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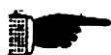
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The Girls' School's Challenge

A Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale of
HARRY WHARTON & CO.
and **FISHER T. FISH**
at Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Fair Foes.

BIFF!
Squash!
"Ow!"
"Ow!"
"My hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Wh-wh-what's that?"
Biff!

Squash!
A snowball squashing under his chin told him plainly enough what it was.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Look out!"

Harry Wharton & Co. drew together in the middle of the snowy lane and looked round them in some excitement.

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent were there. They were taking Fisher T. Fish, the new boy from New York, for a walk. Fisher T. Fish wanted to see the

country-side with the snow on it, and the chums of the Greyfriars Remove were obligingly taking him for a walk.

The sudden snowball attack had come as they were going down Friardale Lane, picking their way along through deep snow, dented with cart-ruts. Snow lay on the lane, and on the leafless hedges, and on the fields, and the steep slopes of the Black Pike had disappeared under a cloak of snow.

"My hat!" said Nugent, in bewilderment. "Where are they?"

There was no enemy to be seen.

Each of the Greyfriars juniors had received a snowball, but they seemed to be the only living things in Friardale Lane.

Whiz!

Squash!

A snowball caught Nugent under the chin as he spoke, and he staggered back with a gasp, and sat down in the snow.

There was a sound of a faint laugh from behind the high, snow-thickened hedge.

"There they are!" shouted Bob Cherry. "It's the Courtfield bounders, for a cert.!"

"I guess this is cold," grunted Fisher T. Fish, rubbing the snow out of his scarf. "I reckon—Ow!"

Fish's reckonings were cut short by another snowball, which caught him on the chin. He gave a yelp, and sat down on Nugent, who was getting up.

Nugent roared as he rolled over under the sudden weight of the American junior.

"Ow! You ass!"

"Oh! Crumbs!"

"You chump—"

"You fat-head!"

"Oh, cheese it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Better go for the enemy instead of slanging one another."

"I guess that's so."

"Come on!" shouted Bob Cherry.

The four juniors rushed towards a narrow gap in the high hedge, behind which their assailants were evidently lurking. They had little doubt that the enemy were the fellows from Courtfield Council School—Trumper & Co. But whoever they were, Harry Wharton & Co. meant to come to conclusions with them.

But that was not so easy.

The snow was piled up thickly in the gap, and the juniors plunged into it almost breast-high as they clambered through.

A steady and well-directed fire of snowballs played upon them all the time, and they were bowled over again and again.

Fisher T. Fish went scrambling back into the lane. He "guessed" that he had had enough of it. He was an American, and he could not stand the cold like the English boys.

But Wharton and Cherry and Nugent scrambled fiercely on. They were at a disadvantage now, but once they got through the hedge they would have a chance, and when it came to close quarters they had no doubt about their power to "keep their end up," even if the odds were against them.

"Come on!" panted Wharton.

"Hurrah! Buck up, Greyfriars!"

There was a soft laugh again, but no word was spoken by the enemy. The chums of Greyfriars could not see them yet. Within the hedge was a high bank of snow, and the enemy were hidden behind it. Sometimes, through the whirling snow, the juniors caught a glimpse of a thick-gloved hand with a snowball in it. That was all.

"Ow!" gasped Bob Cherry, as a snowball smashed on his nose, and he fell backwards into the drift he had just scrambled through. "Yow!"

"Come on, Bob!"

"Groo!"

Nugent dragged his chum out of the drift.

Biff—biff—biff!

Snowballs smashed on them, but they valiantly faced the enemy.

"Back up!" gasped Wharton. "We'll be at 'em in a minute, and then we'll simply smash 'em to smithereens."

"I guess you can't work the rifle," came a nasal voice from the lane behind. "I guess you'd better let up on it."

"Oh, rats!"

"You'll get left."

"Bosh!"

"I guess—"

"Back up, you blessed Yankee!" yelled Bob Cherry, scrambling up, and returning to the charge. "Come on!"

"I guess I've had some."

"Come on, you blessed Yank!"

Fisher T. Fish hesitated. He did not like snow; but he had plenty of pluck, and he followed the English lads through the hedge once more.

Harry Wharton was clambering over the snow-bank now.

He staggered as three or four snowballs burst in his face, and almost lost his footing, but he kept on grimly.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

A big leap, and he went plunging through the snow, and rolled among the enemy.

In a moment he was on his feet, blinded with the snow, and gasping for breath.

"Now, then!" he roared.

There was a soft laugh, and a giggle.

"Oh, dear! Don't hurt us, Harry!"

Wharton jumped.

His fists unclenched, and he wiped the snow from his eyes and blinked about him blankly.

Four smiling faces looked at him.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Wharton. "Marjorie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the girls of Cliff House laughed loud and long.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Fish Is Unreasonable.

HARRY WHARTON blushed.

He had not been able to see the enemy till this moment, and he had had no idea that the assailants were the girls of Cliff House School.

Marjorie Hazeldene was laughing softly. Miss Clara was giggling. Maud and Wilhelmina actually chuckled. They could not help it.

"So it's you!" gasped Harry.

"Yes," said Marjorie sweetly. "We give in, you know. You have captured the fort, and we are beaten. You are not angry, Harry?"

Wharton laughed.

"Angry? No, of course not!"

"Of course, we didn't mean to hurt you," said Miss Clara penitently.

"Hurt us!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, who had followed Harry Wharton closely. "I suppose you don't think a few snowballs would hurt chaps like us, Miss Clara? We're not soft, I hope."

"Rather not!" said Nugent.

"Then you forgive us?" said Marjorie.

"Stuff!" said Harry. "It was only a lark, of course."

Marjorie smiled demurely.

"You did not look like larking when you came scrambling in," she said. "I—I thought you were going to be quite savage and dangerous."

Harry coloured again, and laughed.

"I thought it was the Courtfield fellows here," he explained, "or else the Highcliffe chaps. Of course, we should have gone for them."

"And walloped them!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"You are not going to wallop us, I suppose?" Miss Marjorie asked innocently.

"Oh, Marjorie!"

"Great snakes!" gasped Fisher T. Fish, scrambling in through the snow. "Here I am, I guess. Where are they?"

"There aren't any they," exclaimed Nugent, putting out a restraining hand as the Yankee junior gathered up a snowball in each hand. "It was only a lark."

"Eh?"

"It was only a lark of the girls—"

"Rats!" snorted Fisher T. Fish, grasping the snowballs. "I ain't larking with snow, I guess. I've got some down my neck, and I'm giving some of it back."

"Ass—"

"Here goes!"

The girls gave little shrieks of alarm as Fisher T. Fish raised the snowballs. Fish was a hard-headed American youth, and prided himself upon his business abilities. If girls played a joke like boys, he did not see why they should not "stand the racket" like boys, and face the music—whereby he showed that he had a mere masculine brain, and was not entitled to reason on such subjects. For, as is well known, ladies may do anything they please, from punching Cabinet Ministers to biting policemen, but they must not be punched or bitten in return, or what becomes of chivalry?

"Hold on, you ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"I guess—"

"Stop!"

Wharton jumped in front of the American, and received the snowball himself. It smashed on his nose.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"Down him!" roared Bob Cherry, thoroughly indignant at the idea that anybody should presume to think of snow-balling Marjorie. "Roll him over!"

"Ow!" roared the American. "Leggo! Chuck it! Let up! Yah!"

But the Greyfriars juniors did not "let up."

They rolled the American over in the snow, and finally left him sitting in it, looking a great deal like Father Christmas.

IMPORTANT!

The Chums of Rylecombe Grammar School are in THE "EMPIRE" LIBRARY. One Halfpenny. Every Wednesday.



The snow was piled thickly in the gap, and the juniors sank deeply into it as they scrambled through the hedge. "Ow!" gasped Bob Cherry as a snowball smashed on his nose and knocked him into the drift again. "Yow!" (See page 2.)

Fisher T. Fish sat in the snow and blinked at them.
"You howling asses!" he roared.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You slab-sided chumps!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You fat-headed hoboos!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Fisher T. Fish staggered up.
The girls were laughing almost hysterically at the spectacle he presented. Fisher T. Fish was in a rage. It was not often that the cool Yankee lad was excited. But he was excited now.
"You wall-eyed, slab-sided chumps!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"You jabbering cuckoos—"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Is this what you call playing the game, you fat-headed John Bulls?" roared the incensed youth from New York.
"Yes, you ass!" said Wharton. "What do you mean by trying to snowball the girls? You ought to have more sense."
"You might have spoiled our hats," said Miss Clara severely.
Fisher T. Fish snorted.
"Then what did you mean by snowballing us?" he demanded.
Miss Clara sniffed.
"Blessed if that isn't just like girls!" exclaimed the

exasperated Fish. "You chuck snowballs at us, and we mustn't chuck any back. That's not fair."
"Rats!" said Harry.
"I guess—"
Marjorie broke in.
"Oh, we should not be afraid of a fair snow fight," she exclaimed. "We don't want to take any advantage because we are girls. We could easily keep a snow fort against an equal number of boys, I should think."
The juniors laughed. They could not help it. The idea of the Cliff House girls holding a fort against them was comic.
Marjorie turned pink.
"Then we will do it," she exclaimed. "We shall challenge you to a snow fight, and it shall be a fight to a finish."
"Hear, hear!" said Clara.
"I think so it is all right," remarked Wilhelmina Limburger.
"Oh, stuff, you know!" said Harry Wharton uneasily.
"It's all right; you mustn't mind what Fish says. He's only Fish, anyway."
"I guess—"
"But you laughed," said Marjorie.
"Did we?"
"Yes, you did."
"Well, we didn't exactly laugh," said Wharton cautiously.
"Not exactly what you'd call laugh. We smiled a little."
"Well, you smiled, then."

NEXT
TUESDAY:

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums
of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Well, not exactly smiled—"

"You think you have beaten us this time, I've no doubt!" exclaimed Miss Clara.

The juniors stared.

As they had invaded the defences of their assailants, and had forborne to "wallop" because they were girls, there did not seem to be much doubt that they had won in that little contest. But there is no following the mysterious workings of the feminine mind.

"There!" exclaimed Miss Clara triumphantly. "I knew you thought so!"

"Well, you see—"

"So we'll put it to the test," said Marjorie. "We'll send you a challenge in form, and meet you, and then we'll see who's conqueror."

"What-ho!" said Miss Clara emphatically.

And the four girls, with very distant nods to the Greyfriars fellows, walked away.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Trumper & Co. are Left.

THE chums of Greyfriars stared after the Cliff House girls, and then stared at one another. Then they grinned.

"Well, my hat!" said Harry Wharton.

"I guess—"

"Marjorie means business," said Bob Cherry seriously.

"We shall get that challenge."

"We can't accept it," said Nugent.

"If we don't, Marjorie will be offended."

"But if we do—"

"Then we shall have to let them lick us, I suppose."

"Phew!"

"Well, if we lick them they will be annoyed. Besides, we couldn't lick them without some rough play, you know, and then—"

"They would be hurt!"

"In's double sense," grinned Wharton. "Well, I hope Marjorie won't send the challenge. Well, Fish, are you feeling cold?"

The American's teeth were chattering.

"I g-g-guess so," he said.

"Better get walking, then."

"S-s-some."

The juniors walked back quickly towards Greyfriars to get warm. They were a little troubled in their minds about the forthcoming challenge from Cliff House. But that was quickly driven out of their minds by the sight of four fellows in the lane between them and the school.

The four were Trumper, Grahame, O'Neil, and Solly Lazarus, the chums of Courtfield County School. The Courtfield fellows seldom met the Grey Friars without a row of some sort; and with snow on the ground, the temptation was irresistible.

Trumper & Co. were already stooping for snowballs.

"Hallo!" said Fisher T. Fish. "Who are those chaps?"

"Chaps we're told you about—Trumper and the rest?"

"Going to be a row?"

"Looks like it," grinned Wharton. "They're going to bar our way to the school. We shall have to charge them."

"Well, I guess it will make us warm, anyway."

"Get some ammunition, and charge," said Wharton.

"What-ho!"

The Greyfriars juniors gathered up snowballs, packing them under their left arms. Trumper & Co. were doing the same.

"Hallo, college cads!" called out Trumper, his voice ringing clearly in the frosty air. "Looking for a licking?"

Harry Wharton's reply was in one word:

"Charge!"

And the Greyfriars juniors charged.

They bore down upon the Courtfielders, sending their snowballs as they charged. Trumper & Co. met them with a hot fusillade.

There was a warm exchange as the two parties neared. By the time they were at close quarters, the snowballs were expended. Grahame and Barney O'Neil were stooping down for more, when Nugent and Bob Cherry charged them over, and they were rolled in the snow.

Trumper laid hold of Harry Wharton, and they wrestled. Solly Lazarus retreated up the snowy bank at the side of the lane, grasping up the snow in handfuls and keeping up a warm fire on Fisher T. Fish, who was his adversary. And as Fisher T. Fish did not like close quarters in the snow, he contented himself with replying with snowballs.

"Thook it to them, dear boys!" shouted Solly. "Go for the thilly asses!"

"Back up, Greyfriars!"

"Hurrah!"

Wharton and Trumper rolled in the snow, Wharton uppermost.

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Harry sprang to his feet.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "We shall be late for dinner."

"Right-ho!"

And the Greyfriars juniors ran down the lane, leaving three of their foes rolling in the snow, and the fourth sending snowballs hotly after them. Fisher T. Fish turned his head as he ran, and yelled:

"Jevver get left?"

The next moment he yelled again—in another way—as a snowball from Solly Lazarus smashed on his mouth.

"Yoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wharton. "Come on!"

"Groo!"

Wharton took the American by the arm, and rushed him on. The Courtfield fellows scrambled up, and grasped more snowballs, but the chums of Greyfriars were already nearly out of range.

The Courtfielders were "left," as Fisher T. Fish expressed it. The Greyfriars juniors reached the school, red and glowing with the exercise. Fisher T. Fish was gasping for breath. The American junior claimed to be in better condition than anybody else at Greyfriars, and had often offered to show the juniors how things were done "over there," by which term he described the United States. But, as a matter of fact, Fisher T. Fish was frequently getting "left" himself. In nothing, so far, had he shown himself to be ahead of the Old Country, excepting in one particular, as Nugent had pointed out—swank! So far as swanking went, the Greyfriars juniors were willing to admit that Fisher T. Fish was an easy first.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, slapping the American on the back. "Where is your wind?"

