew a quick, quivering breath.

Until this moment it had not occurred to him that he might escape the punishment due to a sneak by throwing the blame on another.

Now the dastardly thought rushed into his brain like lightning. Bulstrode's question made the lie only too easy.

"Yes," he said.

Bulstrode gritted his teeth. He was only too glad to believe evil of Mark. The blacker Mark could be painted, the more justified Bulstrode felt in his hatred of him.

"The cad! The rotten sneak!"

"The miserable worm!" said Stott. "Why, there's not a fellow in the Remove would have told if he had been flayed alive! We've had rotters in the Form; but no sneaks!"

"What can you expect?" said Bulstrode bitterly. "This worm has been bred up in a slum, and worked among cads all his life. It's only what we might have looked for. I've said so all along."

"Yes, that's true enough; you were down on him from the start."

"I knew the kind of chap he was certain to turn out. I wonder what Wharton and Co. will say when they know it? What will the Form say?"

"We'll jolly well give him a showing-up!"

"Yes, rather!"

"I—I say," muttered Snoop, "are you going to make a Form matter of it? Better let the poor beast alone. After, all, he's—"

"Oh, don't be a fool, Snoop! Why, you've been hardest on him up to now," exclaimed Bulstrode, in astonishment. "We're going to show him up. He'll be sent to Coventry by the whole Form. This is where we have a chance of getting rid of the cad for good. We'll make the Remove too hot to hold him."

"Blessed if I can get this tar off!" said Skinner. "I'm going to try with some hot water in the bath-room. Ta-ta!"

And he left the study. The others followed him. But the attempts to remove the tar were not very successful. In spite of the greatest efforts, very visible traces of it clung to Stott and Skinner when they, with Snoop, presented themselves at Mr. Quelch's study to take their punishment.

The three received a dozen cuts each, and they were hard ones. They left the room wriggling with pain, and Snoop seemed to suffer most. He never could bear pain, and now he was simply doubled up. And as he wriggled and writhed the hatred in his heart for Mark Linley was strengthened by his sufferings. His last scruple had vanished now. Unreasonably enough, he put down the severe caning to the account of the Lancashire lad, and felt that in branding Linley as a sneak he was only somehow "getting his own back."

The contortions of the three sufferers attracted the general attention of the junior common-room when they entered it. A circle of sympathisers surrounded them, and listened to their tale of woe. And the story that Linley had betrayed the ragers to the Form-master excited deep and general wrath.

"It was rough on him to be tarred," said Trevor. "And Bulstrode was a pig—"

"Oh, was I?" said Bulstrode savagely. "I—"

"Yes, you were. But that doesn't excuse Linley for sneaking. I was beginning to like that chap too! It shows that you never know a fellow!"

"You never know how one of these cads will turn out," said Skinner. "We've treated him well enough—h'm, well, quite as well as he could expect, anyway. And now for him to turn on us like this!"

"Caddish!"

"Rotten!"

"Beastly!"

"Rats!" said Russell. "You've treated him like pigs—"

"Look here, Russell, if you're going to back up a sneak—"

"I'm not! I say you've treated him like pigs," said Russell cheerfully. "But that doesn't justify his turning sneak. I daresay he was awfully wild; but a decent fellow wouldn't have sneaked. As far as I'm concerned, I shan't speak to him again."

"Nor I!"

"Nor I!"

"That's the idea!" said Bulstrode. "I've got to be flogged to-morrow morning through that unspeakable cad."

"Shame!"

"But I don't care, if it shows the rotter up in his true light. He ought to be sent to Coventry by the whole Form."

"That's the idea!"

"Send him to Coventry!"

"Faith, and if he's a snake—"

"Who said he was a snake?"

"Ha, ha! Micky means a sneak."

"Sure, and if he's a snake he ought to be sent to Coventry!"

said Micky Desmond. "But how do ye know he gave ye away to the Queleh spalpeen, Bulstrode, darling?"

"Snoop heard him; and Queleh marched into my study at once, bringing Linley with him."

"That's how it was," said Snoop. "It was on the landing. Queleh caught Linley with the tar on his face, and asked him how he got like it."

"I suppose the silly ass blurted it out?" said Hazeldene.

"Whether he blurted it out or not, he gave Bulstrode away, and there's a flogging to follow," said Skinner.

"And he's got to be sent to Coventry."

"And serve him jolly well right."

"And if Wharton backs him up——" said Bulstrode, striking the iron while it was hot, so to speak.

"We'll jolly well send Wharton to Coventry, too, if he does!" shouted Ogilvy.

"Good!"

"Hallo! Here comes the cad!"

Mark Linley came quietly enough into the room. He had cleaned his face and hands as far as possible, though tarry smears still showed there. He had changed his clothes, and the clothes he was now wearing were not so good as those he had been compelled to discard. Linley's people were poor, and his mother, careful soul as she was, had hard work to keep her son clad decently enough for a school like Greyfriars. The ruining of a suit of clothes meant much to Mark—much more than the thoughtless juniors comprehended or could possibly comprehend. He hardly dared to write to his mother and tell her of the mishap; yet it must be told, and something done.

With this trouble, and perhaps other troubles, on his mind, poor Mark did not look cheerful. His evening's work, too, had been spoiled by the ragging. He had finished his prep. early, and had intended to put in a couple of hours at Greek. Greek was an "extra" at Greyfriars, and Mark could not afford it, but with the assistance of Harry Wharton and one or two kindly seniors who took an interest in the hardworking lad, he had taken the subject up, and was getting along very well with it.

Mark Linley had plenty to think about just at that moment, and he did not notice the looks that were bent upon him as he came into the common-room.

But he could not help noticing, a few moments after his entrance, a very audible sound that ran through the room.

"S-s-s-s-s-s-s-s!"

It was a prolonged hiss. There was no mistaking it; and the troubled lad's eyes were quickly raised. He looked round him in amazement. He knew nothing of Snoop's falsehood, nothing of the charge made against him and proved to the satisfaction of the Remove.

"S-s-s-s-s-s-s-s!"

The hiss was meant for him, that was certain. Why, he could not guess—unless it was simply a development of the campaign against him. But why should fellows who had not joined in the general attack—fellows who had been civil and even friendly—why should they be hissing him?

The Lancashire lad looked at the crowd, and his face went red and white.

"Sneak!"

Bulstrode shouted out the word. It was echoed by the others, in a roar of condemnation that rang through the room.

"Sneak! Cad! Sneak!"

Linley stared at them. He did not understand. But it was impossible for him to make his voice heard. He spoke; but his words were drowned in the shout.

"Sneak!"

He turned quietly and left the room. And still the bitter word followed him, dying along the passages.

"Sne-e-e-e-e-e-e-e!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. A Lesson for Bunter.

HARRY WHARTON was one of the last to hear of the matter. As captain of the Remove, he should naturally have taken the lead in the proceedings; but Bulstrode had been glad to leave him out of it. And as the chums of No. 1 Study were busy just then, it was easy for Bulstrode to effect his purpose.

The Famous Four had a matter to think of which was important enough to them. In a few days' time, Cliff House College was to open. Cliff House College fronted the sea at a short distance from Greyfriars, and its opening was a matter of interest to Harry Wharton & Co. To most of the Greyfriars fellows it was a matter of supreme indifference.

If Cliff House had been a boys' school, they would have been interested enough. The prospect of fixing up football matches, or even of rowing with the fellows in the lanes, would have been attractive. But it was a girls' school!

To the average boyish mind at Greyfriars a girls' school was of infinitely less interest than, say, the extinct craters in the moon. But there was one circumstance that keenly interested the chums of No. 1 Study.

Hazeldene's sister was going there!

Marjorie Hazeldene was their chum, and the prospect of having her for a near neighbour was very pleasant. The chums looked forward to boating and cycling with Marjorie in the coming

summer. It would make a great deal of difference to them. Bob Cherry was especially pleased. He thought there ought to be some kind of a welcome organised for the opening of the girls' school, and his chums fully agreed with him. The question was, what form should the celebration take. And, having finished their prep, the Famous Four discussed that subject long and earnestly.

Billy Bunter sat in the easy chair and listened. There was a peculiar self-satisfied smirk about Bunter's fat face which the juniors were too busy to notice.

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, speaking at last. But the discussion went on without a pause.

"It ought to be something really ripping, you know," said Bob Cherry. "Something worthy of the—the traditions of the Remove!"

"Hear, hear!" said Nugent.

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton nodded, with a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow.

"You're right! But how——"

"We shall have to think it out and get up something really toffy and first-class," said Bob emphatically.

"I say, you fellows——"

"I was thinking of a procession from the station——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Don't interrupt, Bunt; can't you see we're busy?"

"Yes; but I say, you fellows, I've got a suggestion to make."

"Oh, go ahead," said Bob Cherry resignedly. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know—Bunter may possibly have an idea."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Get on, and don't be so jolly long-winded."

"Well, I think I ought to be consulted in this matter," said Billy, smirking. "I suppose you know why Marjorie is coming to Cliff House."

"Yes; Hazeldene says his people want her to be in a school as near him as possible, and it's only natural," said Wharton; "as a matter of fact, Hazeldene is a much more decent chap when his sister's about, and I daresay his people know that he's weak, and that Marjorie has a good influence over him."

"Yes, perhaps there's something in that," said Bunter. "But——"

"But what? What are you getting at, and what is that greasy smirk smearing over your fat chivvy for?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! You see, I can't help seeing facts. You know jolly well how nice Marjorie is to me when she sees me——"

"She's nice to everybody," said Bob Cherry, with a face like a thundercloud. "She's nice to me, and I can never talk to her, because I know I haven't half the brains she has. She's nice even to a worm like Snoop. I admit that most girls would bar a fat young porpoise like you, but Marjorie is an angel."

"Oh, really, you know! Of course, I don't mean to hint that I'm an—an Adonis," said Billy Bunter simpering. "But there's a way about me that's taking with girls."

The four juniors looked at him.

"I'm not a chap to boast of a thing of this sort," said Bunter, mistaking their silence. "I'm only telling you fellows. Some chaps are attractive to girls; and some aren't. There's a good deal of luck about it. If Marjorie Hazeldene likes me, of course——"

"You—you miserable, crawling worm!" said Bob Cherry in tones of the most intense disgust. "You—you—oh, hang it, there ain't a word!"

"I'm sincerely sorry to see petty jealousy——"

"What?" roared Bob Cherry.

"To see petty jealousy like this in you, Cherry. I know you're spoony on——"

"Hold your tongue, you young pig!"

"Oh, very well. But as I was saying, it's not my fault if Marjorie likes me. I've never done anything in particular to encourage her. I've just treated her always with ordinary politeness. If she——"

Billy Bunter ceased suddenly.

He couldn't help it; for Bob Cherry had seized him by the shoulders and bounced him out of the easy chair. He was bumped against Nugent, who promptly shoved him off.

"Hang it all, Bob! Don't bring that thing near me," he expostulated.

"Sorry! I know he's not fit for anybody to touch."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Billy Bunter bumped down on the hearthrug, on his back. Bob Cherry put a foot on his chest, and squeezed hard. The air escaped from Billy in a prolonged gasp, a great deal like escaping steam.