Fisher T. Fish gasped.

"Ow! I'm all right!"

"But where's your wind?"

"N-n-nothing the matter with my wind!" gasped the American junior, who was so breathless that he could hardly articulate. "I—feel—as—easy—as—anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here—"

"He feels as easy as anything," grinned Bob Cherry.

"That's why he's spurring out one word at a time like blessed stones from a catapult."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I'm all serene. I'm as sound as a bell, and I could walk miles and miles yet," stuttered the gasping American.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I could lay over anything you kids could do!" gasped Fish. "We know how to keep our end up, over there, I reckon!"

"Come on, then!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, grasping Fish by the arm.

"Hey?"

"Come on! Get a move on."

"Look here—"

"Oh, buck up!"

And Bob Cherry started across the Close with his gigantic strides, dragging the American junior along by the arm.

Fisher T. Fish, puffing and blowing with anguish, stamped along, trying to keep pace with him. He felt as if every step would be his last, but he tried not to give in.

Wharton and Nugent followed them, laughing.

"Groo!" grunted Fish. "Oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"N-nothing, I guess."

"Buck up!"

"Ow!"

"You're slowing down."

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"I'm not."
 "Feeling fagged?"
 "I guess I'm all O.K."
 "Get a move on, then."

Bob Cherry increased his speed. Fisher T. Fish, feeling as if his lungs were about to burst, panted on beside him, Bob's iron grasp dragging him on. Before they reached the school-house, however, Fish dragged himself loose.

"Leggo!" he gurgled.
 "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Tired?"
 "No," snorted Fish. "I'm not tired. I don't see why I should tramp on at that rate for nothing, though. Let up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 And the chums of the Remove went into the school-house laughing. Fisher T. Fish grunted; he had not breath enough left to do anything else.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Alonzo Todd Is Shocked.

"POSTMAN!" said Bulstrode, as the Remove came out of the Form-room, after lessons, that afternoon.

And there was a rush to meet the postman.
 "I say, you fellows!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, as he rolled to and fro in the crush. "I say, don't shove a fellow! I want my letter."

"Rats!" said Tom Brown. "There's nothing for you."
 "Oh, really, Brown, I'm expecting a postal-order!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I——"
 "Here you are, young gents," said the Friardale postman, his ruddy face beaming with exertion and frost. "Here you are—Master Wharton and Master Cherry."

"Good!" said Harry Wharton, taking his letter, but his face fell. It was addressed to him in Marjorie Hazeldene's handwriting.

As a rule, a letter from Marjorie was very welcome to the Greyfriars chums.

But circumstances, as the proverb says, alter cases.
 Harry Wharton had very little doubt that the letter addressed to him in Marjorie's hand contained the challenge from Cliff House.

And that challenge would come awkwardly to Greyfriars. To refuse it would be to offend their girl chums. To accept it meant one of two things—to beat the girls in a snow-fight—an idea which was repugnant—or to let themselves be licked—which would be to make themselves the laughing-stock of Greyfriars. Wharton could imagine how the Upper Fourth would chuckle over the Remove being "licked by girls."

It was an awkward situation altogether; and so the sight of Marjorie's handwriting did not convey as much pleasure as usual.

Billy Bunter blinked at Harry Wharton through his big spectacles.

"Is that letter for you?" he asked.
 "Yes, Billy."
 "Who's it from?"
 "Somebody."

"Look here, there doesn't seem to be a letter for me," said Bunter peevishly. "If there is a postal-order in that letter, I expect it's for me, and it's got wrongly addressed somehow. You know how mistakes do happen."

"Rats!"
 "Oh, really, Wharton——"

Harry Wharton walked away with the letter in his hand. He signed to his chums to follow him, and Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh joined him in No. 1 Study in the Remove passage.

Billy Bunter blinked after them suspiciously.
 The fat junior scented a mystery, and to Bunter a mystery meant only one thing—that somebody was going to stand a feed, and keep him out of it.

"The rotters!" he exclaimed aloud. "The beasts! There's a postal-order in that letter, and Wharton doesn't mean to ask me to the feed. And I used to be in his study, too! Of all the mean beasts——"

"Dear me!" said Alonzo Todd, stopping, as he passed the fat junior in the passage. "I trust you were not alluding to me, Bunter."

Billy Bunter grunted.
 "Look here, Todd, Wharton's got a letter that I believe belongs to me," he exclaimed.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Todd, looking shocked. "You don't mean to say that Wharton has had the temerity to purloin your correspondence, Bunter?"

Bunter certainly didn't mean to say that; he couldn't have used such long words if he had been ordered to by his Form-master. But he certainly wanted to convey that impression to the Duffer of Greyfriars. The distinguishing trait in Alonzo Todd's character was that he was always perfectly willing to believe anything.

"You see, I think there was a postal-order in it," he

explained, lowering his voice, and blinking round to make sure that no one was within hearing.

"Dear me, Bunter! Surely you do not suspect Wharton of attempting to purloin a cash remittance which is your property?"

"I think there's a—a mistake," said Bunter. "There's no doubt whatever that the postal-order in the letter belongs to me."

"Bunter, this is an extremely serious matter. If what you state is veracious, nothing could exceed the turpitude of Wharton's conduct."

Billy Bunter did not know what turpitude was; he had a vague idea that it was something to do with turpentine. But he did not want to argue about that. What he wanted was the supposed postal-order.

"Well, look here, Todd, are you going to back me up in getting hold of my postal-order?" he asked.

"Oh, certainly, Bunter! My Uncle Benjamin would assuredly advise me to do so; I feel convinced of that. My Uncle Benjamin always——"

"All right, then," said Bunter. "Look here, they've taken my postal-order into their study. I want to get hold of it."

"Why not ask for it? If you couched the request in moderate language, I am sure that Wharton would observe its reasonableness, and immediately accede."

"Rats!"
 "My dear Bunter——"
 "I want that postal-order."

"But are you sure it is yours? You remember, Bunter, that you frequently commit extraordinary mistakes in matters appertaining to money, as in the case of my ten shillings, which you expended in mistake for your own."

Bunter snorted.
 "Oh, that's an old account," he said. "I'm going to settle it, of course, some time; in fact, I can settle it out of this very postal-order if you help me to get it. I am convinced that it is mine, as Wharton had such a—such a guilty air as he carried it off. Look here, if you'll help me——"

"Oh, certainly!"
 "Well, then, suppose you rush into the study and shout 'Fire!' then while they're getting out I'll nip in and get the postal-order."

Alonzo Todd looked puzzled.
 "But there is no fire," he said.
 "Oh, rats!" said Billy Bunter. "Who said there was?"
 "But if I shout 'Fire!' when there isn't a fire, it will be equivalent to uttering a falsehood, Bunter. I could not possibly do that. My Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me to tell the truth."

"Oh, really, Todd——"
 "My Uncle Benjamin would be shocked—nay, disgusted."
 "Look here, you idiot——"
 "Eh?"

"I—I mean, you ought to back me up, Todd, old fellow. Besides," added Bunter, struck by a sudden idea; "there is a fire."

"Is there? Where?"
 "In the Form-room grate."
 "The Form-room grate?"
 "Yes. You just shout 'Fire!' you needn't say what fire you're alluding to."

Todd shook his head.
 "That would not be a direct untruth, Bunter, but it would amount to a prevarication, and I am sure my Uncle Benjamin would object to it on moral grounds."

"Oh, blow your Uncle Benjamin!"
 "My dear Bunter——"

"Look here, are you going to help me or not?"
 "Oh, certainly! Under the circumstances, Bunter, I think the best system will be to go to Wharton, and point out to him that it is unjustifiable, indeed strictly reprehensible, for him to retain possession of a monetary remittance which is not his own property."

"You ass!"
 "I will go, Bunter," said Alonzo Todd, with a wave of his hand; and he turned to the stairs. "My Uncle Benjamin has told me that if I ever see a person on the downward path, it is my duty to stop him, if possible, with a word in season. I shall regard it as a strict duty to save Wharton from dishonest courses."

"But——"
 "Leave it to me."
 "Look here——"

But Alonzo Todd did not look. He was mounting the stairs three at a time, in his eagerness to perform that service for Harry Wharton, and to save him from the downward path.

Bunter blinked after him in dismay.
 "My word!" he murmured. "The idiot! They'll——"

they'll squash him! Well, serve him right, that's all, the champion ass!"

And Bunter rolled away. Todd had gone too far for Bunter to stop him, without going to No. 1 Study himself; and that the Owl of the Remove certainly did not intend to do. He had an idea that there would be a row there when the Duffer of Greyfriars started rescuing Harry Wharton from the downward path.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Downward Path.

HARRY WHARTON had opened the letter in No. 1 Study.

He read it out to the other fellows. They all listened very seriously. It was the challenge to the snow-fight, as Wharton had expected.

It was worded in a very stately and impersonal fashion. In fact, it sounded quite legal, as Tom Brown observed. The letter ran:

"Whereas the Greyfriars Remove have a peculiar idea that they could beat the girls of Cliff House in a fair stand-up snow-fight—

"And whereas the girls of Cliff House are quite convinced that they could do nothing of the sort—

"We, the undersigned, wish to put the matter to the test, and hereby send a challenge to the Greyfriars Remove, on the following conditions:

"We will build a snow fort on Saturday afternoon, and hold it against all comers till dusk; and if it is not captured by dusk, it is to be reckoned a victory for Cliff House. Cliff House will be ready for war at three o'clock.

"There shall be twenty girls on the Cliff House side, and an equal number of boys from Greyfriars.

"If these conditions are agreeable, please write and signify the same.

"(Signed) MARJORIE HAZELDENE,
CLARA TREVLIN,
"For the Girls of Cliff House."

The juniors looked at one another.

"Well, the fat's in the fire now!" Nugent remarked.

"The fatfulness in the esteemed fire is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"What's to be done?"

"We can't refuse."

"And we can't fight."

"And there's no middle course."

Tom Brown laughed.

"Looks like a beastly awkward fix," he remarked.

"Perhaps—"

"What are you thinking about, Bob?" demanded Wharton, glancing at Bob Cherry, who was staring at Marjorie's letter with fixed brow.

Bob Cherry started.

"What a pretty hand Marjorie writes!" he remarked.

Nugent sniffed.

"Oh, blow that, now!" he remarked. "The question is—"

"My dear Wharton—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Todd! Walk along, Todd. Lunatic asylum next door."

"My dear Cherry—"

"Yes, buzz off now, Todd, old man," said Harry Wharton. "We're busy."

Alonzo Todd did not buzz off. He came into the study. There was a very solemn and serious expression upon the simple face of the Duffer of Greyfriars.

"My dear Wharton—"

"Another time, Todd."

"Another time will not do," said Todd solemnly. "Another time may be too late. Another time may find you so far on the road to ruin that a word in season may be too late to save you from the terrible consequences of your iniquity."

The juniors stared at him blankly. Nugent tapped his forehead in a significant way.

"Right off it at last," he murmured.

"My dear Nugent—"

"I'm sorry, Todd," said Wharton kindly, "but this isn't an asylum, you know, and really it's too bad to give us Bedlam conversation."

"My dear Wharton—"

"Would you mind shutting up the dictionary and bunking?" asked Tom Brown politely.

"My dear Brown—"

"Buzz off!" roared the juniors together.

Alonzo Todd closed the door, instead of buzzing off. His expression grew more earnest, more deadly in its earnestness.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

IMPORTANT!

The Chums of Ryecombe Grammar School are in THE "EMPIRE" LIBRARY. One Halfpenny. Every Wednesday.

than ever. He waved his hand at Wharton, who jumped in surprise.

"Wharton! Oh, my friend—"

"What!"

"My dear friend, be warned in time. No good can come of yielding to temptation, and going on the downward path."

"The—the what?"

"The downward path. You are staggering—"

"What?"

"You are staggering on the brink of crime. Pray—pray give up the remittance you have unjustifiably purloined, and clear your laden conscience," urged Alonzo.

"My hat!"

"Pray reflect before it is too late!"

"Is that a piece you're learning for recitation?" asked Harry.

"My dear Wharton—"

"If it is, you can go and learn it in your own study, you know. If it isn't, I suppose you're off your rocker, and you ought to go to the Form-master, and ask him for a strait jacket. Second study on the ground floor. Good-bye."

"My dear—"

"Buzz off!" roared Wharton.

"Never!" said Alonzo firmly.

"What?"

"Never till I have made clear to you the risks you run in turning to dishonest courses, and have persuaded you to return the stolen cash—"

Wharton staggered.

"Stolen cash!" he said faintly.

"Yes, Wharton—Wharton! My dear fellow, reflect! What good can this do you? In the long run, think of the prison—the treadmill—the skilly! Oh, reflect, my friend, before it is too late, and escape from the downward path."

Alonzo's voice grew quite impassioned.

"Well, my only Pyjama hat!" said Tom Brown. "He's fairly off his rocker, and no mistake. As he's so strong on downward paths, he may as well save himself from one. Roll him downstairs!"

"Good egg!"

"My dear fellows—"

"Collar him!"

Alonzo's cryptic utterances were not in the least understood by the chums of No. 1 Study; but they did not feel inclined to unravel the mysteries of the working of Alonzo's mind. They collared Alonzo instead, and whirled him out of the study into the passage.

The Duffer of Greyfriars struggled as he was rushed towards the stairs.

"Ow! Oh!! My dear fellows—"

"Shove him along!"

"Roll him down!"

"The rollfulness is terrific!"

"Go it!"

"My dear Wharton—my dear Nugent, I came to save you from the downward path."

"Save yourself, then!" grinned Wharton.

Alonzo Todd was on the downward path now—on the stairs. He was rolled down, bumping on the stairs, and clutched wildly at the banisters.

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Bulstrode, coming out of his study with Hazeldene.

"Only Todd on the downward path!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alonzo grasped the banisters, and stopped himself half way down the stairs. He hung there, dishvelled and dusty, blinking at the juniors, who roared with laughter on the landing above.