"Ow! Ow! I—I'm sincerely sorry——"

"Now, you worm," said Bob Cherry, in concentrated tones.

"You know jolly well that you ought to be suffocated, and buried behind a pigstye somewhere——"

"Hear, hear!"

"But there's a silly law against exterminating pigs when they happen to be bipeds," went on Bob Cherry. "So I'm just going to give you a fearful licking instead——"

"Oh! Ow! Make him lemme get up, Wharton!"

"Not I," said Harry. "You are a rotten young beast, and if Cherry doesn't lick you I will."

"And I'd lend a hand," said Nugent.

"The tendfulness of my esteemed hand would also be terrific."

"Ow! I say, you fellows——"

"You worin'," said Bob Cherry. "If Marjorie knew the kind of crawling reptile you are, she'd never speak to you again, and serve you right. A nice girl can't be civil to you, without you thinking that——pah! Bunter, I'm afraid I shall have to suffocate you after all, and chance it."

"Ow! Lemme gerrup."

"Get me the dogwhip, will you, Nugent?"

"Certainly."

"Ow! wow! Lemme gerrup! I won't do it again—I mean—I—I won't—ow! wow!"

"Do you confess that you are a crawling worm, then, and a lying, stupid little beast?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Do you confess? Gimme that whip."

"Yes! Ow! Yes! Oh, yes."

"And you're not fit to speak to Marjorie?"

"Yes—no—no!"

"And you'll never be a conceited, stupid, flabby little rotter any more?"

"Yes—no—no—n—no!"

"Right—oh! Then I'll let you off with a dozen," said Bob Cherry. He grasped the fat junior by the collar and jerked him to his feet, and the lash played round Bunter's fat legs.

Bunter hopped and yelled, but Bob Cherry was in earnest. He gave the fat junior a lashing that made him squirm and wriggle, and then pitched him into the easy chair. Bunter flopped into it, and lay gasping. He did not quite know whether Bob had been in earnest or not, but he knew that he was hurt.

"You—you—you're a beast, Bob Cherry," he gasped. "I—think you're a beast! And—and I jolly well won't ask you to my feed when I get the three pounds a week from the Patriotic Home Work Association."

"Oh, rats," grunted Bob Cherry.

"I jolly well won't! And Marjorie——"

"Shut up!"

"I was going to say——"

"Never mind what you were going to say. Shut up."

"But—but, really, Cherry——"

"Shut up!" roared Bob Cherry. "I won't allow you to speak! If you open your mouth again, I'll jolly well put my knuckles into it."

Billy Bunter blinked at him. Bob was in earnest, and the fat junior thought he had better not speak again at present. He relapsed into silence, with an extremely injured expression upon his face.

There was a tap at the door, and Hazeldene came in. He had a letter in his hand. He looked rather curiously at the chums of the Remove.

"Hallo! Been having a row?"

Bob Cherry laughed a little uneasily. He was looking red and excited, but he did not wish Hazeldene to know the cause.

"Oh, no, only a little argument with Bunter," he said. "He wants to talk too much, and I've been giving him some instruction for his own good——"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Shut up!" roared Bob.

Hazeldene grinned. Bob glanced at the letter in his hand.

"Any news?"

"Yes; it's from Marjorie."

And the chums of No. 1 Study were all attention at once.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Sent to Coventry!

MARK LINLEY sat in his study.

The gas was burning brightly, and a bright fire glowing in the grate. The study looked very cheerful and cosy; but Mark's face was overcast.

On the table before him were his books—Liddell and Scott, and the "Initia Græca" and "Xenophon's Anabasis"—at which he had intended to work. But he was not working. He could not concentrate his mind upon it. For him, as for many studious lads, the mere sight of a Greek character had a fascination. But he could not give his thoughts to it now. "The Retreat of the Ten Thousand" had lost its interest. For once Mark was thinking only of himself.

His path had been a thorny one ever since he had entered Greyfriars. He thought of the old days in the Lancashire village—of the hard work at the mill, and the still harder work

of the evenings—when, with a body tired from a day's labour, he had worked with his brain, burning the candle at both ends.

It had been a strenuous time—a time that had left its mark upon even the sound, healthy Lancashire lad. But it had been for a great object. All was repaid by the pride and delight of his mother when he won Bishop Mowbray's scholarship, and the good old soul knew that her boy was going to the great school, to conquer fields of learning unknown and incomprehensible to her, and to mix with boys who, never having had to battle with the stern realities of life, would, of course, extend a cordial hand to the lad who had worked his way up from the depths of poverty. Poor simple soul—Mark had not shared her hopes, though he had tried to do so—he had instinctively felt that when he went to Greyfriars, he would only be exchanging one scene of struggle for another—that different difficulties waited for him at the great public school.

But he had been determined to fight his way through them—and so far he had succeeded. His courage, his true grit, had won upon many of his Form-fellows, in spite of themselves. Harry Wharton's friendship had meant much to him, too.

Wharton had recognised him as a brave and true heart the first time he met him; and Wharton was the last fellow in the world to care for the prejudices of others. He had taken Linley up in defiance of the Form; and the Form, as usual, had in the end veered round after their leader.

But all that had been gained had been lost again now.

Mark did not understand the cause of the outburst. He was not yet aware of Snoop's treachery. But he knew that the slumbering dislike of the Form had been fully awakened, that passive indifference had changed to open hatred and contempt, that even fellows who had liked him had turned against him.

He had left the common-room with every voice raised to hoot him, and he had gone to his study, stung to the very soul, and with the hot tears of anger and humiliation starting to his eyes. But he would not shed them.

With grim resolve he took out his books, and set to work. But even his resolution was not equal to the test. His mind wandered, he could not concentrate it upon the text, the characters danced before his eyes.

He had had unhappy hours enough at Greyfriars, but never had he felt really miserable till now. Now—what was he to do? How was he to strive against this new development?

The door opened, and Russell and Lacy came in. They, and the Chinese junior Wun Lung, shared the study with Linley. Mark looked up, and nodded, but received only stony stares in reply.

The colour flushed into his face. He had been on good terms enough with his study mates. They were not claims, but they met on a friendly footing. It was the cut direct he received now, and it stung him.

He started to his feet.

"Look here, what's the matter with you!" he exclaimed hotly. "What is the matter with the fellows? What are they turning on me like a set of wild beasts for?"

Russell went across to the fireplace without reply. Lacy hesitated a moment, and shrugged his shoulders.

"You know well enough," he said.

"I don't—unless you mean it's because I'm—what I am—because I'm a working-man's son! But I thought you were getting over that."

"It's not that."

"What is it, then?"

"You know jolly well."

"I tell you I don't."

"Don't speak to him, Lacy!" exclaimed Russell. "You know what's been decided on. He's sent to Coventry—he's to be cut by the Form."

"Well, I may as well explain why, if he doesn't know."

"He knows well enough! Snoop heard him sneak to Quelch."

Mark started.

"What's that? Who says I sneaked—and what about?"

"Oh, don't try to brazen it out! We know all about it. I admit Bulstrode went too far in the tar-and-feather business. But you had no right to sneak. Of course, a fellow brought up as you've been wouldn't know that," said Russell loftily.

Mark clenched his fists hard.

"Does Bulstrode think I betrayed him to Mr. Quelch?"

"He jolly well knows you did, and so do we all. You took Quelch to his study, and now he's to be flogged."

"I did not take Mr. Quelch there—he ordered me to follow him there."

"It amounts to the same thing, I suppose. You gave Bulstrode away?"

"I did not. I——"

"Oh, what's the good of lying about it?"

That was the last straw. The Lancashire lad's temper was already at boiling-point. He lashed out with his right, and Russell sat suddenly in the fender.

He was on his feet again in an instant, springing at Linley.

They closed and struggled. Lacy started forward, and then

held back. After all, if the fellow was an "outsider," still fair play was fair play, and they were one to one. But Russell was no match for the lad who knew every trick of Lancashire wrestling, and in a few seconds he was on his back.

Mark stood panting, looking down at him with blazing eyes.

Russell slowly rose. He was no coward, but he knew when he had had enough. He was aching in every bone from the concussion on the floor.

"That will do," he said quietly. "I dare say I was wrong to call you a liar, too. But—well, I don't believe you. I don't want to taunt you, Linley, or to blame you at all. I know you've never had the chances a decent fellow gets. But I don't want to speak to you again. Leave me alone, that's all."

"Same here," said Lacy. "I'm not looking for trouble, unless you're pining for it. But don't speak to me, that's all."

Mark gritted his teeth.

"I won't! I don't want to speak to you—or to anybody else here! I won't stay in the same study with you, either! I can do my work in the Form-room. Anybody who says I told about Bulstrode is a liar. That's all I have to say."

He caught up his books, and strode from the study.

Russell and Lacy looked at one another a little sheepishly.

"I—I say, Lacy, it—it isn't possible that——"

"Rats!" said Lacy. "Of course he would try to brazen it out."

"I—I suppose so."

"Didn't he bring old Quelch straight to Bulstrode's study, and show him up? Besides, Snoop heard him."

"Yes, I forgot that."

"Of course, he wasn't likely to own up. Jolly good riddance, I say, if he keeps his word. We don't want him here."

And Mark Linley did keep his word. That evening he removed his few belongings from the study to his locker in the Form-room, and his old quarters knew him no more.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Alone!

HAZELDENE was looking very pleased with himself, and the chums of No. 1 Study could guess what was coming before he told them.

"Is Marjorie coming here?" asked Bob Cherry.

Hazeldene grinned and nodded.

"That's it. Mrs. Locke has asked her to stay with Molly, and she'll be here to-morrow morning. Thought I'd look in and tell you."

"Jolly good!" said Wharton.

Little Miss Molly, the Head's daughter, was one of the powers at Greyfriars, and she had bestowed her royal regard upon Marjorie. But indeed everyone liked Marjorie who met her, and even the sour face of Mr. Maddox, the mathematics-master, had been known to lighten when his eyes fell upon her sunny face.

"But I say, what are you fellows shut up here chowing for when things are going on?" asked Hazeldene.

"Things going on?" yawned Bob Cherry. "Bless your innocent little soul the Remove can play marbles without our help."

"We haven't been playing marbles," said Hazeldene indignantly. "It's a jolly serious matter for one chap at least."

"Anything happened?" asked Wharton.

"Yes. That chap Linley—he's in for it at last. Bulstrode and his set tried to tar and feather him."

"Cads!"

"Well, it was rather rough, and they've made our study into a fearful state, and got into ditto themselves. But the worst of it is that Linley got his reg out over the matter, and complained to Quelch."

"Not to be wondered at either," said Wharton, frowning. "The cads ought to have a thundering good hiding each."

"They've had it, except Bulstrode; and he's going to be flogged before the whole school to-morrow morning."

"Serve him right."

"I don't disagree with you, but I suppose you won't back up Linley in sneaking to a master?"

"N-no," said Wharton slowly. "I suppose the poor chap was exasperated, and blurted something out. He's not the kind of chap to sneak, and I know it. But is there any proof that he did sneak, though—is it certain?"

"He hasn't denied it as far as I know, but it wouldn't be much use. He brought Quelch straight to Bulstrode's study, and the beak started on the raggers at once. Skinner and Stott and Snoop have been caned, and Bulstrode is going up to the Head in the morning. Rough on him."

"Serve him right, but it's rough on Linley. I'm sorry he told about Bulstrode; it's not what I should have expected of him," said Wharton. "But I can understand his losing his self-control, after what he's been through. The fault is with the cads who were ragging him."

"My worthy chum is terrifically correctful."

"Well, he's sent to Coventry by the whole Form now," said Hazeldene. "A lot of the fellows were willing to overlook

the kind of chap he was—his being a mill boy, and so on—I overlooked it myself."

"Nice of you," said Bob Cherry, with the nearest approach to a sneer that had ever been seen on his frank face. "You're a nice-kind of worm to overlook anything, aren't you? Linley was worth a dozen of you any time."

Hazeldene turned red.

"Draw it mild, Bob," grinned Nugent. "Honour the guest that is within thy gates. What have they done to Linley, Vaseline?"

"He's cut by the Form. I don't want to be down on him, but I'm not going to speak to him any more. I know he was roughly used, but he had no right to sneak."

"Yes, if it's proved," said Wharton musingly.

"Not much doubt on that point. He's been rowing with Russell and Lacy since he was sent to Coventry, and I hear they've turned him out of the study, and he's taken his traps into the Form-room."

Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"Where are you going?" asked Nugent quickly.

"To speak to Linley."

"But I say, old chap, if he's really sneaked we can't stand by him," said Nugent uneasily. "I don't believe in kicking a chap who's down; but we're bound to bar sneaking to the masters. You can't set yourself against the Form on a matter like that."

"I shouldn't think of doing so, if Linley has sneaked; but I'd rather hear the account from his own lips before I condemn him."

"Well, I suppose that's only right."

"The rightfulness is terrific!"

Harry Wharton left the study. His brow was darkly wrinkled. He liked and respected the Lancashire lad, and he was sorry for him, and if Linley had really "sneaked" it would be a blow to Wharton, too. Hardly as the boy had been treated, school-boy honour required that he should fight his own battles without bringing any of the masters into the disputes. If he had failed on this point, there was no question about the result—he would have to be sent to Coventry by the whole Form.

There was a glimmer of light under the door of the Remove Form-room. Wharton pushed open the door and entered. Mark Linley sat there with his books under the light of a solitary jet.

He was working. He had accepted the situation with the philosophy taught him by a hard life. He was cut by the Form—well, henceforth he would stand alone, and the Form would see how little their like or dislike could affect him. He had concentrated his mind upon the work in hand, and he was doing it with grim determination. He looked up as Wharton came in, and his face lighted.

"Wharton!"

"I heard you were here, Linley, and I want to speak to you," said Harry, stopping at his desk. "I know all about it."

"You know I am sent to Coventry?"

"Yes, but——"

"Yet you are speaking to me."

"I want to know the facts. They say you sneaked to the Form-master—and I——"

Linley turned crimson.

"And you have come to ask me if it is true?" he exclaimed. Harry Wharton nodded. "Well," said Mark, setting his teeth, "you needn't ask the question. I shall not answer it if you do. Have you anything else to say?"

Wharton flushed in his turn.

He had not a patient temper, and Linley's manner was decided unpleasant—for the first time towards Wharton. Harry did not understand then how the implied doubt of his honour had stung the lad. Mark had a pride as high as Wharton's own, and he resented the question. He thought that Harry ought to have trusted him—to have taken it for granted that he was innocent. Perhaps Mark was a little overstrained, too, but it was what he had gone through that made him so.

"I don't see why you shouldn't answer a question," said Wharton tartly. "I came here to speak to you civilly——"

"You needn't have taken the trouble. I am not on my defence. If I have a friend, he will trust me, but I suppose I cannot expect to have a friend here."

"If you deny——"

"I deny nothing. If you choose to think ill of me, please yourself."

"That is not the way to clear yourself. The Remove are entitled to hear your defence, if you have one to make."

"They have not given me much chance of making one," said Mark bitterly. "But I would not make it if they did! They have been seeking ever since I came here to get some handle against me—something that would excuse their being down on me. But I don't care for the whole Form! Let them leave me alone; that's all I ask."

"Does that apply to me, too?" asked Wharton, with rising temper.

"Yes, if you like to take it so."

"Very well," said Wharton. He turned on his heel and walked out of the room. Mark looked after him with fierce unyielding eyes, but the thud of the closing door was like a knell to his heart.

He half rose from his seat. After all, Wharton had come as a friend—he might have trusted him, and yet—after all—

But pride stood in the way; he would not call him back. He sat down again and dipped his pen in the ink.

"Let him go," muttered Mark, bitterly. "Let him go with the rest. Besides—if he stood by me, he would stand against the Form—it might be Coventry for him too. Why should he be dragged into my troubles? Let him go."

And his pen travelled over the paper again. His face was white and worn; but he worked on steadily by sheer force of will.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Outcast.

"SNEAK!"

Someone called out the word as Mark Linley entered the Remove dormitory. The lad from Lancashire did not appear to hear it. He walked straight towards his bed without a glance to right or left.

His face looked very worn, but calm and quiet. He might have been alone in the room for all the notice he took of the presence of his Form-fellows.

Harry Wharton looked at him, and made a step towards him, but Mark's manner was not encouraging. He seemed to be as grimly unconscious of Harry as of the rest. And the captain of the Remove bit his lip, and did not speak.

"Sneak!"

It was Groom who called out the word. Harry Wharton looked round towards him.

"Hold your tongue," he said.

Groom held it. The Removites turned in, mostly in silence. No one said good-night to Mark Linley. The lights were put out, and one by one the juniors fell asleep; but it was long ere slumber visited the eyelids of the outcast of the Form.

Through long hours of darkness Mark Linley lay awake, thinking—bitter thoughts. Had he made a mistake, after all, in coming to Greyfriars—in staying there when the Remove had shown so plainly that they did not want him?

He had won his scholarship fairly, by hard work, and he was entitled to his own; yet—after all, was he an intruder? The thought had come to him before; it was sharper now. He began to feel that the course he had mapped out for himself was too hard to follow. With the whole Form against him, how could he fight his way uphill. Even if he had found friends at Greyfriars, the struggle would have been hard enough for the mill lad. And he had found only enemies. They had begun to tolerate him—some of them—yet this happening showed that they were only too willing to believe evil of him. If this matter blew over, something of the kind was certain to crop up again, if Bulstrode and his set could contrive it—and they could! Was it worth while prolonging a hopeless struggle?

He fell asleep at last.

The rising-bell clanged through the morning air and awoke the Remove, and at least two boys in the dormitory awoke with heavy hearts. One was Mark Linley—the other, Bulstrode. Bulstrode had succeeded in his object—the Lancashire lad was out by the Form—an outcast from the Remove. But there was another thing for Bulstrode to consider—the flogging that was due that morning.

The whole school was to be assembled after prayers to witness it. Bulstrode was to be chief actor in an important scene, but he did not enjoy the prospect.

His face was clouded as he dressed himself, and he cast more than one savage glance towards Mark Linley. He was tempted to break through the rule of "Coventry" and speak—words of abuse, of course—but he restrained himself. He knew that the grim silence that haunted the outcast was his heaviest punishment.

The Remove went downstairs. No one spoke to Linley, and he showed no desire to speak to anyone. Whether he deserved his exclusion or not, he was not the kind of fellow to complain or expostulate. He could stand his punishment, deserved or undeserved, without whining.

Breakfast was a gloomy meal that morning. Most of the fellows were thinking of the coming flogging. Bulstrode was to be the chief sufferer, but the other fellows could not help thinking about it. Floggings were rare at Greyfriars, and their rare occurrence made them more impressive.

After prayers followed the assembling of the Forms in the big hall. The boys' faces were quiet and grave. Bulstrode was looking pale and harrassed. The nearer his punishment came the less he liked it.

He had the sympathy of the Form, but that did not avail him much now. When Gosling came in with the birch, Bulstrode shivered. When Dr. Locke entered, and he was called out, he was as pale as a sheet. But his dogged courage upheld him,

and he was quiet and firm as he stood before the Head. The fugitive colour from his cheeks he could not control.

The Doctor looked at him, and then his glance swept over the silent, expectant boys, ranged according to their Forms, in the great hall.

"Boys!" The deep voice of the Head rolled through the hall, as it had rolled through the chapel that morning at prayers. "Most of you know why you have been assembled here. A miserable persecution, directed against one of the most deserving boys in the Lower Fourth Form, has culminated in a dastardly outrage. The ringleader in this outrage I am about to punish; his followers have already been punished by their Form-master. Bulstrode, I trust that upon reflection you will realise the cowardice, the unmanliness, of your conduct. I trust that your present punishment will help you to realise it. Remove your jacket."

Bulstrode, with livid lips, obeyed in silence.

"Gosling."

Gosling, the porter, whose expression seemed to hint that he was far from disliking the task, took the junior's wrists, and he was hoisted.

Then followed a scene that Bulstrode, at least, never forgot.

Dr. Locke seldom flogged, but he had a sure and a strong hand when he did, and every stroke seemed to Bulstrode like the searing of a hot iron.

The Forms looked on in silence.

Mark Linley was very pale.

Although he had certainly been the injured party in the whole affair, he felt a curious sense of guilt at that moment, as though he were in part responsible for Bulstrode's bad luck.

He realised, too, how this flogging accentuated the division between him and the rest of the Form.

It placed him in the position of being backed up by the masters against his Form-fellows; about the worst possible position a boy can be placed in.

But there was no help for it.

He was the victim of untoward circumstances, and no more able to help himself than a fly in a web.

Stroke followed stroke with clockwork precision.

Bulstrode had determined not to cry out, and for some time his dogged determination upheld him, and no sound passed his white and quivering lips.

But when twelve strokes had fallen, and the merciless lashing still continued, his fortitude deserted him.

Then he struggled, and shrieked, and his cries rang through the room.

It was a terrible scene then; but the Head did not falter. He had his duty to do, painful and unpleasant as it might be to him.

The boys looked on grimly.

The last stroke fell at length, and Bulstrode was released, and he stood writhing, panting, white as death, his eyes blazing.

He seemed on the point of bursting into a torrent of invective, but the Head's cold, stern glance silenced him. From that stern glance he shrank away. In silence the boys broke up, and the scene was over.

Bulstrode did not appear in the Form-room that morning. He was excused early lessons, and he was, indeed, in no fit state for work. He remained in his room, in dull pain and humiliation, and hatred against the boy he regarded as the cause of his punishment. And Mark Linley fell lower, if that was possible, in the regard of his Form-fellows than before. He had betrayed Bulstrode to punishment—that was the common belief, and he did not take the trouble to defend himself—perhaps he knew that he would not be listened to, and that any explanation of the facts would be stigmatised as a falsehood, without examination.