"My dear fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Wharton—"

The chums of the Remove did not stay to listen to Alonzo. They returned to No. 1 Study to discuss the question of the Cliff House challenge.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

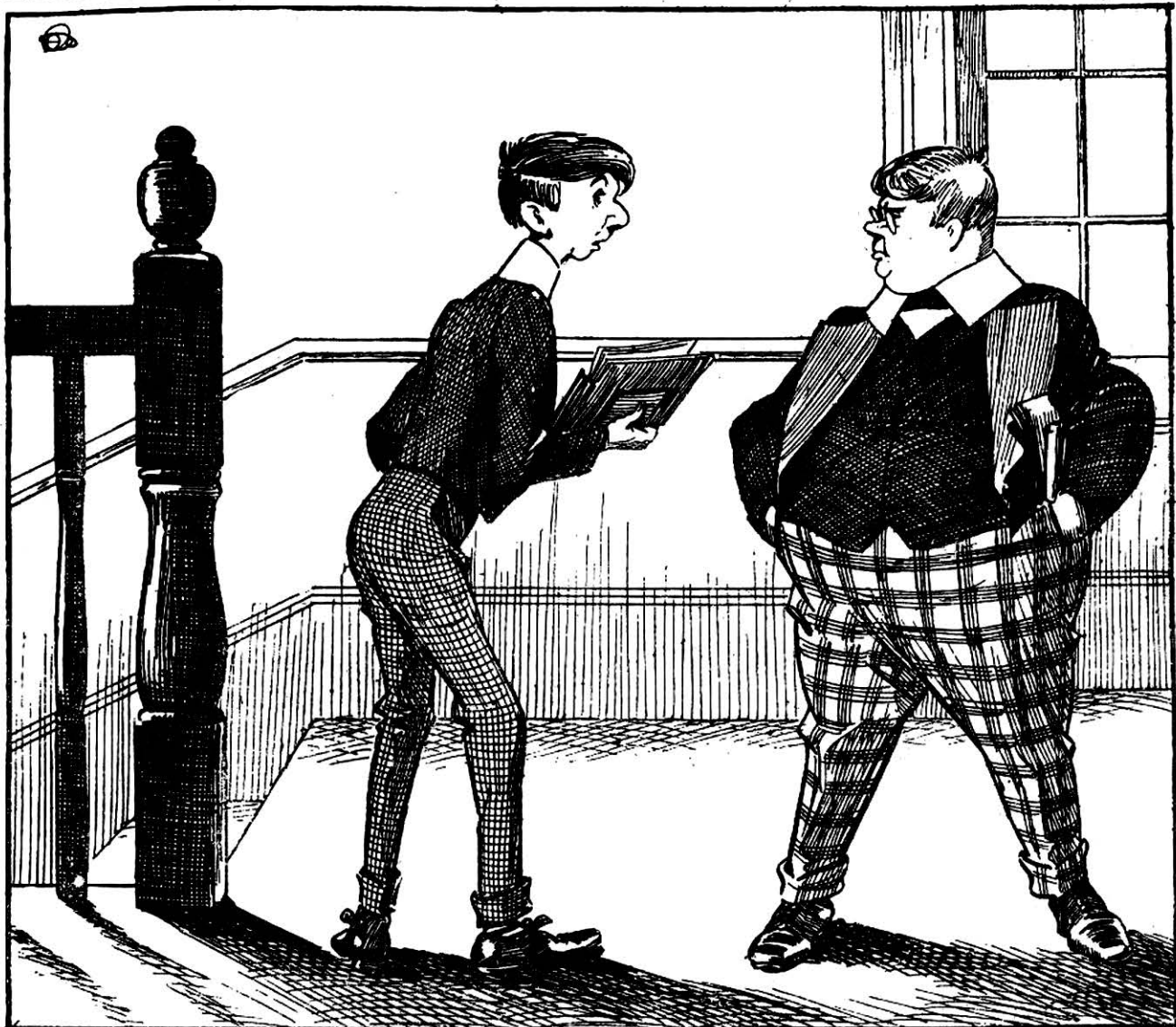
A Startling Accusation.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Something's up!"

Bob Cherry made that remark, as the chums of the Remove came into the junior common-room.

Harry Wharton & Co. had spent some time debating the Cliff House challenge, but they had not yet decided what answer to send. Frank Nugent had suggested giving the subject a rest, and that was agreed to, and the chums had come down with the answer to Marjorie's letter still not settled upon. As they entered the common-room, it was easy for all of them to see that something was "on."

Fellows were talking together, and they suddenly left off as the Famous Four came in. Whispering went on, and



"Look here, Todd," said Billy Bunter, "I believe Wharton's got a letter that belongs to me!" "Dear me," said Alonzo Todd, "you don't mean to say that Wharton has had the temerity to purloin your correspondence, Bunter?" (See page 5.)

covert glances were thrown at Wharton and his friends. Bulstrode and Skinner coughed in a very significant way, though what the coughing was meant to signify was a question the chums could not answer.

Harry Wharton looked round with a puzzled expression.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

There was no reply.

The juniors looked at one another, and some of them smiled, and some of them coughed, and a few sneered.

But no one replied in words.

Harry began to feel wrathful. His temper was never slow to rise.

"Look here, you asses, what's the matter?" he demanded.

"What are you grunting about, Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose a fellow can grunt if he likes," he remarked.

"You've got something on."

"Well, I'm not likely to go about without anything on in this weather, you know."

Some of the juniors chuckled. Harry Wharton made a step towards Bulstrode, with a gleam in his eyes.

"Will you explain what all this rot is about?" he asked.

"Ask Skinner."

"Will you explain, Skinner?"

"Ask Ogilvy."

Harry Wharton looked at the Scottish junior.

"Will you explain, Ogilvy?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

Ogilvy looked very uncomfortable.

"I know it's all rot," he said, at last.

"What's all rot?"

"About the postal-order?"

"What postal-order?"

"Oh, you know well enough," said Bulstrode, with a sneer. "Bunter's postal-order."

"I didn't know he had one," said Harry. "You don't mean to say Bunter's had a postal-order at last?"

"Of course, you didn't know."

"Certainly I didn't."

"Then you haven't boned it?" asked Morgan.

"What?"

"Todd says—"

"Oh, Todd!"

Alonzo Todd came forward. There was a look upon his face in which indignation and benevolence were mingled.

"Wharton—" he began.

Harry Wharton grasped him by the shoulder, and shook him.

"Now, explain yourself!" he rapped out.

"My dear Wharton—"

"Explain, you duffer."

"I have explained to these fellows about your keeping Bunter's postal-order," said Todd. "I did not wish to injure you in any way; but I wanted the whole Form to remonstrate with you, and keep you off the downward path."

Wharton was speechless. He could only stare at the Duffer of Greyfriars. He had never expected this, even of Alonzo Todd.

"While there is yet time, pause!" said Todd, impressively. "My Uncle Benjamin says that a sinner can always pause while there is yet time, and, under the circumstances, it is the most judicious thing he can do. Pause, my dear friend! Reflect! Once committed to the paths of dishonesty—"

"My only hat!" gasped Wharton.

"Pause!" repeated Todd, raising his hand and his voice at the same time. "Oh, my dear friend pause!"

"Great Scott!"

"The great Scottfulness is terrific."

"My dear friends—"

"You howling ass!" roared Wharton.

"My dear Wharton!"

"You frabjous chump!"

"M-m-my dear!"

"Did Bunter tell you I had taken his postal-order?" asked Harry Wharton, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"Oh, certainly."

"And you were idiot enough to believe him?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"My dear Cherry—"

"The letter that came was for me, and it was from Marjorie Hazeldene at Cliff House," said Harry Wharton.

"Bunter was stuffing you up!"

"Oh!"

"Where is Bunter?" asked Wharton, looking round.

Bunter was not to be seen. Bunter had an idea that there was going to be trouble on account of the yarn he had told Alonzo, and for some time he had been out of sight.

"Do you understand now, you champion ass?" demanded Wharton.

Alonzo looked at him more in sorrow than in anger.

"My dear friend, pause!"

"What?"

"My Uncle Benjamin says that it is wisest to confess a sin instead of trying to get out of it by uttering fabrications," said Alonzo solemnly.

Harry Wharton jumped.

"You—you ass!" he roared. "Look here, I can't stand this, even from a howling duffer like you. Put up your fists."

"What for?" asked Todd, innocently.

"I'm going to lick you, chump!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Put 'em up!"

"I think this is very ungrateful, Wharton, when I'm only trying to save you from the downward path, and rescue you from the depths of sin and wickedness."

Wharton snorted. He had had enough of Alonzo's kindness. He grasped the Duffer of Greyfriars by the shoulders, and rolled him over, with a bump, on the floor.

"You ass!" he gasped. "I've a jolly good mind to put your head in the ashes."

"Ow!"

"Let him alone!" exclaimed Bulstrode, in his most bullying tone. "Let him alone, Wharton. Hit a chap your own size."

"Coward!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton turned upon them with flashing eyes.

"I'm not hitting him!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't hit such a silly chump as Todd. But I'll show you whether I'm a coward, or not. Come on, either of you, or both—I don't care!"

Bulstrode and Vernon-Smith exchanged a quick glance. Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars—the pair of them would have liked nothing better than to take Harry Wharton at his word. But there was the public opinion of the Form to be reckoned with. They could not attack Harry Wharton two to one; at all events, with half the Remove and the Upper Fourth looking on.

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Bulstrode.

"You know we shouldn't accept that," sneered Vernon-Smith.

Wharton's eyes blazed.

"I don't know anything of the sort!" he exclaimed. "And I'll jolly well make you accept it."

And he ran towards the two of them, and his open hand came with a loud smack on Vernon-Smith's face.

In a second more his hand smacked loudly on Bulstrode's cheek.

The action had been so swift that neither had time to dodge. They staggered a pace or two back, and Wharton followed them up.

"Now, will you come on?" he exclaimed. "Either or both, you cads!"

"Go it, ye cripples!" sang out Bob Cherry.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

IMPORTANT!

The two juniors leaped at Wharton. But even as they did so, the face of Mr. Quelch looked in at the doorway.

"Stop!" exclaimed the Form-master.

The juniors dropped their hands, Bulstrode giving Wharton a furious glance, Alonzo Todd was staggering to his feet, very much confused and bewildered.

Mr. Quelch looked at Wharton, with a stern brow.

"What is this dispute about?" he exclaimed.

Wharton did not reply.

"You explain, Bulstrode," said Mr. Quelch quietly.

"We interfered between Wharton and Todd, sir," said Bulstrode glibly.

"Indeed!"

"I bumped Todd over, sir," said Harry. "I don't think he's hurt; but he made me wild, sir. It's because he's such a howling duffer."

"My dear Wharton, I was only acting in your best interests, and in a way my uncle Benjamin would certainly have approved of, when I tried to induce you to restore to Bunter the money of his, which you have wrongfully withheld."

"Oh, the frabjous ass!" murmured Bob Cherry. "All the fat's in the fire now."

"What!" thundered Mr. Quelch, glaring at Todd. "Wharton has withheld money rightfully belonging to Bunter?"

"Yes, sir. I was attempting to persuade him to restore it, sir. My Uncle Benjamin says that there is always time to pause on the downward path, and I—"

Mr. Quelch advanced into the room, and the look upon his face made even Alonzo cease. A grim and uncomfortable silence fell upon the juniors.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Catches It.

HARRY WHARTON was standing with flushed cheeks. His gaze met Mr. Quelch's without faltering. Wharton was very angry. The ridiculous charge against him could, of course, be disposed of in a very short time, but the eagerness of his enemies to make capital out of it naturally angered the captain of the Remove.

"Now," said Mr. Quelch, in a hard, stern voice, "we will examine into this. I want a full explanation, Todd."

"If you please, sir—" began Wharton.

Mr. Quelch held up his hand.

"I will have Todd's account first, Wharton. Now, Todd, you say that Wharton has held back money belonging to Bunter?"

"Oh, certainly, sir."

"Where is Bunter?"

"He's not here, sir," said Bulstrode.

"Some of you go and look for him, and bring him here at once."

Half a dozen juniors left the room to look for Bunter. The master of the Remove questioned Todd.

"Did Bunter tell you so, Todd?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you believed him?"

"Oh, certainly, sir. You see, a letter came, and Wharton took it, and Bunter said it was his, and there was a postal-order in it. That's how it was, sir. I went to Wharton's study to remonstrate, and point out to him that the evil course he was following could only lead eventually to destruction, and I was rolled downstairs, sir, in what I can only characterise as a rough and unfeeling manner."

"I hardly know what else you could expect under the circumstances, Todd. You deny the whole matter, I suppose, Wharton?"

"Wholly, sir."

"You had a letter, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir: I have it here."

"Have you any objection to my seeing it?"

"None, sir."

Harry Wharton handed Mr. Quelch the letter containing the challenge from the Cliff House girls.

The Remove-master glanced over it, and a puzzled expression came upon his face, but that expression soon gave place to a smile.

"Here's Bunter, sir!" exclaimed Bulstrode, entering the room with Billy Bunter, his hand upon the fat junior's collar.

Billy Bunter was wriggling most uncomfortably. He had made several attempts to bolt on the way to the common-room, but Bulstrode's knuckles were digging into the back of his neck. Mr. Quelch handed the letter back to Wharton.

"Bunter, come here!"

"Ye-e-s, sir."

Billy Bunter was jerked in front of the Form-master, and there Bulstrode released him. He cast a longing glance towards the door.

"Bunter!"

The fat junior jumped.

"Yes, sir. I—I'm here, sir."

"You accuse Wharton of having received a letter directed to you, and of having taken a postal-order from it?"

"Ye-es, sir. I—I mean, no, sir."

"You cannot mean both yes and no, Bunter."

"Yes, sir."

"What do you mean, Bunter?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Quelch drew a deep breath. The Owl of the Remove was always a trial to him. The juniors were beginning to grin. Bunter's manner was not that of a fellow who had a serious accusation to make. The fellows realised that the whole affair was only the outcome of Bunter's love for crooked paths.

"Now, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch sternly, "collect yourself, and answer me seriously."

"Yes, sir."

"You say that a letter came for you to-day?"

"Certainly, sir."

"And that Wharton took possession of it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it in his possession now?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Did you see it in his possession?"

"No, sir."

"Where did you see it?"

"In his hand, sir."

Mr. Quelch breathed hard through his nose, and the crowd of juniors chuckled. Billy Bunter was bewildered to such an extent that he hardly knew what he was saying, but he held, in the midst of his confusion, firmly to his usual system—not to tell the truth so long as he had a lie left.

"Bunter, if the letter was in his hand it must have been in his possession."

"If you say so, sir, only—you're saying so, not me, sir."

"You should say not I, Bunter."

"But you did say so, sir."

"I mean, you should use the nominative case, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch. "You should say 'not I,' not 'not me.'"

"Not I, not not me," said Bunter.

"And the Remove giggled again."

"Bunter, you declare that the letter Wharton had was yours?"