Black looks were directed towards the lad from Lancashire, but not a word was spoken to him. Even the taunt of "sneak" was no longer hurled at the outcast. He was sentenced to Coventry, and the sentence was rigidly carried out. Bulstrode declared that any fellow found speaking to Linley would be sent to Coventry too, and the Remove concurred.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

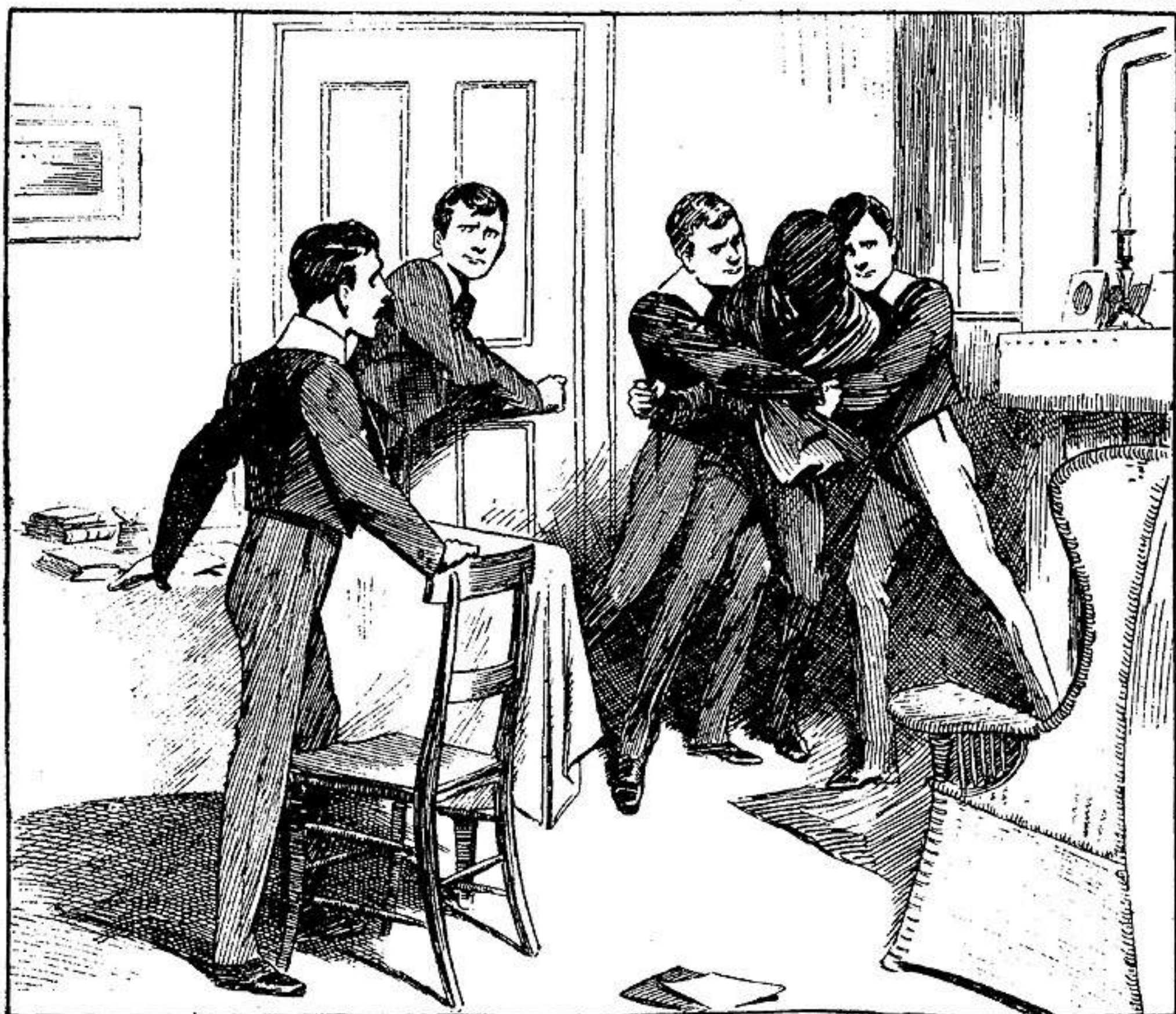
Marjorie Arrives.

HARRY WHARTON was looking thoughtful and somewhat depressed as he came out of the Form-room that morning. He could not help thinking about Linley. Harry was usually able to make up his mind on any matter without much hesitation. But now he had to confess himself perplexed.

He did not know what to do.

The isolation of Linley touched him, and he could not help thinking that there was probably some mistake, some injustice. But Linley had not explained, and without an explanation from him, Wharton felt that he could not defy the opinion of the whole Remove.

His chums were looking grave too. They watched Linley as he left the Form-room. He looked straight before him, without a glance at them or anybody else, and walked quickly away with a book under his arm.



"Who have you got there?" demanded Hazeldene. "It's Linley! We're going to tar and feather him!" replied Bulstrode.

Harry watched him out of sight, and then looked at his chums. "What do you think about it?" he asked, uneasily.

"Blessed if I know," said Nugent. "I suppose it's true. Anyway, he doesn't say that it's false. I suppose he blurted it out to Quelch."

"He had provocation enough."

"I suppose so—but that doesn't excuse sneaking to a master. Bulstrode was a cad: but he's been flogged. That's serious."

"Hang it!" said Bob Cherry. "If he sneaked, the Form are quite right in sending him to Coventry. I wouldn't speak to him myself. And if he didn't sneak, why can't he say so, and have done with it!"

"Well, he has said so—or as good as said so."

"Hallo, hello, hallo, here's Snoop! Let's ask him about it. Trevor says that Snoop actually heard Linley telling the Form-master."

"Snoop! Snoop! Come here a minute!"

Snoop paused. He looked inclined to scuttle off, but he stopped. Snoop was wearing a far-from-happy look.

"Snoopy, we want to know about that sneaking business," said Bob Cherry. "Did you actually hear Linley sneak to Quelch?"

Snoop flushed dully.

"Yes, I did."

"He took him to Bulstrode's study, as Bulstrode says?"

"Well, Quelch went there of his own accord."

"After Linley had sneaked?"

"Yes."

Snoop walked away. The chums exchanged hopeless glances.

"That seems clear enough," said Bob Cherry. "Snoop

wouldn't take a prize for truth-telling at any time, but I don't see why he should be lying now. It looks to me as if Linley was in such a temper about the tarring and feathering that he forgot all about sneaking being barred; and called Quelch into it to get level with Bulstrode."

"He oughtn't to have done it, but considering the provocation—"

"Look here, Harry, you can't go against the Form in this!" exclaimed Nugent warmly. "A sneak has to be barred."

"I know—but—well, I'm not going to be down on a chap who's been through as much as Linley. Why couldn't they let the chap alone?" said Harry irritably. "I don't say I'm going to seek him out. He doesn't encourage a fellow to talk to him. But if he speaks to me I shall answer him civilly, and that's flat."

"It will mean trouble with the Form. You know what they're saying—anybody who speaks to Linley is to be sent to Coventry, too."

Harry's eyes flashed.

"They can send me to Coventry, too, if they like—I don't care a rap. I can't help thinking we haven't got to the bottom of this—and, anyway, I'm not going to kick a chap when he's down."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz along, Bunter, do!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, I was only going to say that Miss Hazeldene has come—"

"Oh!" Bob Cherry's expression changed at once. "Where is she?"

"I saw her in the Head's garden. She came during morning

lessons. Vaseline has gone into the garden. He has permission, of course. I was wondering whether we could go. As friends of Miss Marjorie—"

"You're not a friend of Miss Marjorie," said Bob Cherry brusquely. "You're a fat, little beast, and if you go into the garden I'll sling you out on your neck."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

And Bob looked so dangerous that Billy Bunter promptly buzzed off. Bob Cherry tried to get a reflection of himself in a window, and pulled his necktie straight. Then he gave a tug to his hair, which never would keep tidy. Then he looked at his hands. They were certainly rather inky about the finger-tips.

"Wait a minute for me," he said. "I—I can't give Miss Marjorie an inky fist to shake."

Harry laughed.

"Buck up, then!"

Bob Cherry bucked up. He came back in a few minutes, and his face as well as his hands was glowing from vigorous ablutions. There was a scent of fresh soap about him, and his hair was brushed.

"I'm ready!" he announced. "I—I suppose it would be only civil to go and speak to Marjorie, wouldn't it?"

"Of course," said Wharton.

"The politeness is great, and the esteemed pleasure of the speakfulness will be terrific," murmured Hurree Singh.

"Come on, then!"

And the juniors made their way to the Head's garden, and for the time Mark Linley was forgotten. The garden was forbidden ground to the juniors. Seniors walked there sometimes, in serene stateliness. But the Lower Forms could not invade the sacred precincts without danger of incurring fines. But that was of little moment to the chums of No. 1 Study.

It was a bright March afternoon, and the garden was showing the green of spring. Just inside the gate Marjorie was talking to her brother. She looked up with a bright smile as the chums of the Remove came into sight.

"We are so glad to see you again, Marjorie," Harry Wharton said, while Bob Cherry shook hands with the girl without uttering a word. But perhaps the deep red colour in his cheeks spoke his feelings as eloquently as words could do.

"And I am glad to see Greyfriars again," said Marjorie brightly. "I suppose you know I am to be your neighbour next week."

"Yes—Hazeldene told us. It's ripping!"

"First chop," said Nugent. "We shall challenge you to a cricket match in the summer, you know."

Marjorie laughed.

"Ah, you know I play cricket! Of course, we should not be up to your form—I think that's the correct expression."

"Oh, we would let you play sixteen—or twenty-two!"

"Not at all," said Marjorie indignantly. "We should meet you on fair terms. My brother has taught me to bowl—"

"Yes," said Hazeldene, with brotherly frankness, "and you've taken a wicket in the dining-room window—and another in the conservatory glass—and another on Uncle Richard's bald head—"

"Of course, everybody has to practise," said Marjorie. "I shall be in good—what do you call it?"

"Form," suggested Wharton.

"That's it—in good form by the summer. I should like to ask you to tea in the study at Cliff House," Marjorie went on confidently, "but we sha'n't have any studies as you do; and Miss Penelope would be horrified, too. Miss Penelope doesn't like boys."

"Curious," said Wharton, laughing. "They're so nice, too, as a rule. But who is Miss Penelope—your governess?"

"The head-mistress of Cliff House. She is very kind, and very strict, and—dear me, that is your dinner-bell."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Bob Cherry. "we're not hungry!"

"Not a bit of it!" said Nugent.

"I know I jolly well am," said Hazeldene. "I'm off! See you again very likely, Marjorie!"

And Hazeldene was off. Marjorie laughed.

"I shall not keep you from your dinner," she said. "I suppose I shall see you again. Good-bye!"

And Marjorie ran up the garden path. The chums of the Remove turned away slowly towards the house. They passed Linley near the garden gate; he was walking along slowly, with his eyes on the ground, and did not look up.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Wun Lung Does Not Understand.

AFTERNOON school passed heavily enough to Mark Linley. He had taken his exclusion so quietly and calmly that some of the fellows were provoked by it, and inclined to take more active measures. He was avoided with a public pointedness that there was no mistaking. The fellows on either side of him in Form crowded away as far as possible; and, in fact, all the fellows on the same form made themselves uncomfortable by squeezing up, in order to leave the boy in marked isolation.

Mark Linley showed no sign of having observed it.

But Mr. Quelch, the Form-master, had keen eyes, and he took an interest, too, in the lad from Lancashire. He noted the exclusion of the boy at once, and though he made no remark upon it, he compressed his lips, and a wrinkle appeared for a moment on his brow.