"If you please, sir, I'd rather let the matter drop. I'm quite willing to overlook Wharton's conduct, sir, as I used to be in his study, and I—I hope it will be a warning to him, sir."

"My hat!" murmured Wharton.

"Nonsense, Bunter! How do you know the letter was yours?"

"Because it was mine, sir."

"Did you see your name on it?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Then how did you know?"

"There was a postal-order in it, and I expected a postal-order, sir. In fact, I have been expecting several postal-orders lately, sir, from some titled friends of mine."

"Did you see the postal-order, Bunter?"

"No, sir; Wharton wouldn't let me."

"How many letters did Wharton receive?"

"Only one, sir."

"Wharton has shown me the letter he received. Bunter, and it was written to him. I have read it."

"Oh, sir!"

"And so," thundered Mr. Quelch, in a voice that made Bunter quake, "you did not see the superscription on the letter, you did not see the postal-order, and on these grounds—or, rather, no grounds whatever—you accuse Wharton of theft!"

"Oh, no, sir! Certainly not, sir! I never dreamed of such a thing."

"You accused him of retaining your postal-order, which has no existence."

"But not of stealing it, sir. Oh, no, sir! I wouldn't dream of accusing Wharton of such a thing. I used to be in his study, sir, and I know he wouldn't steal. He would keep a fellow short of grub, but—"

"I fail to see any difference between retaining it and stealing it, Bunter."

"But you say yourself, sir, that the postal-order has no existence, so he couldn't possibly have done either. Your own words, sir."

Mr. Quelch drew a deep breath.

"Once for all, Bunter, of what do you accuse Wharton?" he demanded.

"Nothing, sir!" said Billy Bunter promptly.

"You stated to Todd—"

"Oh, that was a—figure of speech, sir. Besides, sir, anybody will tell you what an awful duffer Todd is. He always misunderstands, sir. What I really said to Todd was, that I had a great respect for Wharton, and that I knew the postal-order would be perfectly safe in his hands."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

NEXT
TUESDAY;

EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

"My dear Bunter—" began Alonzo.

Mr. Quelch gasped.

"You—you said that to Todd, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir. Todd will remember my words."

"Dear me!"

"Did Bunter say those words to you, Todd?"

"Certainly not, sir! Bunter is mistaken—in fact, I should think that he was prevaricating, only my Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me always to give anyone the benefit of the doubt. But Bunter is quite wrong. He told me that Wharton had taken his letter and was keeping his postal-order, and so I went to Wharton to remonstrate, sir. I was sure that that was a course of which my Uncle Benjamin would have approved if he had been consulted in the matter, sir."

"Do you deny Todd's statement, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir! I don't know his uncle, sir," said Bunter feebly.

"I mean his statement of what you said to him."

"Yes, sir."

"You say that Todd is speaking falsely?"

"No, sir."

"Bunter!"

"If you please, sir, I'd rather let the matter drop. I'm willing to overlook both Wharton's and Todd's conduct, and—"

"Bunter!" rapped out the Remove master.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Follow me to my study."

"W-w-w-what for, sir?"

"I am going to cane you severely for uttering deliberate untruths. You have brought a wicked and ridiculous accusation against Wharton, and imposed wickedly upon the credulity of the most foolish boy in the Remove."

"Oh!" said Alonzo.

"If—if you please, sir, it was all a joke," said Bunter, changing his ground. "I was only stuffing Alonzo up, sir."

"If you utter another falsehood, Bunter, I shall cane you more severely than I had intended. I shall cane you as a warning to any other boy in this Form who may be inclined to prevarication, as well as a punishment for your wickedness."

"If—if you don't mind, sir, couldn't you cane Todd as a warning?" stammered Bunter. "It would be just as good a warning, sir, and—and I'd like it ever so much better."

Mr. Quelch did not reply in words. His forefinger and thumb closed like a vice upon Billy Bunter's ear, and the fat junior was led from the room. One minute later sounds of anguish were heard proceeding from Mr. Quelch's study.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

Alonzo Refuses to Reply.

"MY dear Wharton," exclaimed Alonzo Todd, "I'm so sorry!"

"Eh?" said Wharton.

"I'm so sorry."

"Oh, you are, are you, you champion ass?" said Harry grimly.

"My dear Wharton I was deceived with that unscrupulous person. My Uncle Benjamin would be shocked with him—nay, disgusted."

"Your Uncle Benjamin did a lot of things for you, didn't he, Todd?" Nugent remarked.

"Yes, indeed, Nugent. I am very much obliged to my Uncle Benjamin in every way."

"There's one more thing he might have done."

"My dear Nugent, what is that?"

"He might have tied a brick round your neck and dropped you into a pond," said Frank.

"My dear—"

"Oh, scat!"

"All the same, I don't see why Bunter should have made such a mistake about the letter," Bulstrode said obstinately.

"What is that blessed mysterious letter, after all?"

"No business of yours," said Ogilvy.

"I don't mind showing it," said Harry Wharton. "In fact, it concerns the whole Form, and I was going to read it out. It's a challenge from Cliff House."

"My hat!"

Harry Wharton read out Marjorie's challenge.

ANSWERS

Some of the juniors grinned.

"Oh, we'll meet 'em!" said Bulstrode.

"I guess so!" Fisher T. Fish remarked. "But I suppose you'll let us snowball 'em this time, Wharton?"

"You'll be expected to play the game," said Wharton sternly.

The American shrugged his shoulders.

"Does that mean standing up to be snowballed, and doing nothing?" he asked. "If so, you can count me out."

"And me, too," said Bulstrode promptly. "I don't mind a snow fight, but I'm not going to be made a cockshy of."

"All right, I'll leave you out," said Harry curtly; and he turned away.

There was a great deal of discussion in the Remove on the subject of the coming snow-fight.

The general opinion was that the challenge should be accepted, as there was no doubt that the Cliff House girls would consider a refusal in the light of shirking a contest. But how the fight was to be fought was another question. The girls would be no match for the boys in a real snow-fight, of course; but the Removites felt that they could hardly combat with Marjorie & Co. as they would have done with Trumper.

But it was necessary to reply to Marjorie's letter that evening, and before the last collection went, Harry Wharton had written an acceptance of the Cliff House challenge.

The letter was posted, and the chums of the Remove were committed to it now, though exactly what their plan of operations was to be they had not yet decided.

The Famous Four were roasting chestnuts in No. 1 Study, with Mark Linley and Tom Brown for company, when Wingate came along.

The captain of Greyfriars looked into the study.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "You're pretty full up here."

"The fullness is terrific, my worthy Wingate."

"Room for one more," said Harry Wharton. "Come in and have some chestnuts? They're good."

Wingate smiled and shook his head.

"No, thanks. Let me see; you're three in here, as a rule, I think."

"Three since Bunter left," said Harry.

"How many are you, Brown?"

"I'm in No. 2, with Bulstrode and Hazeldene."

"You see, there's a new boy coming, and I've got to find a study for him," said Wingate. "The Remove studies are nearly full up, I think."

"New fellow in the Remove?" asked Bob Cherry. A new arrival in the Form was always a matter of interest to the Removites.

Wingate nodded.

"Oh, you can't put him in here, Wingate," said Frank Nugent. "We're quite crowded. I should think Bob would like him."

"Rate!" said Bob Cherry. "I have Linley and Wun Lung with me in No. 13."

"There's No. 14," exclaimed Tom Brown. "Only two in that, Wingate."

"Which two?" asked the Greyfriars captain.

"Billy Bunter and the Yank, Fish."

"Good! Bull can go in there, then."

"Bull?"

"Yes, that's the new kid's name."

"Tame bull, I hope, not a wild bull," said Bob.

"You'll see when he comes," said Wingate, laughing; and he left the study.

"Any more chestnuts?" yawned Bob Cherry.

"No; all gone."

"Time we were gone, too, then. I wonder what the new chap will be like?"

"I wonder!"

"Jolly glad he isn't poked in with us, anyway. The studies are none too large at any time."

"Right-ho!"

The Remove went to bed a little later, and in the dormitory the Remove were informed of Wharton's reply to Marjorie's letter. Most of the fellows were satisfied with it.

"But is it going to be a real fight?" asked Stott.

"I don't exactly know."

"I mean, if we've got to take the fort, and they're going to snowball us, I don't see what we can do but snowball them."

"Hear, hear!"

"We shall have to be careful, that's all."

"The carefulness will have to be terrific."

"You can leave me out," grunted Bulstrode.

"I intended to," said Wharton quietly.

And Bulstrode grunted again, and went to bed.

"I say, you fellows," Billy Bunter remarked, as he took off his boots, "I hear there's a new chap coming into the Remove, and they're going to put him in my study."

"I guess you mean my study," said Fisher T. Fish.

"Oh, really, Fish—"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

IMPORTANT!

"I guess it will be all right," said Fish. "I'd like to have a decent chap in the study with me. It will be a change."

"Oh, really—"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's one for you, Billy."

"Oh, rats!" said Billy Bunter. "Look here, what I was going to say is, that I should like to stand a feed to the chap, as he's new to Greyfriars, you know. I hear that he's coming to-morrow morning. I'm expecting a postal-order by the first post, and—"

"Then it will come in handy Bunter."

"Ye-es; but there are delays in the post at this time of the year, you know," Billy Bunter remarked. "If my postal-order shouldn't arrive by the first post, Wharton, I suppose you'd have no objection to lending me the ten bob."

"Something wrong with your supposer, then," said Harry, laughing. "I should have a very big objection."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"But the postal-order will be here," said Skinner. "Bunter's postal-orders always come just when he expects them. His titled friends can be relied upon."

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suppose you'll lend me a trifle, Todd, till my postal-order comes?"

Todd looked very seriously at Bunter.

"You have not yet repaid me the five shillings I lent you."

"Oh, really—"

"Nor the half-crown."

"Yes, but—"

"Nor the three-and-sixpence."

"Oh—"

"Nor the one-and-six."

"Look here—"

"And then there is the ten shillings of mine which you used by mistake."

"Look here, Todd—"

"Besides," said Alonzo solemnly, "I have thought the matter over, Bunter, and have considered the circumstances in all their bearings, and I have come to the decision that it behoves me to avoid your acquaintance."

"Good old dictionary!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alonzo Todd blinked round at the Removites.

"I regard this as my bounden duty," he said. "My Uncle Benjamin, were he acquainted with the circumstances of the case, would, I am convinced, counsel me to avoid Bunter. Bunter is a very untruthful person, and my Uncle Benjamin would be shocked, nay, disgusted, at his conduct."

"You ass!" roared Bunter. "I—"

Alonzo wagged a bony forefinger at him.

"Pray do not address me again, Bunter."

"You chump!"

"I refuse to reply."

"You fathead!"

"I will not say a word."

"You howling cuckoo!"

"I still refuse to open my lips."

The Remove were yelling with laughter. Todd's refusal to reply was comic, as he was replying all the time. Wingate came into the dormitory.

"Not so much row!" he said. "Lights out!"

And the Remove, still chuckling, went to bed.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Sudden Alarm.

"BULL'S coming this morning," Frank Nugent remarked, as the Remove made their way to the Form-room in the morning.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes, he'll be here by the morning train," he remarked.

"You remember when Fish came, there was an expedition to meet him, and we were let off lessons for the purpose?"

"Yes," said Harry, laughing. "But that was because Fish came from America. The same wheeze won't work twice."

"Oh, I don't know; I believe Bull comes from a distance." "Well, you can try it. I'd rather go for a run down the lane this morning, and snowball the village chaps, than grind Latin."

"No harm in trying," said Mark Linley, laughing, "but I don't think it will work. Mr. Quelch is too old a bird."

But Frank Nugent meant to try.

When Mr. Quelch came into the Form-room, Nugent rose in his place, and remained standing.

The Remove-master looked at him inquiringly.

"If you please, sir—" began Nugent.

"Well?" said Mr. Quelch, in his short, sharp way.
"If you please, sir, there's a new boy coming into the Remove."

"I am aware of that, Nugent. The Head would not be likely to leave me to be informed of the fact by a junior in my own Form."

Mr. Quelch's manner certainly wasn't encouraging. But the frosty, keen air outside tempted Nugent, and he stuck to his guns.

"Yes, sir. Chap named Bull, sir."
"Will you kindly come to the point, Nugent? You are wasting time."

"Yes, sir. You see, we were thinking that the new chap might be lonely and—and solitary, and—and alone, you know, and all by himself, sir."

"If he is one of those things he will probably be the rest, as all the expressions you have used have the same meaning, Nugent. You are tautological, Nugent. Have you anything else to say?"

"We were thinking, sir, that it would be a good idea to go and meet him at the station, as we did Fish, sir," said Nugent boldly.

"Oh! You would like to be excused lessons for the purpose, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, if you please, sir."

"How many of you?"

"Well, the four of us, sir."

"Only four?"

"Perhaps six would be better, to give the chap an impression of—of hearty welcome, sir," said Nugent. "I dare say you remember, sir, what you felt like when you were a new boy in a school, sir."

The Remove grinned. It must certainly have been a great many years since their Form-master was a new boy in a school.

"Six," said Mr. Quelch. "You feel that six would be a sufficient number, Nugent?"

Eager looks were cast upon Nugent from all sides. Everybody wanted to be in the party, of course.

"Well, sir, I dare say eight would make the new fellow feel more at home, sir."

"Only eight?"

"Well, a round dozen, sir," said Nugent.

"You are very moderate," said Mr. Quelch. "I really am surprised that you don't suggest the whole Form going, Nugent."

Nugent started. It dawned upon him suddenly that Mr. Quelch was only subjecting him to a sarcastic process, and had no intention of excusing anybody from lessons for the purpose of meeting and welcoming the new boy.

"Oh, sir, you see—"

"I see an impertinent boy," said Mr. Quelch, frowning.

"Your request is impertinent, Nugent. There is no occasion to meet Bull at the station. It was different in the case of Fish, who came many thousands of miles to this school. Bull, I suppose, will be able to reach Greyfriars in safety. I fear, Nugent, that you have been actuated less by a desire to greet and welcome the new boy, than by a desire to escape your lessons this morning."

"Oh, sir!"

"You may sit down, Nugent."

"T-t-thank you, sir!"

Nugent dropped into his seat. He was relieved at not getting lines. Mr. Quelch's frown generally meant impositions.

The subject dropped; and Nugent, and the round dozen of juniors who didn't get that little run after all, settled down to work with the rest.

When morning lessons were over, the juniors crowded out. Snow had been falling in the quadrangle and footer was a thing impossible; but a snow-battle with the Upper Fourth would afford plenty of fun.

Harry Wharton & Co. were on the stairs, when a sound ringing down the passage from above made them halt.

It was a wild, wailing sound, as of some powerful animal in great pain; or, as Byron has put it, "a solitary shriek, the bubbling cry, of some strong swimmer in his agony."

It echoed wildly down the stairs.

"What on earth's that?" exclaimed Wharton, in amazement.

"Blessed if I know!" said Bob Cherry. "Somebody hurt, I suppose."

"The hurtfulness must be terrific."

"There it goes again!"

"Hark!"

The discordant sound rang out again. It was followed by another and another, and then a burst of what seemed like hideous shrieks in chorus.

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"What's that?"

Fellows were gathering from all sides to listen.

"It's in the Remove passage!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Come on," said Nugent determinedly. "Let's see what it is."

They ran up the stairs.
A crowd followed them to investigate. There was another burst of hideous discord, and the sound guided them to the end study in the passage—No. 14.

The door was closed.

From behind the closed door came a sound of groaning, shrieking, and grunting, which astounded the juniors.

"Some animal dying," said Ogilvy.

"It's not Bunter; he's here."

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"Listen!"

"Ow! What a horrible row!"

"The rowfulness is terrific, my worthy chums, but it sounds to me like to the discordant strains of the untuneful musical instrument."

"By Jove!"

Harry Wharton threw open the door of the study.

The discord burst upon them louder than ever, and the juniors crammed their fingers into their ears as they stared into the study.

A youth with a plump figure and chubby cheeks sat in the armchair, with his feet on the fender, and a concertina in his hands.

As the Removites stared, the concertina closed once more, and the discord burst forth anew.

"Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Stop it!"

"My hat! It's the new fellow!"

"Bull!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

John Bull, Junior.

BULL—for the occupant of the study was evidently the new fellow in the Remove—lowered the concertina and stared at the Removites.

He had a round, plump, strong figure, and a round, plump, good-humoured face, and a round bullet head with a crop of early hair on it.

He was not a big boy, by any means, but he looked strong and sturdy—a mass of muscular development from head to foot.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Hallo!" said Wharton. "Who are you?"

"I'm Bull."

"Oh! Any relation to John Bull?" asked Skinner, by way of being funny.

But the new boy nodded, apparently taking the question in all seriousness.

"He's my father," he said.

"Eh?"

"John Bull's my father."

"My only hat!" exclaimed Wharton. "You don't mean to say that your father's name is really John Bull?"

"Yes, I do. What's the matter with it?"

"Great snakes!" ejaculated Fisher T. Fish.

"And what's your name?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"John Bull—John Bull junior."

"Phew!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The new boy's keen, blue eyes sparkled.

"I don't see where the joke comes in!" he exclaimed. "If you see anything comic in my being named John Bull, I'd be glad if you'd point out the joke, and I'll laugh, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I may as well tell you," went on John Bull junior, "that I've heard jokes made about my name before, and I always punch the joker's head. If you bear that in mind, it may save trouble."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner.

Bull looked at him quietly.

"You heard what I said!" he exclaimed.

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!" roared Skinner. "Are you going to punch my head, Johnny Bull? Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner regarded it as an excellent joke. Skinner was a big fellow, almost as big as Bulstrode, and half a head, at least, taller than the new junior. It did not seem likely that Bull would tackle him.

But Skinner had under-estimated the hero of the concertina.

Bull stopped up to him.

"I'll punch your head with great pleasure," he said. "I'm not a quarrelsome chap, but I'm not going to be ragged, I warn you. I mean business."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you cackle again, I'll tap you on the boko."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tap!

Bull's knuckles came upon Skinner's rather prominent nose, and the humorist of the Greyfriars Remove left off laughing suddenly. He staggered back. Bull had said that he would

tap Skinner nose, but the tap was a very hard one, and it brought the water with a rush to Skinner's eyes.

Skinner doubled his fists, and an extremely nasty look came over his face.

"Go for him, Skinny," said Bulstrode.

"Hold on!" said Harry Wharton. "Don't pile on to a new fellow, Skinner!"

Skinner snorted.

"Do you think I'm going to be punched on the nose for nothing?" he yelled.

"Well, you see—"

"I'll wipe up the floor with him!"

"Go ahead," said Bull cheerfully.

Wharton was silent. Bull had certainly been rather aggressive, and he could not expect Skinner to take that tap on the nose peacefully.

Skinner wanted vengeance. He advanced upon the new junior, seeming to tower over him, his big fists sawing the air.

"You worm! I'll smash you!" he exclaimed.

"Smash away!" said Bull.

"I'll—I'll knock you into little pieces!"

"Knock away!"

"Go it, Skinny; knock his cheeky head off!" exclaimed Bulstrode.

"I've a jolly good mind to do it myself."

"You're welcome," said John Bull.

Skinner ran at the new junior.

John Bull junior met him, standing like a rock. Not a fraction of an inch did he budge. Skinner expected him to dodge, but he didn't.

His hands came up quickly, and Skinner's guard was knocked up, and a hard fist—a fist that seemed like iron—caught the Removite on the point of the chin.

Skinner went backwards as if he had been shot.

He crashed on the floor of the study, with a crash that made the chairs dance.

"My hat!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Great snakes! I guess that was a regular sockdolager!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I'm not quarrelling with that chap myself, I guess."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner sat on the floor, holding his chin with one hand, and looking utterly dazed.

"Ow!" he groaned. "Ow!"

"Go it, Skinner!" said Bulstrode encouragingly.

But Skinner shook his head.

"Thanks! I've had enough," he said. "That chap can have best; he can do as he likes, and say what he likes. I've had enough; I don't want to be kicked on the jaw by a horse again. Ow! I know my jaw's broken!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The jawfulness of the esteemed Skinner is terrific."

"Oh, go it!" urged Bulstrode. "Don't let a new bouncer like that knock you out in one round, Skinner, old chap."

Skinner sniffed.

"Go it yourself, if you're so mighty anxious!" he exclaimed.

"I'm backing you up."

"Well, take him on yourself."

"Yes, go it, Bulstrode," said several voices, from the crowd of juniors in the passage and the doorway.

"Take it up for Skinner."

"Let's see you wipe out the new chap."

"Pile on him!"

"Go it, Bulstrode!"

Bulstrode hesitated.

The new boy stood quite firmly on his feet, looking as steady as an oak tree. It was amazing to the juniors that so forceful a blow should have come from that quiet, compact little fellow.

Many of them thought that Skinner ought to go on. But Skinner was wiser in his generation. He knew when he had had enough.

Bulstrode, indeed, was not so very anxious to tackle John Bull junior. But his credit was at stake.

If he refused to tackle him he would indubitably lose very much of his prestige in the Remove. And, after all, he looked like a giant beside the new boy. There could surely be no doubt of the result.

He pushed back his cuffs.

"I think I'd better lick you, Johnny, or you'll be getting swanky," he remarked.

"I don't want a row with you," said Bull, in his slow, deliberate tones; "but if you're looking for trouble I don't mind. Come on!"

"Get ready to be wiped up, then."

"Thanks; I'm all right."

"The wipefulness will be terrific," murmured Hurree Jameet Ram Singh; "but I thoughtfully consider that the honourable and ludicrous Bulstrode will receive the wipeful contact with the esteemed floor."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

IMPORTANT!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Bulstrode!"

"Stand up to him, Johnny!"

Bulstrode advanced upon the new boy.

He did not attack recklessly, as Skinner had done, but he threw all he knew of science into the attack.

But John Bull junior met him calmly, steadily, scientifically, standing as firmly upon his feet as if he were nailed to the study floor.

Bulstrode's blows did not get home easily. His attack was brushed aside, and it was quite clear that John Bull was a good boxer.

But by sheer strength Bulstrode forced the attack home, and his fists came smartly upon the new boy's face, but John Bull junior countered with swiftness and terrific force.

Bang, bang! came left and right, the first on Bulstrode's chest, the second on his chin. Bulstrode staggered back blindly, and John Bull could have followed up his attack easily if he had so chosen. But he did not. He dropped his hands quietly, and stood impassive, while Bulstrode crashed to the floor.

There was a long-drawn ejaculation from the juniors;

"Oh!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Put to the Torture.

JOHN BULL JUNIOR stood with his hands in his pockets, looking calmly and sedately at the fallen Removite. Nothing seemed to shake John Bull junior out of his phlegmatic calm.

Bulstrode lay on the floor for some seconds, too dazed to move.

Then he sat up.

He blinked at Bull, and then at the grinning Removites.

His face was dark with rage, but he showed no intention of renewing the contest with the new fellow.

He staggered to his feet, rubbing his chin.

"Going on?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"No!"

"Oh, come—"

"Mind your own business!" said Bulstrode savagely. "I suppose I can please myself about it, can't I?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, shut up, then!"

"It's all right," said Bull. "I don't want to quarrel with anybody, only I'm not going to be bullied."

"Quite right," said Harry Wharton. "My hat! You are a hard hitter!"

"The Bulls always were hard hitters," said the new junior.

"Look here, I don't bear any malice, and I'm willing to be friends if you are."

Bulstrode and Skinner did not reply. As a matter of fact, they had more reason to bear malice than John Bull had. He had had matters all his own way in that little contest.

They left the study without replying, but with dark scowls upon their faces which boded no good to John Bull junior if they should find an opportunity of paying off the score.

The Removites looked at Bull in wonder and admiration. Bulstrode, from his size and great strength, was the terror of the Remove.

True, there were several fellows who could beat him, with or without gloves, such as Wharton and Mark Linley, and perhaps Tom Brown.

But they were few, and Bulstrode generally managed to avoid quarrelling with them. For a new boy to come into the Remove and knock out Bulstrode in one round, before he had been a couple of hours at Greyfriars, was a surprising thing, and the new boy was an object of general interest at once.

"I suppose those chaps have got their backs up," said Bull, as Skinner and Bulstrode strode away together. "Well, I can't help it. They started it."

"Quite so—"

"The so-fulness is terrific!"

"I say, you fellows," began Billy Bunter. "I think that, under the circumstances, as Bull has put the bully of the Form into his proper place, we ought to stand Bull a feed. I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Ring off!" roared Bob Cherry. "Look here, Bull, here's a word of warning in case Bunter tries to borrow any tin of you. Don't do it—he owes money to every fellow in the Remove, and he never pays."

"Oh, really—"

"Dry up!"

John Bull laughed.

"I shouldn't be likely to lend him money," he said. "I never lend money. It's a mug's game. Look here, you

chaps, I've been amusing myself the last hour or so with my concertina. Would you like a tune?"

"A tune, eh?" said Wharton doubtfully.

"Yes; I'll play for you with pleasure."

"Give us a reel," exclaimed Ogilvy.

"Faith, and a jig's the thing!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. The chums of the Remove, remembering the terrible noises they had already heard from that musical instrument, backed out into the passage, prepared for flight. John Bull took up his concertina, and put his head a little on one side, with a dreamy expression upon his face.

Groo—shriek—crash—grooh!

It was a terrific burst of discord from the concertina.

"My hat!" gasped Ogilvy.

"Oh!"

"Stop!"

"Chuck it!"

But John Bull junior did not stop. The concertina wailed and groaned and crashed on wildly.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "I'm off!"

And he fled, with his fingers in his ears.

His chums followed his example.

In a few moments the study and the passage were cleared, but the concertina still wailed and brayed in the end study.

With only one exception the Removites were gone. That exception was Billy Bunter. Even Fisher T. Fish, who was popularly supposed to have no nerves, could not stand it. But Billy Bunter was hardy.

The fat junior had looked John Bull up and down, and decided that he was a prosperous-looking person, and Bunter was hard up, as usual.

Bunter would have endured worse things than concertinas for the purpose of raising a loan when he was hungry. He was always hungry. But it is doubtful whether there ever was anything worse than Bull's concertina.

Whether he was playing a tune or not it was impossible to tell. If it was a tune, it must have been, as Nugent remarked, something extremely classical, for there did not seem to be a trace of melody in it.

There was nothing but crash and bray, and bray and wail and groan. Billy Bunter held out heroically.

He burst into eloquent speech the moment the din ceased.

"I say, Bull, that's jolly good, you know!"

Crash—bray!

The concertina was re-starting, after the briefest of intervals.

Bunter looked dismayed.

"I—I thought you had finished," he exclaimed.

Bull did not reply.

He was sitting on the corner of the table, see-sawing with the concertina, with his head on one side, and a very dreamy expression upon his face.

He was evidently buried deep in music, and totally lost to his surroundings. He did not even know that Bunter was in the study.

"I—I say—" stammered Bunter.

Bray—crash—crash!

"I want to speak to you, you know. The fact is, I'm expecting a postal-order by this afternoon's post, but I'm rather hard up at the present moment." Bunter shouted to make his voice heard above the din. "If you could lend me ten bob till my postal-order comes, Bull, I should be ever so much obliged."

Crash—bray!

"You see, I'm in temporary difficulties, but only till my postal-order arrives. I'm expecting several, in fact, from some titled friends of mine. If you care to oblige me in this matter, Bull, I'll use my influence in your favour in the school, you know."

Crash—wail—squeak!

"It's jolly well worth while having an influential friend, Bull, I can tell you, in a place like Greyfriars," pursued Billy Bunter. "I'm in with the prefects, and I'm Mr. Quelch's favourite pupil, you know. I've a lot of influence with the Head. What do you say, Bull?"

Crash—s-s-sh!

Bunter wondered if it would offend John Bull and endanger the loan if he stopped his ears with his fingers. He felt that he could not endure that concertina at close range much longer.

"I say, Bull, old man, that's ripping music, you know, but you ought not to tire yourself. What do you say about that little loan?"

Crash—squeak!

"Besides, I'm very chummy with the girls at Cliff House," went on Billy Bunter. "Most of them are rather mashed on me, you know. I can introduce you to Marjorie Hazeldene, and she'll be nice to you as my friend."

Squeak—crash!

"Look here, Bull—"

Crash—crash—crash!

With that final burst of terrific discord the concertina ceased, and Bull laid it on the table with a deep sigh of contentment.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

NEXT
TUESDAY:

"There! That's music!" he exclaimed. "That's music, if you like! Hallo! What are you doing in my study?"

Bunter blinked at him.

"It's jolly well my study, too!" he exclaimed. "But I stayed to speak to you. Didn't you hear me?"