The lessons passed off, and the class was dismissed. The Form-master made a sign to Linley to stop behind as the others went out. Mark halted by the desk.

The Remove went on, and in the passage outside they were not slow to remark upon the circumstance. Bulstrode, still sore from his flogging, had an explanation to give at once.

"Linley's making his report," he said bitterly. "He's taken on the job of sneak as a permanency."

"Looks like it," Skinner remarked.

And most of the juniors agreed that it looked like it. Had Mr. Quelch known what was going on in the Remove, he would have been more careful. His intention was wholly kindly towards the Lancashire lad.

His glance was kind enough as he looked at the boy, standing quiet and silent before his desk, waiting for him to speak.

"There seems to be something wrong between you and your Form-fellows, Linley," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Mark quietly.

"I noticed that you were working in the Form-room last evening, instead of in your study."

"Yes, sir."

"You are on bad terms, then, with the rest of the Lower Fourth?"

Mark was silent.

The Form-master did not press him for an answer. In such a case, there was little a master could do, beyond sympathy and advice.

"I am afraid you have found a thorny path to follow at Greyfriars, Linley," he said. "No doubt your present unpopularity is due to the flogging of Bulstrode, although he was flagrantly in the wrong. It will die away, I think. At all events, if you go on as you have begun, you may be sure of this—that you are fitting yourself for an honourable place in the world, and winning the respect of those whose good opinion is really to be valued."

The tears started to Mark's eyes.

A few kindly words, at that time, meant much to the lad. He could not speak for a moment.

"Thank you, sir," he said, at last. "Thank you. The— the fellows don't understand—they don't mean to be as hard as they are. It's all right."

He left the class-room, with a lighter heart for those few kind words. He left the Form-master with a thoughtful frown on his brow.

The groups of Removites in the passage looked at Mark with a new, savage contempt as he came out.

But he hardly noticed it. He was growing accustomed to that kind of thing. At the door, Harry Wharton touched him on the arm, and Mark looked up.

"You won't mind my speaking," said Harry hesitatingly, "but—"

"The other fellows will," said Mark. "Can't you see how they're looking at you? You'd better leave me alone."

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Let them look! I was going to say—you just stopped behind in the Form-room to speak to Mr. Quelch."

"What about it?"

"It's injudicious. Some of the fellows jumped to the conclusion that it was sneaking—that you were telling Quelch something—"

"And were you one of them?"

"I was not, or I should hardly be speaking to you on the subject now. I only wanted to warn you that it looks bad, and to caution you."

"I dare say you mean well," said Mark wearily; "but I've given up trying to get on good terms with the Remove. I am learning my lesson at last."

"What lesson? What do you mean?"

"The Remove don't want me. I'm not surprised at it—the son of a workman, I suppose, has no right here—unless he became a snob and a liar, and pretended he was something else. Then he might be tolerated. I never learned to be either a liar or a snob, and so I've no chance. I am going to keep my place in the future. They want me to leave the school; I'll never do

ANSWERS

NEXT
TUESDAY:

"THE SCHOOL DANCE."

A Grand School Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co.

that till my scholarship has run out. But I'll keep out of the Form. There was growling about it when you put me in the footer eleven. There was more growling when I joined the sailor corps. This affair is only an excuse for sending me to Coventry. They wanted to do it all along. Well, this is the end—I shan't trouble them any more. But as for taking any trouble to conciliate them, or to gain their good opinion—it's not worth it. I despise them too much, if you want to know the exact truth."

Several fellows had gathered round while Mark was talking, and heard his words; and there were black looks at his plain speaking. The Lancashire lad walked away, his head held very high, leaving Wharton perplexed. He understood how Linley was feeling, but he knew that Linley's mood would never do. He could not live a life of exclusion from the Form—it was impossible. Unless he conciliated the Remove, life would be impossible for him at Greyfriars—unless, indeed, his courage and strength of mind were very great.

"Cad!" growled Skinner. "Despises us, does he?"

"And no wonder, if he was speaking of you particularly," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "What do you expect, Skinner?"

"Look here, Bob Cherry—"

"You've been talking to the outsider, Wharton," broke in Bulstrode fiercely. "You've been warned that anybody speaking to Linley will be sent to Coventry, too."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Don't let it happen again, that's all. That fellow's out."

"Oh, rats!"

And Wharton turned on his heel and strode away. Bulstrode turned scarlet with rage, but the general opinion was on his side. There was no doubt that if Wharton took the side of the outcast, he would lose his hold on the Form.

Linley had his tea in Hall. He had an empty seat on either side of him during the meal—a fact that did not pass unnoticed by Mr. Quelch, who was at the head of the Remove table. Wharton and his friends were having tea in their study. Wun Lung, the little Chinese, came into the hall late, and dropped into a chair beside Linley.

There was a low murmur, instantly suppressed by a glance from Mr. Quelch. After tea, Mark Linley left the room first, and when the other fellows went out, they found him talking to Wun Lung in the hall. It was not Mark who had sought the conversation; Wun Lung was showing him a Greek exercise, and demanding expert advice. It was not like Linley to refuse a favour; and in fact he would have lent a helping hand to any fellow in the Remove, in spite of what had passed.

Bulstrode dropped a heavy hand on the Celestial's shoulder.

"Cut that!" he said sharply.

Wun Lung looked up innocently.

"You speakee to me?" he asked.

"Yes. Drop that!"

Wun Lung had a Greek lexicon under his arm. He misunderstood Bulstrode—or affected to misunderstand him—and dropped the lexicon—on Bulstrode's foot.

Bulstrode gave a fiendish yell and jumped clear of the floor.

"You heathen beast! You've squashed my toe!" he roared.

"Me solly," murmured the Chinese. "You say dlop it, and me dloppee it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up, you cackling idiot. I believe the heathen beast did it on purpose. You—you pigtailed rotter!"

"Me velly solly," said Wun Lung, blandly. "You say dlop it, and—"

"Look here, you're not to speak to Mark Linley."

"No savvy."

"He's been sent to Coventry."

"No savvy."

"You stupid heathen! He's in Coventry!" shouted Bulstrode.

"No savvy. Coventry in Midlands—Gleyfials on sea-coast. How fiend Linley in Coventry?"

"The utter savage, he doesn't know what Coventry means!" growled Bulstrode. "I mean that nobody's speaking to Linley—he's out."

"No see cut," said Wun Lung, looking over the Lancashire lad, as if in search of a wound.

"You—you pigtailed dummy! I mean he's not spoken to—he's barred."

"No savvy."

"You're not to speak to him."

"No savvy."

"If you do you'll be sent to Coventry, too."

"No savvy."

"Look here, you're not to speak to Linley, or we'll jolly well yank your heathen pigtail off!" yelled Bulstrode.

"No savvy."

"I—I—I—"

"No savvy."

Mr. Quelch came out just then, and the enraged bully of the Remove had to leave the matter where it was. But Wun Lung was determined not to "savvy," and he walked away with Mark Linley, still discussing Greek. For the little celestial's own sake, Mark tried to explain to him how matters stood, but Wun Lung either could not or would not "savvy," and Linley gave it up at last.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Linley Finds a Friend.

MARJORIE HAZELDENE stopped. It was dusk in the Close, and the girl was crossing it towards the Head's garden. She had been to the village, and her sweet face was glowing with colour from the walk home through the windy lane.

From the dusk under the trees a sound came, and she started for a moment, and then stopped. The next moment she caught sight of Mark Linley. The boy was standing leaning against a big elm, and a book had just slid from under his arm and fallen to the ground. That was the sound Marjorie had heard. But Linley had not noticed it; he did not notice her. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets, his face clouded, his eyes fixed on the ground. It was an attitude of utter dejection, and at the sight of him Marjorie felt a strange pang at her heart. The girl was kindness itself, and she knew that only some great trouble could have crushed the lad so. She had met Linley in company with the chums of No. 1 Study, and she had learned to like and respect him.

She looked at the boy and hesitated. Her heart was touched, but he was so deep in thought that she hesitated to speak—and a slight shyness, too, kept her silent. She might have passed on, but something, perhaps some slight sound, made Linley raise his eyes. He saw her.

His cap came off in a moment.

"Miss Hazeldene!"

Marjorie smiled at him a little tremulously.

"Yes," she said; "I am just going in. I—"

"Did I startle you?" said Mark.

"Oh, no; but—"

She paused. Mark looked at her, and read the concern in her face, and the colour stole into his cheeks.

"You are in trouble," said Marjorie, with the sweet frankness that was her most engaging trait.

Linley smiled a little.

"It is nothing—that is—well, nothing. It is very kind of you to care about it at all, Miss Hazeldene. But—" He broke off.

She looked at him inquiringly.

"What were you going to say?"

"I don't know whether I should let you speak to me," said Mark, flushing painfully. "Your brother mightn't like it—and the others."

"Not like my speaking to you?" said Marjorie, in amazement. "You haven't quarrelled with my brother, have you?"

"Oh, no—not exactly."

"It is nonsense," said Marjorie, with a little decided nod of the head, that Linley thought very charming. "You shall make it up again."

"It isn't that. Only I'm on bad terms with the whole Form, you know—your brother among the rest—and Wharton and all your friends. It's all right. Don't bother your head about me!"

"But I shall bother my head about you," said Marjorie. "What is the matter? Why have you quarrelled with the Form? Have they quarrelled with you?"

"Ye-e-es."

Mark hesitated to reply. He was far from wishing to appear desirous of sympathy. He wanted to face his troubles alone, and bear them alone. Yet to the lonely boy there was something infinitely sweet in the girl's gentle tone and in her look of concern.

"What about?"

Marjorie asked the question with charming directness. Mark could not help smiling.

"They think I—I told tales to a master," he said. "Sneaking, they call it."

"Oh!" said Marjorie, with sudden comprehension. "And you are sent to Coventry. Is that it?"

Mark nodded.

The girl's lips were pursed thoughtfully. She knew enough of the matter now to understand Mark's position.

"But you did not?" she said; "I am sure you did not."

Why should she be so sure? Why was her faith so strong in the boy she had met only half a dozen times? Mark felt his heart warm as it had not warmed for a long time.

"You are very kind to say so, Miss Hazeldene. I did not—but they all believe that I did."

"Cannot you explain?"

"They would not believe me if I did."

"But have you tried?"

"You don't understand," said Mark sadly. "Even Wharton thought it of me—and he might have known me better. What would be the good of denying it? I have denied it, but no one cares for that. They found me guilty before asking a single question. And if I explained, it would be my word against that of another—another whom they would certainly believe before me."

"Toll me all about it."

Mark hardly knew how it was, but he found himself telling her. Marjorie listened quietly.

"Mr. Quelch questioned me, but I did not answer," he went on. "It was Snoop who told him. I suppose he was afraid of Bulstrode. I don't know exactly what he said to Bulstrode, but Bulstrode believes that I sneaked. So do the others. It would be no use entering into a dispute with Snoop about it. He must have given his account—not a true one. But he would stick to it, of course. I dare say he was afraid to own up."

"And you don't want to tell about him, either?" said Marjorie quietly. She understood what was in Linley's mind.

"No," said Mark frankly; "but if I did they would stick by him. They wouldn't even listen to me."

Marjorie was silent for some moments.

"Of course, you won't say anything about what I've told you—to the fellows I mean?" said Mark hastily.