"No," said Bull. "How could I hear you when I was playing?"

Billy Bunter snorted.

It was not pleasant to be told that all his eloquence had been wasted on the desert air. But he returned to the charge.

"Look here, Bull, I was asking you for a small loan—"

"Stuff!" said John Bull, in his direct way. "I never lend money."

"I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"Rats!"

"I shall repay the loan this afternoon—"

"Bosh!"

Bunter glared.

"Look here," he exclaimed wrathfully, "will you lend me a few bob, or won't you? I want a plain 'yes' or 'no.'"

"No!" said Bull.

And he walked out of the study, leaving Billy Bunter speechless.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Dismayed Challengers.

"O H, dear!"

"What's the matter, Marjorie?"

"Nothing."

"Then why 'Oh, dear'?" demanded Miss Clara.

"Oh, dear!"

Marjorie Hazeldene was standing in the school-room, with an open letter in her hand. There were several girls clustered before the big, blazing fire. Marjorie Hazeldene was looking dismayed.

"It's from Harry," she said, holding up the letter.

"Oh!"

"He has accepted the challenge."

"Oh!"

And the girls looked at Marjorie and at one another.

Now, as the Cliff House girls had put their pretty heads together to concoct that challenge to Greyfriars, it might have been supposed that they would expect a reply to it, accepting the challenge.

But, with the sweet inconsistency which belongs to the feminine nature, they did not seem to expect anything of the kind.

It had seemed to the girls that in sending that challenge they had put the Greyfriars juniors in their place, and the acceptance of it came as a surprise.

It really seemed to them that the Greyfriars Remove were popping up like a jack-in-the-box, in an unreasonable and irrepressible way—like the gentleman in the story who was dead, but refused to lie down.

"Cheek!" said Miss Clara.

"Oh, Clara!"

"Nerve!" repeated Miss Clara firmly. "Face!"

"Tat is vat I tink, too, meinself," said Wilhelmina Limburger. "I tink tat is it vat you say—cheeky, ain't it?"

"Horrid!" remarked Grace.

"Rude!"

"Uncalled-for!"

"Rotten!" said Miss Clara, who was boyish in her expressions or nothing. "Beastly! Quite outside!"

"Oh, Clara!"

"Simply outside!" said Miss Clara. "What are we going to do now?"

"Oh, we shall have to meet them, as they are so persistent!" said Marjorie. "Of course, we cannot refuse the acceptance of our own challenge."

"I suppose not."

"It's very inconsiderate of them to place us in an awkward position like this, I think," said Miss Clara.

"I am sure they did not mean to be inconsiderate," said Marjorie. "But, as you say, it is very awkward. But the snow fight will have to take place."

"Of course!"

"We must put on our oldest clothes, and—and shawls over our heads instead of hats, and thick boots on."

"I know I shall look a fright."

"Yes, it's horrid!"

"Why not take no notice of that letter, and treat the whole matter with contempt?" suggested Kate Flynn.

Marjorie laughed.

"Well, we sent the challenge, you know."

"Sure. But we shall have no chance; and if some of the boys are rough we may be hurt, too, you know. I know a girl who had her hat completely spoiled by a snowball."

"Oh, dear!"

"Horrid!"

"I don't see what's to be done," said Marjorie thoughtfully. "We must build the snow fort, and—and hold it, that's all. After all, we challenged them."

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"Well, boys are so—so unreasonable, you know. But I have an idea," said Marjorie. "I suppose you don't know how to build a snow fort?"

There was a general shaking of heads. The Cliff House girls had had very little experience in that line of business.

"Well, I know where we can get help," said Marjorie.

"You remember old Captain Trumper in the village?"

"He is an old dear!" said Miss Clara. "But surely he—"

Marjorie Hazeldene laughed.

"I wasn't thinking of him, but of his son. He belongs to Courtfield County Council School, you know, and I know him very well. You remember he came here for the deportment lessons with Miss Primrose. Well, he and his friends would help us build the snow fort, and, of course, they know about that kind of thing. And, as they are always fighting with Greyfriars, they would like to help us, I think."

"Good egg!" said Miss Clara.

"Oh, Clara!"

"Ripping wheeze, then!"

"But where can you see Trumper?" asked Grace.

"I saw him this morning. He is helping his father mend a boat between school hours, and I know where to find him," said Marjorie. "Let's go and ask him now. There's time before dinner."

"Jolly good!"

And Marjorie and Clara put on their hats and walked out of Cliff House.

The path along the sands led them to the village of Pegg. On the left the sea was rolling on the rocks with a deep, sullen boom. But the girls had no eyes for the sea just then. They were too busy thinking about the impending conflict with Greyfriars, and how it was to turn out.

The clinking of a hammer came from the direction of Captain Trumper's little cottage facing the sea.

Outside the house a boat was upturned upon trestles, and Trumper, of Courtfield, was engaged at work upon it. The lad was in his shirt-sleeves, and working away patiently and steadily, to get his allotted task finished before it was time to return to Courtfield for afternoon lessons.

He looked up with a smile as the girls came up. He could not raise his cap, as it was lying on the sand.

"Are you very busy?" asked Miss Clara. "We want to speak to you."

Trumper grinned.

"Yes, I'm busy; but I can talk while I work," he said.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"You can help us," said Marjorie.

"Anything I can do, Miss Hazeldene, I'll be glad to do," said Trumper.

Trumper liked Marjorie very much. There was never anything in her manner to hint that she was conscious of the fact that he was a Council School boy, while she belonged to an expensive boarding-school.

Marjorie explained the circumstances of the challenge to Greyfriars.

Trumper grinned as he listened.

He did not seem to see very clearly that the Greyfriars fellows had been so very unreasonable; but he was evidently willing, and even eager, to help the Cliff House girls in their campaign.

"You'll help us?" Marjorie asked.

"What-ho!" said Trumper.

"It's easy as anything. I'll get a dozen of the fellows, and we'll pile up a snow fort in any place you like. We can begin it to-day if you choose; it's certain not to thaw before Saturday, and we can take plenty of time about it."

"Jolly good!" declared Miss Clara.

"That is very kind of you, Trumper."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

"Oh, we're jolly glad to get one up against Greyfriars, and very glad to do you a turn, Miss Hazeldene! We'll have the snow fort up all right!" said Trumper. "I wish we could be inside it, and help you keep out the Greyfriars chaps!"

"I wish you could," said Marjorie, laughing. "But that would be impossible."

"But you won't have any chance, Miss Hazeldene."

"We shall try."

"You might get hurt."

"We shall have to risk that."

Trumper wrinkled his brows thoughtfully. A curious gleam had come into his eyes. His grin widened.

"My word!" he ejaculated. "I've thought of an idea. Miss Hazeldene. I believe we could help you to lick the Greyfriars chaps!"

"How?" asked Marjorie eagerly.

Trumper laid down his hammer and laughed.

"It's a ripping idea!" he exclaimed. "It's splendid! And the fellows will all join in it like anything. Look here, why shouldn't we help you hold the fort? The Greyfriars fellows won't know any difference, if—"

"If what?"

"If we're dressed as girls!"

Marjorie and Clara looked at one another quickly, and then burst into a simultaneous laugh.

"Ripping!" exclaimed Miss Clara.

"But would it be quite fair?" said Marjorie thoughtfully.

"Fair as anything!" said Trumper. "You can have any garrison you choose; and so long as they look like girls it's all right. And I'll guarantee to hold the fort for you as long as you like against the Greyfriars chaps."

"If—if it could be managed—"

"Of course it could!"

"And you think the others will help you?"

"I am sure of it," said Trumper, with conviction. "You see, they'll only see our heads and shoulders over the snow walls, and we can be wearing shawls and bonnets—or something of that sort. It's as easy as anything; and as they'll never get inside the fort it can't come out."

"Then——" said Marjorie slowly, her eyes dancing

"Yes?"

"I think we'll accept your help."

"Hurrah!"

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Not to be Done.

JOHN BULL JUNIOR had caused some excitement in the Greyfriars Remove. He had certainly made himself rather conspicuous on his first day at the school. The fellow who had licked Bulstrode with scarcely an effort, and without turning a hair, was entitled to respect. And John Bull junior did not assume any airs for having done that either. He went on his way with phlegmatic calmness, and appeared to be quite unconcerned about his victory; though it would have been enough to make some of the fellows in the Remove swank for weeks.

But it was evident that John Bull was a solid character, and not to be moved easily by external influences. He stood firmly upon his own feet, and it is probable that if he had been defeated, instead of victorious, in that tussle, he would not have allowed the result to disturb him very much.

John Bull was a good boxer and a hard hitter, but he was a good-tempered fellow, too. It was also clear that he was well provided with pocket-money. Upon the whole, the fellows were inclined to regard him as an acquisition. Certainly Bulstrode had been much more subdued in manner since that little encounter in No. 14 Study, and the small boys felt much relieved and comforted thereby.

It was naturally expected that Bulstrode would show animosity towards the fellow who had knocked him out so easily; and for some time, indeed, he did. But later in

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"You laughed!" exclaimed Marjorie, turning pink. "Then we shall challenge you to a snow fight, and it shall be a fight to a finish!" "Hear, hear!" said Clara. (See page 8.)

the day he seemed to have recovered from the effects of the licking. At the dinner-table he asked Bull if he might pass him the salt, and passed him several things with great politeness.

Bulstrode never troubled himself to be very polite at any time, and that he should be so courteous to the fellow who had knocked him out was a thing so astonishing that all who beheld it stared.

Bulstrode seemed unconscious of the stares.

He was polite to Bull all through dinner, and when the boys came out of the dining-room afterwards, he stopped to speak to Bull.

"Sorry about what happened this morning, Bull," he said, in a very frank way. "I had no business to start on you like that, I know."

Bull nodded calmly.

"Quite right," he agreed. "You were in the wrong."

Bulstrode coughed a little.

"Exactly," he assented. "Well, I'm sorry."

"That's all right," said Bull. "You can't say more than that. I'm willing to be friends, as I said before. There's my fist."

He held out his hand.

Bulstrode took it, and gave it a shake with great heartiness. The fellows who saw him simply gasped.

"My only hat!" said Bob Cherry.

"There's Bulstrode

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

shaking hands with Bull! The world will come to an end next."

"Some game on," said Nugent.

"Bulstrode is up to something," said Harry Wharton, with a frown. "He certainly hasn't forgiven Bull for knocking him out. Bulstrode wouldn't get over a thing like that in a hurry. But Bull can take care of himself, I fancy. He doesn't look like a chap to be taken in easily."

"Rather not!" said Nugent, laughing. "Bulstrode will find him a very hard nut to crack, I think."

The chums of the Remove went out, and forgot about the matter. If Bulstrode was trying to make up to the new fellow, it did not trouble them.

Bulstrode watched them go out of the corner of his eye. He had felt their eyes upon him.

"Look here, Bull," he remarked, "you're a jolly good boxer."

John Bull nodded.

"I used to pride myself on it a bit," said Bulstrode, "but I admit that you can go one better, easily."

"Oh, not at all!" said Bull.

"Yes, you can. Where did you learn?"

"Oh, I've always boxed," said Bull carelessly. "I'm pretty strong, too."

"By Jove, you are!" said Bulstrode. "You saw that fellow who went out, just now—Harry Wharton?"

"Yes."

"What do you think of him?"

"Seems a very decent chap."

Bulstrode bit his lip.

"Bit of a swanker, don't you think?" he asked.

"I haven't noticed it."

"Well, he is; the fellows all think that he puts on a lot of side, and he's not an easy chap to get on with, either. He's bad-tempered and suspicious."

John Bull looked Bulstrode directly in the face.

"You needn't talk like that to me," he said. "I don't want to hear a fellow run down behind his back."

Bulstrode flushed.

"I didn't mean that—" he began.

"Well, that's what you were doing."

"I mean—"

"Oh, keep off the subject! I tell you I don't like it."

Bulstrode's teeth came hard together. He would have given a great deal to lay hands upon the new junior just then.

But he remembered that terrible knock-down blow in the study, and he restrained himself.

John Bull was turning away.

"Hold on!" said Bulstrode.

"Well, what is it?"

"I was only speaking for your own good," said Bulstrode, with unwonted civility. "What I mean is, I wanted to put you up to some things, as you're a new boy, and you don't know the ropes here yet."

"I'm much obliged to you."

"My idea is that you'll come into contact with Wharton, and there'll be trouble," said Bulstrode. "I was putting you on your guard."

"Oh, that's all right!"

"He will try to lord it over you, as he does over the rest of the Form, because he's a first-class boxer," said Bulstrode. "I was wondering whether you could handle him."

"I don't want to quarrel with him," said Bull.

"But you may have to; what then?"

"Then I fancy I shall be able to take care of myself. But look here, Bulstrode, if that's your name, you're not going to set me against Wharton, and bring about a row. It looks to me as if that's your game."

Bulstrode turned scarlet. There was a directness about John Bull junior that was decidedly disconcerting.

"Look here!" he exclaimed fiercely.

Bull faced him, with his hands in his pockets.

"Well?" he said.

"I don't want any of your confounded cheek," said Bulstrode savagely. "If I start on you again, you mayn't come off so well next time."

Bull shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want a row," he said, "but I'm ready if you are, any time. Come into the study and try it over again."

Bulstrode did not accept that invitation. He muttered something, and turned angrily away.

John Bull, with a slight grin, went out into the quadrangle, still with his hands in his pockets. That was his favourite attitude, and except when he was using his hands, they generally reposed in his pockets. He sauntered out into the snowy quad., with a calm and cheerful expression upon his face.

Whiz!

Squash!

A snowball flew through the air, and smashed on John Bull junior's nose.

He staggered, and as he did so several more snowballs crashed upon his chest and face, and he rolled over in the snow.

He scrambled up furiously.

"Who chucked those snowballs?" he roared.

There was a laugh and a yell.

"Back up, Remove!"

"Go it, Fourth!"

The Close seemed to be full of figures trampling through the snow, in scarves and coats, and snowballs whizzed in all directions through the air. Another and another caught John Bull, and he staggered and fell again. At last a strong hand dragged him up, and he stared dazedly at Harry Wharton.

"Come on!" exclaimed Wharton cheerily.

"Eh? What?"

"We're fighting the Upper Fourth. You're on our side. Come on!"

"Oh, I see!"

"This way! Back up!"

John Bull grinned.

"Right-ho!" he exclaimed.

And he clutched up handfuls of snow, and joined in the battle on the side of the Remove.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Snowballed

THE snow was falling in thick flakes, and there was a cloak of it upon the ground, plenty for snowballs, and the juniors were enjoying themselves thoroughly. Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth, were snowballing the Remove, and getting back quite as good as they sent. John Bull had walked into the middle of the combat, and received the fire from both sides. But it did not disturb him, and he fell into the ranks with great readiness. In a minute or less he was snowballing away merrily.

The Upper Fourth had gained an advantage, driving the Remove back as far as the School House; but here the Lower Fourth rallied, and their enemies receded in turn.

The air was thick with whizzing snowballs.

The fight was waxing fast and furious, when Loder, the prefect, came out of the gym., and walked across towards the School House.

Loder's face showed that he was in a bad temper. Loder had troubles on his mind. He had broken bounds the previous night to visit the Cross Keys in Friar-dale village, and had not got back to bed till one o'clock, with the natural result that he had not had enough sleep, and woke in the morning feeling peevish and generally "rotten." He had also drunk something overnight stronger than tea, and the fumes of it were not quite gone out of his head. He felt rotten, tired, and bleary that day, and he had the additional comfort of owing several pounds he could not pay. It was not a time for any unlucky junior to cross his path.

Loder scowled at the sight of the snow fight.

He was in danger of catching a stray ball as he crossed the Close; but any good-natured fellow would have risked it, rather than interfere with harmless fun. But Loder was glad of an excuse to be down upon somebody.

He stopped, and glared at the juniors.

"Stop that!" he roared.

They were too busy to hear him. Loder advanced towards them and shouted out the order again.

"Stop that snowballing! It's not safe for anybody to come out into the Close. Stop it at once, I say!"

The juniors heard him then.

But they did not heed. Loder was a prefect, and technically entitled to obedience. But authority is only respected, as a rule, when it is used justly. The great Nelson put his telescope to his blind eye when he did not wish to see a signal, and the juniors of Greyfriars turned a deaf ear to Loder.

They might all have been stone deaf, to judge by the amount of attention they paid to the prefect.

The snowballs flew more busily than ever.

Loder's hard face grew red with rage. He ran towards the juniors, and a snowball—accidentally, or, perhaps, not accidentally—caught him on the nose. He gasped as the snow smashed in his face, and the fragments flew in all directions.

"Oh! Ow!"

The juniors who saw the mishap chuckled. Nobody seemed to know who had thrown the snowball, but Loder knew who had received it.

"Stop that snowballing!" he roared.

He received no reply, and no obedience. The missiles flew thickly through the air, and Loder could not come nearer, or even remain where he was, without great danger of coming under fire.

But Loder's temper was at boiling-point now.

He ran into the thick of the snowballs, waving his hands and shouting furiously at the juniors.

"Stop at once! Stop, I say!"

Some of the more timid of the fellows left off.

But the majority of them turned a deaf ear.

"Blessed cheek!" exclaimed Wharton. "Don't take any notice! If he comes too near, let him have the snowballs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You catch on, Temple?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Stop, I say! I'll—I'll—ow!—oooh!"

A snowball from Micky Desmond caught Loder in his open mouth, and effectually stopped his utterance.

He staggered back, gasping and spluttering.

It was the signal to the rest.

Fourth-Formers and Lower Fourth turned their combined fire upon the interfering prefect, instead of upon each other, and a perfect hail of snowballs came crashing and smashing on Loder.

There were more than fifty fellows snowballing in all, and when they all started upon Loder, the fire was thick and fast.

The prefect tried to stand against it, shouting to the juniors to leave off. But the snowballs crashed into his face in clouds, and broke upon his chest and legs in a rain, and he could not make his voice heard. His mouth, his nose, his

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eyes, were full of snow, while his ears and his neck were thick with it.

He staggered to and fro as if intoxicated, under the ceaseless attack of the snowballs.

The juniors were laughing loudly now.

They had already gone far enough to be punished, in snowballing a prefect at all; and, as Bob Cherry sagely remarked, now they had done it, they might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb.

If punishment was to come, they might as well take it out of Loder in advance. And they did!

Crash, crash, crash, smash! went the merry snowballs, and Loder's face, and head, and body and legs, received the incessant fire.

He was bewildered, and twice he went down into the snow, and scrambled blindly up again.

A few minutes of it were enough for him, and then, throwing authority and dignity to the winds, he broke into a run for the School House.

He was so blinded by the snowballs breaking in his face that he ran in the wrong direction several times, and zigzagged across the Close instead of making straight for the house.

The juniors only needed to see the prefect running, to wire in with a hearty good will, and keep him on the run.

Behind him Upper Fourth and Remove joined gaily, with inexhaustible snowballs, to chase the prefect, and give him a warm run to the house.

Loder plunged and staggered and scrambled on, wildly and blindly, while snowballs broke on his head and his neck and his back.

He plunged forward on his hands and knees several times, but got up again, and at last, covered with powdery snow, dazed and furious, he gained the shelter of the School House.

He staggered in at the open doorway. The juniors were so excited that they would have continued to snowball him there, had not an awe-inspiring figure appeared in sight. It was that of Dr. Locke, who had seen the whole occurrence from his study windows, unknown to any of the actors in the scene.

"Loder!" exclaimed the Head.

Loder, who had turned on the doorstep, and was about to break into a torrent of abuse, directed towards the juniors, restrained himself in time.

He gasped as he turned to the Head.

"You see how they have treated me, sir—me, a prefect!" he panted.

The Head coughed.

"Why did you interfere with the juniors, Loder?" he asked.

"I was restoring order, sir."

"There is no harm in a game at snowballs, and the weather prevents football at the present moment," said the Head quietly. "You should be careful not to interfere unnecessarily, Loder."

The prefect almost choked with rage. If he had said the things he felt inclined to say then, the Head of Greyfriars would have been very much surprised.

"Yes, sir!" gasped Loder.

"However, the juniors must be punished for snowballing a prefect. Discipline must be maintained," said the Head. "You had better go and change your clothes, Loder. You may leave this matter in my hands—entirely in my hands."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

The prefect almost staggered away. Dr. Locke looked out into the Close. Some of the juniors had scattered, but a great many of them stood their ground. They knew that the Head must have recognised them as Loder's assailants, and, in any case, the prefect would not have hesitated to give their names.

"My boys!" said the Head, rubbing his chin, "this—er—this will not do. I cannot approve of your snowballing a prefect, as if he were a—junior. You are quite—er—wrong to do so. Every boy who has taken part in this regrettable affair will—er—be detained for—er—ten minutes after lessons this afternoon, in the—er—house. Please be more careful in the future."

And the Head walked in.

The juniors had listened in respectful silence, but as soon as the Head was gone, they grinned. The punishment was formal only. To have to remain indoors for ten minutes after lessons was no hardship.

"Good old boy!" said Harry Wharton. "He knows that Loder was in the wrong, though it wouldn't do to let down a prefect before us. Of course, he doesn't know that we see all that as well as he does. We're never supposed to see anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've got off pretty cheaply, I think!" grinned Temple.

"Oh, rather," said Dabney.

"It was jolly fun, anyway," said Bob Cherry. "We don't have the treat of chasing a prefect across the Close with snowballs every day. Ha, ha, ha!"

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

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ONE
PENNY.

"By the way, who won that snowballing scrap?" asked Fry.

"Remove," said Wharton, at once.

"Fourth, you mean."

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"The boshfulness is terrific."

"Look here—"

"Oh, go home!"

"I tell you—"

"My worthy chums, pray keep the esteemed peacefulness, or the respected and ludicrous Head may descend upon us punishfully. Let it remain in undecidedness who has won the fight, as we can agree that the honourable and disgusting Loder has lost it."

"Ha, ha, ha! Good old Inky!"

"Inky's right."

And the Remove and the Fourth Form cheerfully agreed that it did not matter who had won, as the bullying prefect had certainly lost.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Fish Looks In.

"JOLLY good place here," said Trumper.

"All thereen, dear boy!"

"Then we'll build it here."

"Good!"

The early winter evening had set in, but there was a clear, gleaming starlight, and the moon was rising over the sea. Trumper & Co., the chums of Courtfield County Council School, had stopped in the lane that ran down to the village of Pegg, in the bay.

Here a slope led up from the side of the lane, to the first acclivity of the Black Pike—a hill no longer black, but looming spectre-like in its white garb of snow, spotless in the gleam of the stars.

Snow was banked up thickly on the slope, and piled up behind the hedge, and heaped in masses beside the road, where the path had been cleared.

Trumper & Co. were satisfied with the spot. Trumper's comrades had simply jumped at the idea of building the snow fort and helping the Cliff House girls to hold it against the juniors of Greyfriars.

Trumper and Grahame and Solly Lazarus and Porter and Barney O'Neil and Bertie Ford, had come down together, three of them carrying light spades for the work. Some of the lads were in the habit of turning an honest penny in their spare time by shovelling away snow from garden paths and doorways, and so they were somewhat accustomed to the work they had to do now.

Trumper had selected a very suitable spot for the fort. It was easy of access from Cliff House. Marjorie had promised to come next day, and see what progress they had made.

Trumper marked out the space the fort was to occupy, and the snow was cleared from the area, and banked up in square blocks to make the foundations of the wall.

Then the building of the fort was commenced.

Snow was cut and beaten into hard squares, and these were piled up steadily, and jammed close together, forming a wall almost as hard as masonry.

The work was hard enough, and it kept the Courtfield fellows warm, as they laboured away with the snow bricks.

After an hour of steady work a breastwork of snow to the height of three feet had risen round the growing fort.

Then Trumper slackened down.

"Nuff's as good as a feast," he remarked. "Plenty of time to finish it to-morrow."

"Quite tho," assented Solly Lazarus, leaning on his spade. "We've put about five bob's worth of work into it already, you know."

Trumper snorted.

"Just like you to look at it in that way!" he exclaimed.

Solly grinned. He had a way of reckoning up all matters from a financial standpoint, and he did not mind jokes on the subject.

"Anyway, it will keep the Greyfriars chaps out when it's finished," Grahame remarked.

"Quite tho!"

"Especially with us inside, pelting the bounders with snowballs!" chuckled Porter.

And the Courtfield fellows laughed in chorus.

The joke that was to be played upon the chums of Greyfriars just appealed to their sense of humour. The surprise of the Grey Friars would probably be great at the force with which snowballs would be hurled by the supposed girls.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Porter suddenly. "Look out!"

"What is it?"

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums
of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Greyfriars cads!"

"Phew!"

Porter was pointing over the hedge to the lane.

A cap had come into view, and the Courtfield fellows knew the Greyfriars caps well enough.

"Cover!" muttered Trumper.

"Faith, and—"

"Cover, O'Neil, you ass! Don't let him see us. We don't want them to know the fort's here till they find it on Saturday."

"Faith, I—"

Trumper and Grahame dragged the Irish lad down behind the snow walls. The walls were high enough to hide the lads, crouching.

"Faith, I only wanted to say—"

"Shut up!"

"But sure—"

"He'll hear you!"

"But—"

Porter jammed a mouthful of snow into O'Neil's mouth to keep him quiet.

Unfortunately, it had the opposite effect.

Barney was quiet for a moment, while he was spluttering the snow out, and then he gave a gasp that could be heard on the other side of the road.

"Groo-o-o-oop!"

"Oh, you ass!" muttered Trumper. "He'll look here now."

"Faith, I—"

"Shut up, you chump!"

But the cap passing the hedge in the lane had stopped, and the front of it was turned towards the field.

The sounds had evidently caught the ears of the passing youth.

There was a muttered exclamation, and then the cap was seen coming through the gap in the hedge from the road.

Trumper snapped his teeth.

All the hillside was perfectly clear in the moonlight, and the moment the stranger passed the gap in the hedge he was certain to see the snow fort.

"Faith, and give him a snowball, and he may buzz off without looking, entirely!" Barney O'Neil gasped. "That's what I was going to say, yo omadhauns."

"Ass!"

"Faith, you spalpeen, I—"

"Here he is! It's the Yank!"

The wiry figure of Fisher T. Fish came into view in the early moonlight. Fish had been to the village of Pegg on an errand for a master, and was returning to Greyfriars. But Fisher T. Fish was always inquisitive. He was curious now, and he stared at the half-made walls of the snow-fort in astonishment.

The Courtfield fellows lay very low, even Barney O'Neil being quiet now.

They knew that if the American saw them there, he would tell what he had seen in the Remove at Greyfriars; and it was quite possible that Harry Wharton would "tumble" to the intended jape.

The Courtfielders lay low.

"Great snakes!" the American junior exclaimed aloud. "I guess this beats the deck! Who's building a snow-fort here, I want to know?"

He came up the acclivity. The Courtfielders heard his boots in the snow, and Trumper grunted. The American evidently meant to look inside the snow walls.

"Faith, and he'll see us now," muttered O'Neil.

"All your fault," grunted Trumper.

"Sure, I—"

"Shut up!"

"Get some snowballs ready, and let him have something for his blessed inquisitiveness, anyway," whispered Grahame. "All there!"

The Courtfield fellows, grinning softly, grasped handfuls of snow.

They waited for the American to come through the narrow opening left in the snow wall of the fort.

Fisher T. Fish came on unobtrusively.

It was Fisher T. Fish's boast that he had his eye-teeth cut, and that he could never be taken in, and that he was never, under any circumstances, "left."

But he was destined to get "left" this time, with a vengeance.

The moment he stepped into the snow-fort, before he could perceive the half dozen forms crouching in the snow, six arms went up, and six snowballs flew at the same moment.

Smas-s-s-sh!

Right into the American's face the snowballs crashed, and Fisher T. Fish reeled back with a wild yell of alarm.

"Go for him!" roared Trumper, leaping to his feet.

The Courtfielders sprang up, and rushed at the American junior of Greyfriars.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

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Before Fisher T. Fish had recovered his balance he was sent rolling down the slope to the hedge, and he crashed into it, bringing down a thick shower of snow upon himself.

"M-m-m-my hat!" stuttered Fish. "What—"

Smash, smash, smash! came the snowballs.

The American staggered out into the lane under a shower of smashing missiles. There he broke into a wild run in the direction of Greyfriars.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Trumper & Co. "Jevver get left?"

Fisher T. Fish did not stop to reply to that question.

He kept on at top speed, and vanished in the direction of the school, and the last snowballs hurled after him fell short. The Courtfield fellows chuckled cheerfully as they took their homeward way.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Kind Regards from Greyfriars.