"Suppose I explained to Harry Wharton?"

Mark shook his head.

"No, no; him least of all!"

"He would try to do you justice."

"Perhaps. But the Form have made up their minds, you see; and I don't want to drag Wharton into it. He would stand by me if he thought it right; and he would be sent to Coventry too. I don't want that."

Marjorie nodded.

"I understand."

"Don't mention it to any of the fellows. I don't want to make my peace with them; I can stand it. I don't want to make it up with any of them unless they make the first advances. But—"

"Marjorie!"

It was Hazeldene's voice. He came out of the gloom, and looked surprised when he found Linley with Marjorie. He looked keenly from one to the other.

"I've been looking for you, Marjorie," he said abruptly.

"I have just come in," said the girl. "Good-night, Linley."

"Good-night, Miss Hazeldene."

Mark raised his cap. The girl walked away with her brother. Hazeldene was looking a little uneasy.

"Hang it, Marjorie," he said, as soon as they were out of hearing of the Lancashire lad, "you mustn't speak to that chap, you know."

"Why not?"

"He's in Coventry."

The girl was silent.

"He sneaked to the Form-master," explained Hazeldene.

"Of course, we can't stand that sort of thing in the Remove. We have to bar sneaking."

"Are you sure he did?"

"Oh, of course he would tell you he didn't. There's no doubt about it. You see, he took Quelch to Bulstrode's study, and caught him in the act, as it were. Snoop heard him telling Quelch, too."

Marjorie did not speak. Was it possible that Linley had spoken untruly to her? She dismissed the thought. Truth had run in the very tones of the Lancashire lad; if she could not believe him, she would never believe anybody again.

And a thought was working in the girl's mind now—a plan for helping the outcast of the Remove.

He had not wished her to speak about it to any of the other fellows, and she would respect his wish. But there was another way of getting the truth, whatever it was, made known. The girl coloured at the thought that was passing through her mind; it would require no small courage on her part. But she was coming to a determination. Hazeldene little guessed what was passing in his sister's mind as they walked to the Head's house together.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Friend in Need!

THE next morning the sentence of "Coventry" was still being rigidly carried out—more rigidly than ever, if possible. Wharton had said that he would speak to Linley if Linley spoke to him; but that Mark was careful not to do.

He did not wish to drag the captain of the Remove into his troubles. Harry's attitude in the matter had brought him enough unpopularity already.

And so they did not speak; and Mark's isolation was complete—except for little Wun Lung.

The little Chinese had received dire warnings from half the Form, as to what would happen to him if he persisted in speaking to the ostracised one; but the warnings made not the slightest difference to him. Apparently he did not "savvy."

He persisted in speaking to Mark on every possible occasion; and in the grim, icy silence that now enveloped his life, even the company of the quaint little Celestial meant much to the lonely lad.

Mark, indeed, expostulated with the Chinese, trying to point

out to him how matters stood. But Wun Lung did not understand.

"You'd better leave me alone," said Mark at last desperately. "Bulstrode will be on your trail if you don't."

"You no wantee helpee me with lesson?"

"Yes, yes; of course I want to help you, but—"

"Allee light; you helpee."

"Yes, but don't you understand that the Form are not speaking to me."

"Allee light; me speaker."

"They'll be down on you, Wun Lung."

"Allee light."

"You'll be ragged if you don't keep away from me."

"No savvy."

"My dear kid, you'll be cut by the other fellows, and perhaps licked into the bargain," said Mark patiently.

"No savvy."

Mark had to give it up. Licked, too. Wun Lung certainly would have been but for Harry Wharton. Bulstrode was proposing in the common room to frog-march him, and give him a dormitory licking, when the captain of the Remove quietly chipped in.

"You'll let him alone," he said.

"We'll do as we like," Bulstrode blustered fiercely. "The heathen rotter knows well enough that Linley's in Coventry, though he pretends not to understand."

"The fellow who touches Wun Lung will have a fight on his hands, that's all," said Harry Wharton very quietly, but with evident meaning in every word.

"You'd better take care, Wharton, or you may get a dormitory licking yourself," said Bulstrode savagely.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm willing to face the music, if you like to start," he said.

"Oh, leave the heathen alone," said Russell. "After all, you can't expect a Chinaman to understand. Let him alone."

And Bulstrode decided to leave Wun Lung to go his own way. As for sending the little Chinese to Coventry, very few of the Removites could find it in their hearts to be hard on the cheery, irresponsible little fellow. Besides, as he could rely upon the Famous Four for company, he would have cared little.

There was one other fellow who broke the rigid rule. That was Billy Bunter. Not that the Owl of the Remove was inspired by generous feelings. Bunter thought he saw a way of grinding a private ace in the matter. After morning school that day he tapped Mark Linley on the arm in the Close, after a cautious glance round to see that his action was not observed. But as Bunter was extremely short-sighted, his caution was not worth very much. As a matter of fact, there were several Remove fellows within easy distance, who saw him speaking to the proscribed junior.

"I say, Linley—"

"What do you want?"

Mark's question was very sharp, and not at all cordial. Billy Bunter assumed an injured expression.

"Oh, really, Linley, I think you might be a little more civil to a chap. I thought you'd be feeling lonely as you're sent to Coventry, and so I made up my mind to speak to you. I say, don't go away while I'm speaking. I've got something to say to you."

"Say it then—quickly!"

"I've had a disappointment about a postal order. I was expecting it this morning, but it hasn't come. I'm going to inquire at the post-office about it. But I'm stony just at the moment. If you could lend me five bob—"

"I couldn't."

"I can let you have it back next week for certain. Even if there's any delay in the postal order, I've got other resources," said Bunter, with dignity. "I'm shortly expecting three pounds a week for some picture-postcards I'm colouring for the Patriotic Home Work Association."

"I have no money to lend—"

"I could make a bob do. If you— Ow! Oh, really Cherry—"

"You young whelp!" said Bulstrode, grasping the fat junior by the collar. "You know jolly well that Linley's in Coventry. What did you mean by speaking to him, hey?"

"Ow! I didn't mean to speak to him. He spoke to me—I mean—"

Mark Linley walked away. Bulstrode shook the fat junior violently.

"You fat young porpoise—"

"Ow! I'm sincerely sorry! Don't shake me like that, Bulstrode, or you'll make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them. I wasn't really speaking to Linley. He wanted to borrow some money—"

"Faith, and it's a champion loan ye are!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "Sure, I heard ye thyrin' to borrow of him!"

"I—I mean—it's all the same thing, you know, really—ow—wow!"

Bulstrode walked away, leaving Billy Bunter sitting on the ground, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.

The fat junior did, not speak to the outcast of the Remove again.

It was a bright afternoon. Most of the Removites turned out on the football ground before dinner. The end of the football season was near, but the boys were as keen as at the beginning. Mark Linley did not join them. He knew very well that if he had done so, the players would have walked off the field, which would have placed Wharton in an awkward position.

The outcast of the Remove took his books into a quiet corner of the Close, and studied there. There Mr. Quelch saw him, as he took a stroll after lunch in the sunny Close. The Form-master frowned a little. The feeling against Linley, which he had hoped would die away, was apparently as strong as ever. Mr. Quelch understood what the exclusion would mean to the Lancashire lad when he could hear the merry shouts from the football field.

Mr. Quelch's brow was very thoughtful as he went in. He felt keenly for Linley, but he did not know the true circumstances, and he could not help the boy. He went into his study—and then gave a sudden start.

The room was not empty, as he had expected. A graceful, girlish form rose from the easy-chair as he came in, and he found himself looking at the blushing, half-terrified face of Marjorie Hazeldene.

"Excuse me," said the girl hurriedly. "I came here to speak to you, sir; the door was open and you not here, so I thought I might wait."

"Quite right," said Mr. Quelch, smiling. "Please do not rise. What can I do for you, Miss Hazeldene?"

The girl remained standing, one hand on the table. The colour came and went in her cheeks.

"I—I—I want to speak to you," she said desperately at last. "I—I—"

"Certainly, my dear. Go on."

The Form-master's kindly tone reassured the girl. But her eyes were on the floor as she went on.

"I—I don't know whether you will think it presumptuous of me—I do not mean it so—but—but I felt that I ought to speak. It occurred to me, you know, that—that it might set the matter right."

"What matter are you alluding to?"

"It is about Mark Linley."

Mr. Quelch started a little.

"Yes?" he said inquiringly.

"He has been sent to Coventry by the Remove, sir, because—because—"

"I was aware of that, my dear girl," said the Remove-master quietly. "The boy has a hard path before him here. But he is a brave lad—a brave and true lad, and he has courage enough to carry him through."

"But—but you do not know all," said Marjorie. "It is not only that, but—but they think he told you about Bulstrode."

"Ah!"

Mr. Quelch uttered only that monosyllable. But he understood. The girl's words had let in a flood of light upon his view of the late happenings of his Form.

"They think that he—he sneaked, as they call it," pursued Marjorie, blushing furiously, and half wondering how she found the courage to speak at all to the big, grave Form-master. "You will know whether he did or not, sir—"

"He did not."

"Ah, I was sure of it," said Marjorie eagerly. "I—I thought you might think it important enough to—to let the Form know, sir, because—"

"I certainly do think it important enough," said Mr. Quelch. "The boy who told me about Bulstrode must have spoken falsely afterwards, or the blame could never have fallen upon Linley. I will see that right is done."

"Oh, thank you, sir. And—and you don't think it—impertinent—of me—?" The girl's voice failed her.

"My dear girl, I think you have acted in a generous and womanly way," said Mr. Quelch. "I am only too glad you have spoken to me. I can set this matter right, and I have no doubt that his Form-fellows will do Linley justice. I thank you for speaking."

And he opened the door for Marjorie with as respectful a bow as if she had been a princess, and the girl gave him a tremulous smile, and ran away with a beating heart, but feeling very glad that she had paid that visit to the Form-master's study.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Cleared!

THE Remove were to be taken in first lesson that afternoon by M. Charpentier, the French master. But when they entered the Form-room, they found to their surprise that Mr. Quelch was there. He was speaking to the French master, and he did not turn round till the Remove were in their places. Then he held up his hand for silence, and a pin might have been heard to drop in the Remove-room. The juniors were curious, and they listened eagerly when their Form-master spoke.

"I have to say a few words to you before lessons commence, with Monsieur Charpentier's permission," said Mr. Quelch. "The matter is somewhat important. A boy in this

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

Form has been flogged for playing a dastardly trick upon another boy.

Bulstrode turned red.

"There appears to be an impression in the Form," resumed Mr. Quelch, "that Mark Linley gave me the information leading to the discovery of Bulstrode as the culprit."

The Remove gasped.

Snoop turned as white as a sheet. He could see that the truth was coming out now; his cowardly falsehood, after all, had only put off the evil hour.

"This impression," said Mr. Quelch, "is quite incorrect. I found Snoop and Linley on the stairs, the latter in a tarry condition. I questioned him, and he was silent. Mind, I do not say it was right of him to remain silent when questioned by a Form-master. I am only stating the facts."

"My word!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Bulstrode's face was a study.

"There was another boy, who, in his eagerness to save himself, told at once about Bulstrode," said Mr. Quelch. "I will not mention that boy's name. He answered perfectly correctly in answering a question put to him by his Form-master; but he appears to have acted in a cowardly and contemptible manner afterwards, by attributing his own action to Mark Linley."

"Snoop!" murmured Nugent.

"As Linley seems to be suffering from a general persecution over this matter, I have deemed it my duty to make this public statement of the facts," said Mr. Quelch. "I can only hope that all right-minded boys will do all in their power to make reparation to Linley for the injustice they have done him."

And Mr. Quelch walked out of the room.

There was a murmur in the Remove, a general muttering and commenting, and it was nearly time for the French lesson to end before M. Charpentier could reduce his class to anything like attention.

Glad enough were the Removites when the hour of dismissal came that afternoon. The wretched Snoop hurried away, not daring to face his Form-fellows. Mark Linley found the chums of No. 1 Study round him as soon as he left the Form-room.

"We didn't know how it was," said Harry Wharton simply. "I still think you might have explained; I, at all events, should have believed you, whatever the others had done. But it's all over now, and I think the Form are pretty well ashamed of themselves. They ought to be."

"The oughtfulness is terrific."

"Faith, and it was jolly decent of Quelch to speak out, too," said Desmond. "I'm sorry I was down on ye for snaking, Linley darling—I mean, for thinkin' ye was snakin. I wonder how Quelch knew about it."

Mark was wondering too.

"Bulstrode, ye spalpeen, come and beg Linley's pardon, can't ye? You know jolly well now that he never sneaked of you."

Bulstrode scowled.

"I suppose he didn't," he said. "I suppose Snoop was lying."

"Then tell him you're sorry."

"Hang him! I'm not sorry!"

And Bulstrode jammed his hands into his pockets and strode away. A loud and prolonged hiss followed him. The feeling of the Form had quite veered round. It was some time before Mark Linley could escape from the Removites. Almost all were only too anxious to make amends for unjust suspicions and hasty condemnation; and even those who had been hardest on the "mill boy" were anxious to show that the sentence of Coventry was over and done with.

Mark Linley's heart was light as he went out into the Close. His position in the school had been strengthened by the late happenings after all. There might be snobbish and thoughtless prejudices left still, but every boy's sympathy naturally went out towards a victim of treachery and injustice. And Mark was thinking of something else too. How had Mr. Quelch known? Was it merely a coincidence that he had spoken to the Form the day after that talk with Marjorie in the dusk of the Close? Linley did not think so.

The glimmer of the girl's dress near the gate of the Head's garden caught his eye. He ran quickly towards it; and Marjorie Hazeldene smiled kindly as he raised his cap.

"It's all right," said Mark. "But—you know?"

She nodded, with a slight blush.

"Yes. And it is all right now?"

"Yes; and I know whom I have to thank for it," said Mark earnestly. "I shall never forget your kindness, Miss Hazeldene. If ever a time comes when I can show that I am grateful, I shall not fail."

"And Mark meant every word of it; and, little as he thought of it then, the future held a time when he would be called upon to remember those words."

THE END.

(Another splendid, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday, entitled "The School Dance." Order your copy of the "Magnet" Library in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

NEXT
TUESDAY:

"THE SCHOOL DANCE."

A Grand School Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co.

GRAND TALE OF ARMY LIFE.



READ THIS FIRST.

On the death of his father, Jack Dashwood finds to his astonishment that he has been practically disinherited in favour of his Uncle Dominic and Cousin Leonard. He consequently enlists in the 25th Hussars, under the name of Tom Howard, and soon becomes a corporal. Dominic Dashwood's death occurs just as the 25th are sailing for India. On their arrival there, Leonard joins the Ploughshares. A frontier war breaks out, and the 25th receive orders to mobilise for the front. A trooper named Sligo is bribed by Dashwood to drug Tom Howard one night while the young corporal is on picket duty. Tom falls asleep at his post and is told that in due time he will be court-martialled. One day Sligo has a letter from his wife, describing how, while cleaning out a certain set of offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields, she discovered a dusty document under a safe, relating to Tom Howard's affairs, and that Sergeant Hogan, a former servant of Colonel Dashwood's, with whom Mrs. Sligo was acquainted, had joyfully affirmed that it established Jack Dashwood's claim to the Colonel's estates. This letter Sligo maliciously shows to Leonard Dashwood, who manages to destroy it, together with one from Sergeant Hogan to Tom Howard, who has been promoted to sergeant. An I O U for £95, which Dashwood had given to Sligo as hush-money, falls into Colonel Greville's hands.

A general advance is now ordered, and the column moves into the difficult Mahmud country. Sir Ponsonby Smithers, with three squadrons of the 25th Hussars and four companies of the Ploughshares, effects a juncture with General Jefferies, and is shortly in the thick of a severe engagement. The Hussars and the Bengal Lancers charge together, and plunge into a deep nullah, whither the enemy had hastily retired. Colonel Greville leaps his black horse into the midst of the enemy, followed by Tom Howard and Bill Sloggett, whose catall, to which the 25th were so accustomed, rang above the clamour.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Last of Alf Sligo.

"Bill's at it again," said the troopers of the 25th, one to another.

And Bill Sloggett was at it, being in the seventh heaven of delight as he delivered swooping cuts of his own, which were not to be found in the cavalry sword-exercises, leaping his mare hither and thither by a pressure of the knee or a touch of his heel, his face glorified out of all likeness to the Sloggett family; who, as a matter of fact, were not a prepossessing crowd.

The bugles sounded the "Retire," and, unable to force their horses up the steep bank, they wheeled as one man and rode back again; the Bengal Lancers brandishing their lances, and laughing with fiendish glee.

Bill, who was one of the last to retire, had taken a good look round him, when his mare swerved, and his eye caught a figure in khaki lying on the ground. His helmet was off, and the wounded man stretched an arm out in piteous appeal to the corporal, and a piercing voice cried:

"Don't leave me, Bill!"

The next instant the mare was reined in on her haunches, and Corporal Sloggett was looking down at Trooper Alf Sligo, who had got hit badly.

"Can you take my stirrup and get up?" said Bill.

"Can't move, mate," said Sligo. "Both legs broken, and I'm 'it 'ere!"

And he grasped his throat with his left hand.

"All right! 'Alf a mo'!" said the corporal; and he sprang out of his saddle. "Now then, put your arm round my neck. Broken or not broken, you'll 'ave to stand for a minnit." And, pulling him to his feet, Bill steadied the wounded man for a moment, quieting the mare with a soothing whistle. "I'm goin' to put you across 'er

back," said Bill Sloggett. "Leave go my neck, and seize the cantle. Now then, up yer go!"

And, giving him a muscular hoist, he slid Sligo on to the slippery leather, bidding him grip hold of the saddle-flap on the other side, while he tried to loop the off stirrup round the broken legs.

Sligo screamed with agony; but it was no time to be gentle, for seven or eight Mahmuds, seeing the isolated pair, leapt down the bank and were upon them in a moment.

Bill Sloggett grasped the reins in his left hand, and took hold of the mare's headstall.

"If you let go, you're lost—remember!" he called.

And Sligo, his eyes starting from his head with pain and terror, dug his nails into the saddle-flap, and clung on with all his might.

"If I set her head for home," muttered the corporal, as the foremost of the Mahmuds came within striking distance, "can you keep on?"

"Don't leave me, Bill!" wailed the wounded man. And Bill sneered as he muttered between his teeth: "All right, you booby!" and cut down a tribesman.

But there were others upon his heels, and the next moment the corporal, holding his horse with one hand, found himself face to face with five sinowy Asiatics, who all attacked him at once.

He wounded one on the sword-arm, sent a second man staggering back with a foot of steel through his ribs, and then, digging under the horse's neck, delivered a terrific slash on the shins of a third which brought him toppling to the sand.

He saw one of the two that remained making a terrific slash at Sligo, who screamed. And the corporal, letting go of the mare's head, darted forward as the man was going to repeat the blow, knocked him backwards by a well-delivered punch in the neck, and crossed blades with the last of them.

The plucky fellow had placed four men hors de combat in something under twenty seconds; but another party came leaping down the bank, and he knew that the struggle could not last.

Bill and the Mahmud revolved round each other, playing warily; but Bill, who was as full of tricks as a monkey, dropped suddenly to his knee, and, thrusting upwards, he ran the man through.

He looked at the rush of rebels bounding towards him over the plain, and saw on the other side of the nullah that Tom Howard and half a dozen of the 25th were spurring to the rescue. But they were some distance off, and, catching the mare's bridle again, he hit her over the flanks with the flat of his sword, and they started off at a gallop, followed by a howl of rage from the Mahmuds.

Before they had gone a dozen yards, Tom and his party went by him like a whirlwind, and Sloggett could feel the rush of air as they passed.

He loosed the mare's head for a moment, and watched them. The enemy turned round, and went flying back to the shelter of their bank, and when he looked round again at the man he had rescued he saw that Alf Sligo had slipped from the saddle, and fallen unconscious to the ground.

Bill knew he was safe now, and, kneeling down, he placed his canteen to Sligo's lips.

"Come on, buck up!" said the corporal, supporting Sligo's head against his own knee.

But Sligo turned a pair of curious eyes upon him—eyes that already had a glassy stare in them—and the water that

Bill forced into his mouth returned the same minute, discoloured with flecks of bright red blood.

"I'm done, Bill!" gasped Sligo.

"Oh, chuck it! You'll be all right when we get you to the doctor. Just lie where you are for a minute, and I'll get a couple of our chaps to come down and carry you in."

"Wait!" said Sligo; and his hand closed on the wrist of his former friend. "I've something to tell you, Bill. 'Tain't no good you trying to get me away. I'm goin' faster than you can carry me!"

And Sligo coughed hoarsely, and there was a curious little hiccup in his voice that made Bill Sloggett look more closely at him.

"Great Scott! I believe you are a goner this time!" said the corporal, feeling rather softened by the unmistakable signs of approaching death. "Me and you was pals long ago, and if you have any message to send to anyone I'll take it for you. Where's your wife?"

"She's all right!" said Sligo, his face every moment becoming more pinched and white, and his eyes already looking as though someone had pressed them inches back into his head. "She'll be better off without me! That 'ound, Dashwood, owes me ninety-five quid. 'E can't say he don't, if I did lose the I O U. No, 't isn't 'er I want to speak about; it's 'Oward. Tell 'im"—he made a pause, and spoke again with evidently increased difficulty—"tell 'im—"

"Yus—yus?" prompted Bill, lifting Sligo's head a little higher.

"Letter from Sergeant 'Ogan—watch mails—Dashwood 'ad the last one for 'Oward. There's money in it, Bill—money in it for 'im!"

He sat up suddenly, with a strength marvellous in one so sorely wounded, and he looked about him as the sergeant and the rescue-party drew rein beside the two men.

Something like a smile came into the face of the dying hooligan, but, though he opened his mouth several times with a spasmodic gasp, no words passed his lips, and, his last flicker of strength going as quickly as it had come, Sligo fell back in a heap, and all was over.

"Is he dead?" asked the sergeant, his face growing grave—all the graver, perhaps, that he had never liked the man now lying so still and stark before him.

"Yus, he's dead!" said Bill Sloggett, getting up and collecting his reins. "He's left a message for you, but I'll give you that afterwards. They're sounding for us now, and the squadrons are going to retire."

And, swinging on to his mare, sheathing his sword as he went, Sloggett and the rest of them galloped out of the nullah to join their comrades.

Dick Vivian Laughs Under Heavy Fire.

The horsemen did not retire very far, for their recent charge had cooled the ardour of the enemy, who were straggling back towards the hills again; and the brigadier, bent on the destruction of Shahi-Tungi and the recovery of the body of Lieutenant Hughes, was about to make a second attack.

Word was sent to the Infantry of the Guides to protect the left. The Buffs and the remainder of the 35th Sikhs were to push on to the village at all costs, and orders were helioed back to camp for every available man to come up to reinforce the column.

At one o'clock, after a slight pause, the advance began again, the guns opening on the ridge and shelling the village. The enemy sniped us, but were evidently falling back, and only here and there could they be seen.

After a very stiff climb of two hours, Shahi-Tungi was occupied, and razed to the ground, and when, at half-past three, orders were given to return to camp, the second retirement began, and was the signal for a vigorous attack by the enemy.

Fortunately, however, instead of a couple of companies, we had now ten on the spur, and the Buffs, who acted as rearguard, kept the enemy at a respectful distance by the deadly fire of their Lee-Metfords.

Before five o'clock most of the men were clear of the hills, and we had a little breathing space; but against the sky, far away on our right, Captain Rider's company of the Sikhs were hotly engaged, and they helioed down that they were running out of ammunition.

Campbell, with his Guides, was called up from the left and sent to their assistance, and after a very hard fight they reached the valley, retiring in the direction of the entrenched camp, whither the Hussars had already preceded them.

Mighty clouds had now begun to roll over the sky, fearful thunder pealed, and the flashes of lightning were so vivid that they showed the enemy where to aim.

It was now discovered that the general, with the guns, some sappers, and four companies of infantry, were left behind in the valley, and the boom of the guns told the rest that they were being hotly attacked.

Colonel Goldney, who was in supreme command during the absence of the general, ordered four companies of the 38th Dogras to go to their assistance, and some of the Bengal Lancers volunteered to accompany them. But darkness fell, and with it the pitiless rain, that filled the nullahs with rushing water, and turned the sand dust to liquid mud.

The camp was in a miserable state, and the general, expecting that the enemy would be down upon us, had signalled an order to reduce its size, and generally to strengthen it. Nearly all the tents had been struck, and lay with the baggage in the centre. Transport-mules roamed unattended about the place, and, after a very hard day's work, the men lay down without food, the wounded being roughly dressed until they could be transported to the hospitals.

"Where the dickens are we?" said a voice in the darkness.

And forty men of the Ploughshires, who had got separated from the rest of their party, halted knee-deep in the water that filled a wide nullah.

They had been attached to the Buffs, and in the retirement down the spur had got separated, and now found themselves soaked to the skin, without the slightest idea where they were, or what had become of the rest of the force.

The officer who had spoken was Leonard Dashwood, who for the last half-hour had been silently cursing the day when he took to soldiering, and he stood very much like a drowned rat, with the water pouring down his back from the quilted flap of his helmet.

"Stay where you are!" said Dick Vivian. "There is something like a ridge on the right, which I take to be the other side of this nullah. I will go over there and have a look round, and if I whistle, bring the men along."

Dashwood was very weary and footsore, and, making no reply, he and his men waited, hearing the splash of Dick's progress as he struggled through the water and clambered up the other bank. He went cautiously, with his revolver in his hand, and, climbing up in a stooping position, looked over the bank top.

He had just reached it when the rumble of wheels fell on his ear at no great distance away, and he knew that it must come from the battery. He whistled over his shoulder, and in a few minutes Dashwood and his party joined him, and, heading straight for the sound, which was growing fainter and fainter, they were suddenly challenged in the darkness, and replied just in time to prevent the sappers, who were escorting the battery, from firing upon them.

They found that the gun had received an order to return to assist the Guides, and after a little scrambling march in the darkness they met the brigadier with two companies of Sikhs close to the village of Bilot, which was held by the enemy.

There was considerable confusion, inevitable from the broken ground, the darkness, and the driving rain, and the brigadier despatched messages for reinforcements. Half a battalion of Sikhs, who were on the march back to the entrenched camp, could not be found; but two companies of the Guides and two of the 35th, who had been previously sent for, came up under Major Worledge, and were at once despatched to help their comrades, who were evidently hardly pressed.

The battery remained, with about thirty sappers to protect it, and the little band of Ploughshires; and later on twelve brave fellows of the Buffs, who had been out searching for a dhooley that contained wounded officers, but which they had missed, blundered up to the guns, and proved a very welcome addition.

The stacks of bhoosa, or chopped straw, in the village had been fired, and when the general ordered the battery to take it, it was found impossible, and they began to entrench themselves on the outskirts. This was a signal for the enemy to attack them in force, and at thirty yards' range the Mahmunds began a heavy fire on two sides at once. Luckily they had not many rifles, but they flung stones and burning bhoosa among the little party, taking aim by the light of the flames.

The position was very serious, and there was very little cover.

"We must try and clear them out of that!" said the brigadier.

And Lieutenants Watson and Colbyn, with the sappers and twelve men of the Buffs and the Ploughshires, fixed bayonets and charged.

"Come on, you beggars!" cried Dick, his sword in one hand and revolver in the other.

And through the brilliant light of the flames they dashed among the houses.

"Good heavens, are you hit, sir?" cried Sergeant Hawkesley, seeing Dick stagger.

And the lad made a wry face, for a bullet from one of the houses had struck him and almost flung him on his back.

The sergeant supported him with his arm; but the next moment Dick's colour came back, and he laughed. The bullet had lodged in his watch, which was destined to become a valuable relic at Vivian Towers when the campaign was over.

"It's not the first time a man's life has been saved by his ticker, sergeant. Come on! We'll make short work of these chaps!"

And the Ploughshares, giving a cheer when they found that their popular officer was not wounded, ran in with the bayonet, and killed half a dozen Mahmuds, who were skulking in the houses.

Lieutenant Watson had had his hand smashed; but the plucky fellow led the men until he was shot again so severely, that he could not keep on his feet, and, the village proving much larger than they had imagined, his men carried him out, and they had to give up the attempt, returning to the battery, and taking what shelter they could.

It rained so heavily about nine o'clock that the tribesmen ceased firing, being afraid of wetting their powder; but an hour after they began again, and, making a shelter of the village wall, they inflicted terrible slaughter on the little band of Britons. Our guns blazed away at twenty yards' range, pulverising the wall, and slaying many of the Mahmuds, but the situation was very critical.

The general himself was wounded, and Lieutenant Winter, who had previously gone out in search of the missing companies, was badly shot through both legs.

He stuck to his guns, however, until he fainted away from loss of blood, and a brave native gunner covered him with his own body until he, too, was wounded.

A pile of dead mules was not much of a barricade, but the officers and men crowded behind it. The whole scene was lit up by the glare of the burning bhoosa-stacks, and the entire thing was a little Rorke's Drift all over again.

Leonard and Dick Vivian lay side by side, each armed with a rifle, which they used with considerable effect until their cartridges gave out, and Leonard, who had been fighting gamely, lifted his head and looked about him.

The lurid light of the flames showed him a man lying some distance away in a nullah—a man whose khaki uniform showed him to be one of ourselves.

"Sit tight where you are, Vivian," said Dashwood. "I am going over there to see if that chap has got any cartridges in his pouch."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" muttered Dick to himself. "You've got more pluck than I thought you had!"

And he watched Leonard crawl away on hands and knees, then rise to his feet and run like a deer in the direction of the dead man.

Two or three bullets spurted up the mud about his legs, but he went through it unhurt, and sprang into the shelter of the nullah bank.

Dick saw him grope in the dead man's pouch, and suddenly start. He was kneeling down beside him, keeping well under cover of the ridge, and there he stayed for several minutes, staring intently at the dead man's face.

"I wonder what's up?" thought Dick.

And Sergeant Hawkesley, who had also been watching, raised himself on his hands to see the better.

"He can't possibly have been shot, sir," said the sergeant, in a doubtful tone. "I have known men hit in the heart before now, remain in the same position for hours."

"No, he's not shot," replied Dick; "but what on earth is he doing?"

Leonard Dashwood had placed his hands on the dead

man's shoulders. One might almost have thought that he was shaking him if the thing had not been too utterly absurd. But there was no doubt about his next action; for, drawing back to get on his feet again, he deliberately shook his fist in the dead man's face, and even as he came away, he paused and went back again, looking at the body fixedly, as if to satisfy himself that the man was quite dead. Then he dived down, and ran like a hare back to the place where Dick and the sergeant were wondering what it could all mean, and as he flung himself on the ground again, there was a most extraordinary expression on Leonard Dashwood's face—nothing less than a smile of supreme satisfaction, a glitter in his eye, and a gloating in the lips drawn back to show the white, regular teeth on which the wavering light sparkled.

"Whatever is wrong?" said Dick, allowing his curiosity to overcome his repugnance for the man at his side. "Did you find any cartridges?"

"No," said Leonard, fixing him with his eye; "but I found something else—better to me than all the cartridges in the world!"

He had been surprised out of all discretion by the joy of his discovery, and then, suddenly remembering that Vivian and he were by no means friends, he froze up with a short laugh, and Dick did not know that the body Dashwood had knelt beside was that of Alf Sligo.

"Hallo! What's this?" said the sergeant suddenly.

For the sound of a horse came out of the darkness beyond the wavering light of the fire, and a young sowar of the Bengal Lancers, holding up his hand, rode coolly up, and, seeing the general, whose uniform was covered with mud and blood from the wound in his head, saluted as though the situation was the most ordinary thing in the world, and inquired whether he wanted any reinforcements. A few words passed between them, and then the boy wheeled his horse round and galloped away in the darkness, and soon Major Worledge's two companies, who had been unable to find the guides, came up at the double, with a cheer.

With the morning came the rest of the Bengal Lancers, and the squadrons of the 25th, and, injured as they were to scenes of slaughter, the sight that met their gaze staggered them. The whole place was a shambles. The bodies of men and mules lay scattered about in all directions. A party was interring half a dozen sepoy in a hastily-made grave, and eighteen badly-wounded men lay in a ghastly row in the shelter of a roofless hut, while round about, on the knolls and ridges, the hideous vultures waited patiently for their morning feed.

Tom Howard, spying Dick, rode forward to greet him; but before he could do so, Leonard Dashwood, who had seen him coming, strode forward and put up his hand.

"One moment! I want a word with you!" he said, a malevolent sneer on his dark, handsome face.

"Well, what is it?" said the sergeant abruptly.

"There's a man named Sligo in your squadron—a white-livered skunk enough; but that's no matter. Have you had any conversation with him the last few days?"

"I don't see what that's got to do with you whether I have or not," said Tom.

"That is just the point—you don't know what it has to do with me! It is almost a pity you don't. He might have told you something that you would have given your ears off your head to learn. But it's too late now. He is dead. That is all I had to say, Sir John Dashwood!"

And Leonard turned on his heel.

"And it's like your confounded impudence!" muttered the sergeant. "I wish you'd give me another opportunity of punching your head!"

(To be continued.)

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