"MY hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"What's the matter?"

The juniors gathered round with exclamations of surprise as Fisher T. Fish came breathlessly into the School House.

The American certainly presented a startling sight.

His cap was gone, he was smothered in snow and wet from head to foot, his collar was full of snow, and his ruffled hair streaming with wet.

He was so breathless that he could only gasp.

"What on earth have you been doing?" demanded Bulstrode. "Rolling down in a snow-drift?"

"Oh!" gasped Fish.

"What's happened, old chap?"

"The Courtfield cads!" gasped the American at last.

The juniors laughed.

"Oh, you've met Trumper & Co., have you?" said Nugent.

"Yes. I've got some news for you."

"Go ahead!"

"They're building a snow-fort in Pegg Lane, on the hill-side," said Fish. "I dropped on them there, and they gave me a warm time. I had to run. If there had been only three or four I'd have licked them—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But there were nearly a dozen, so I had to bolt. I guess it would be a good dodge to go out after tea and yank the fort down. Hey?"

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Jolly good dodge!" he exclaimed. "We can get a pass from Wingate for some of us to go out after gates."

"The good-dodgefulness is terrific!"

And Harry Wharton lost no time in asking the captain of Greyfriars for a pass out of gates. Wingate, who was having tea in his study with Courtney, put down his teacup and looked at the junior.

"What do you want the pass for?" he demanded.

"To go out, Wingate."

The Greyfriars captain laughed.

"Yes, I know that. But what do you want to go out for, and how many of them?"

"Well, half a dozen would do."

"You must tell me what half a dozen of you want to go out for," said Wingate. "I suppose it's some prank—eh?"

"Oh, no! In fact, we're—we're going to back up the cause of law and order, really," said Wharton cautiously.

Wingate and Courtney burst into a laugh.

"Yes, I can believe that—of the Remove," said Wingate. "Now, tell me what's on, or you can get out of the study."

"Well, as a matter of fact, the Courtfield fellows are putting up a snow-fort alongside Pegg Lane," said Wharton frankly. "I suppose they mean to hold it and snowball people passing—us among others. We thought of yanking it down this evening, so that they'd have all the building to do over again to-morrow."

The Greyfriars captain could not help grinning.

"I can't give you a pass to go out and pick a row with the Courtfield fellows," he said thoughtfully.

"But there won't be a row," said Wharton eagerly. "The Courtfield fellows must have been gone home hours ago. We just want to yank down the fort, that's all."

"All right; I think I can allow that, especially as you're taking all this trouble in the cause of law and order," said Wingate, with a twinkle in his eyes.

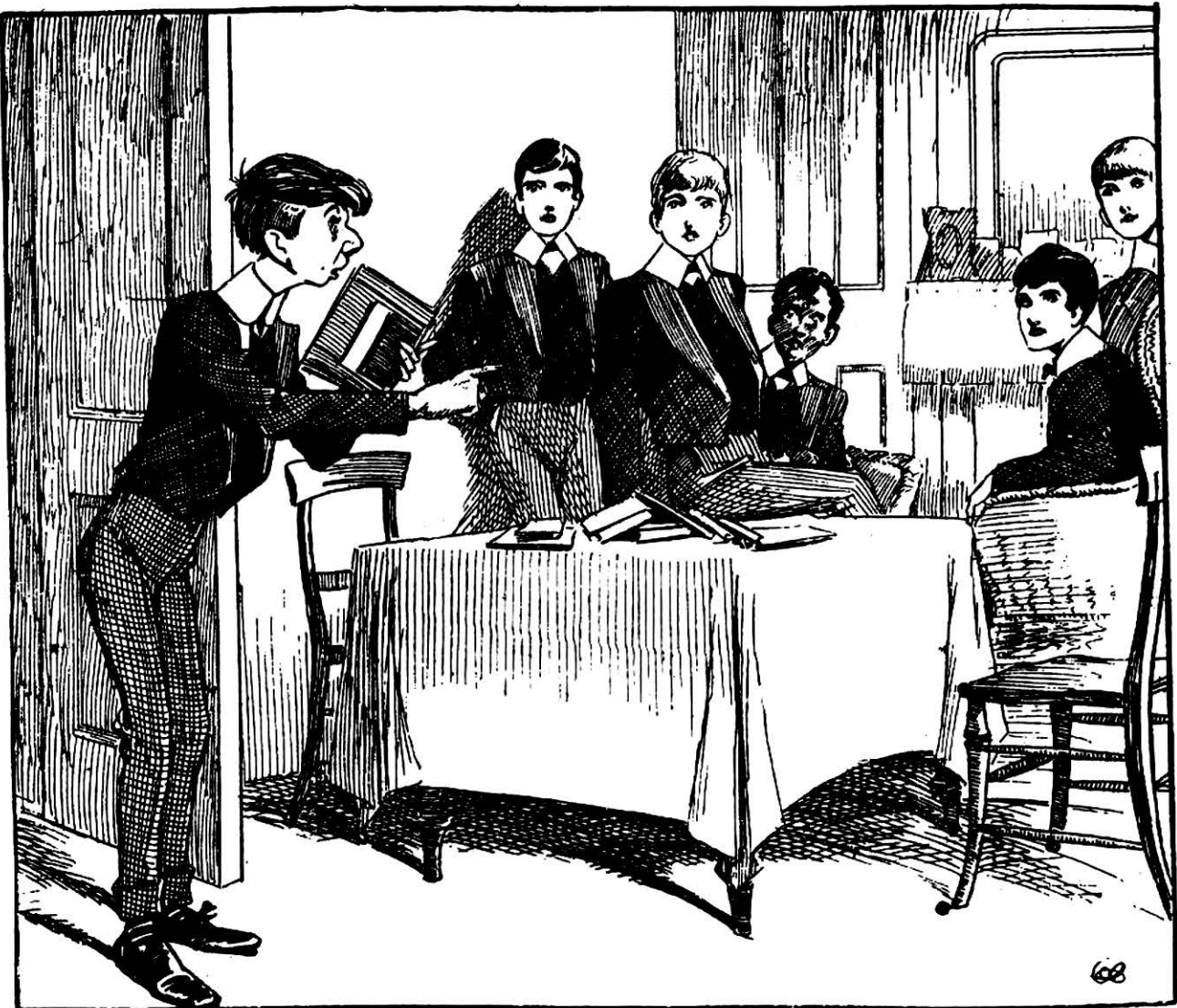
And he wrote out the pass for six.

Harry Wharton carried it away in triumph. His chums gathered round him eagerly in the passage.

"Got it?" demanded Bob Cherry tersely.

Wharton held the pass up to view.

"Bravo!"



"Wharton, my dear friend," said Alonzo solemnly, "be warned in time. No good can come of yielding to temptations and going on the downward path!"

"The—the what?" gasped Wharton. (See page 6.)

"Good!"

"Pass for six," said Nugent thoughtfully. "Whom are you going to take?"

"You and Bob, Inky and Tom Brown and Linley."

"Right-ho!"

And a little later the chums of the Remove, well wrapped up against the cold in scarf and overcoats, left the gates of Greyfriars. They left Gosling, the porter, shaking his head after them in a dubious sort of way. Gosling felt that there was mischief afoot; but as the juniors had a pass signed by the captain of the school, the porter could not stop them.

Harry Wharton & Co. lost no time in reaching the spot Fisher T. Fish had described to them.

The moon was sailing high above the great Pike now, and a flood of silver light glimmered back from the snow-covered fields.

The snow walls stood up to view in the moonlight, as the juniors came through the gap in the hedge. There was no sign of the Courtfield fellows. Even their footprints in the snow had been obliterated by a fresh fall.

An unbroken sheet of white surrounded the snow-fort on the slope of the Black Pike.

It was soon disturbed by the tramping boots of the Greyfriars juniors.

Harry Wharton & Co. entered the unfinished fort, and looked round them with some admiration. The place had been very well planned, and when it was finished would undoubtedly be a strong fortification. It did not occur to

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

NEXT
TUESDAY:

the juniors that the Courtfielders were building the fort for Marjorie & Co. They did not know, of course, that Marjorie had asked Trumper for help.

"Well, they're putting it up very well," said Bob Cherry.

"Jolly strong, anyway."

"The strongfulness is terrific!"

"We'll give 'em something to cure all that," grinned Bob Cherry. "Here goes! Lay hold, and we'll soon have their blessed fort over."

"Go it, ye cripples!"

The juniors had brought a couple of spades. They set to work, and the snow walls of the budding fortification were demolished much faster than they had been built.

The juniors worked hard, chuckling the while. The only drawback to the jape was that they would not see the faces of the Courtfielders when they came the next day and found that their snow-fort had ceased to exist.

The snow had now ceased to fall, and the frost was hard. It was bitterly cold, but the Greyfriars chums were warm enough as they worked.

The work was done at last, and they stepped back into the road, well satisfied with the result of their labours.

"I should like to hear Trumper talk, when he sees it," grinned Tom Brown.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The honourable and ludicrous Trumper's talkfulness will probably be terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Wharton was looking thoughtfully at the wreck of the fort.

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"Come on, Harry," said Bob. "May as well get in. Cold here."

"I was just thinking—"

"You can do the thinking at Greyfriars, over some roast chestnuts," said Bob Cherry, with the air of one making a really useful suggestion.

"Ass! I was thinking that we might leave a message for Trumper, so that he'll know who he's indebted to. We don't want him to feel grateful to the wrong party."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If there's no more snow a message written there would be all right," said Harry thoughtfully. "Anyway, I'll risk it."

"I think the frost will hold."

Harry Wharton entered the wrecked fort again. In the level sheet of snow that covered the interior it was easy to trace a message. With sweeps of the shovel he cut out huge letters in the snow, and in a few minutes had completed the message to Courtfield. It ran, in great, square letters engraved in the snow:

"WITH KIND REGARDS FROM GREYFRIARS!"

Then, chuckling, the Greyfriars juniors tramped off. They grinned over that message to Courtfield and the rest of the Remove grinned when they heard it; but, as Nugent said, it would have been worth a week's pocket-money to see Trumper's face when he read it.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Fisher T. Fish Catches It.

MARJORIE HAZELDENE came out of the gateway of Cliff House in the bright, cold, winter sunlight. There was a hard frost on the fields, and there had been no more snow since the fall of the previous evening.

Trumper and Solly Lazarus were waiting outside. They took off their caps to the Cliff House girls.

"Coming to see how the snow fort's getting on?" asked Trumper.

Marjorie nodded.

"Yes; we shall be glad to see it."

"Oh, rather!" said Miss Clara.

"Come on, then. I think you'll say it's all right," said Trumper, as they went down the lane. "We got it about half done last evening, and we'll finish it after school this evening."

"Thank you so much!"

"Not at all. It's fun to us, ain't it, Solly?"

"Quite tho," said Solly Lazarus. "All there, Mith Hazeldene."

"It will be more fun still to be inside the fort when the Greyfriars bounders come along to-morrow," grinned Trumper. "There will be a surprise in store for them."

There was a surprise in store for Trumper now, as a matter of fact.

They reached the gap in the hedge, and Trumper was the first to step through, and as he did so he paused, and uttered a sharp ejaculation.

"My word!"

"What's the matter, dear boy?"

"The fort!"

"Eh!"

"It's gone!"

"What?" yelled Solly.

He bounded through the hedge, and then he, too, stopped dead.

Marjorie and Clara followed them, and looked at the bumpy masses of snow, which were all that remained of the snow fort, in consternation.

"Dear me!" said Marjorie. "Has it been pulled down?"

"My hat!" said Clara. "It looks like it."

She pointed to the inscription on the level snow in the space that had been enclosed by the demolished walls.

The girls read the message from Greyfriars, and could not help laughing. Trumper and Solly only glared at it. The letters were as clear in the deep snow as when Wharton had cut them with the spade the previous night.

"WITH KIND REGARDS FROM GREYFRIARS!"

"My word!" murmured Trumper.

"My only Uncle Tham!"

"Wharton, of course!"

"Quite tho."

Trumper looked very pink as he looked towards the smiling girls.

"I'm sorry," he said. "One of the Greyfriars rotters saw us putting up the fort last evening, and I suppose they came out late and yanked the thing down."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

IMPORTANT!

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"Yeth, rather!"

Marjorie smiled sweetly.

"Never mind; it cannot be helped," she said.

"The bounders!" muttered Clara.

"Oh, Clara!"

"The rotters!" repeated Clara firmly.

"Never mind; we'll have it up again this evening," said Trumper. "Only, if they pull it down again after dark—H'm!"

"I'll speak to Wharton about it," said Miss Clara.

"Yes, indeed!" said Marjorie. "I suppose they didn't know the fort was for us, but I shall tell them so, and then they will let it alone."

"Good!" said Trumper. "We'll have the blessed thing up again this evening, then."

"Yeth, rather!"

The Cliff House girls walked on towards Greyfriars. Trumper and Solly Lazarus looked at one another with rueful fates.

"We've been done, Solly."

"Yeth, rather!"

"Never mind; we'll make them sit up for it on Saturday."

"All there!" grinned Solly.

Marjorie and Clara walked to Greyfriars, and looked into the Close. In a moment an active figure came speeding towards them. It was Harry Wharton. He stopped, with a flushed face, and raised his cap.

"Do come in!" he exclaimed. "So glad to see you!"

Marjorie and Clara bowed stiffly—they were very much upon their dignity.

"No, I don't think we've time to come in," said Miss Clara, with great stateliness. "We have to get back to dinner."

"I guess we'd stand you a dinner," said Fisher T. Fish, coming up.

"Thank you very much, but we must return," said Marjorie.

"You had my letter?" Wharton remarked.

"Yes."

"What time to-morrow—no alteration?"

"Certainly not."

"Good! We'll be there."

"But you must let our fort alone," said Miss Clara.

Wharton stared.

"Your fort?" he said.

"Yes; our snow fort."

"Of course we shall let it alone," said Harry. "Have you started building it yet, Marjorie?"

"It was started yesterday."

"Where is it?"

"In Peggy Lane."

Harry Wharton started.

"You—you don't mean to say that that was your fort we lugged down last night?" he exclaimed, in dismay.

"It certainly was."

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "That blessed Yank told us it was being built by the Courtfield bounders! Where's that Yank? Bump him!"

"Collar him!"

"I guess—Ow! Yow!"

Fisher T. Fish had no time to guess. The exasperated juniors laid hold of him and bumped him in the snow.

Fish yelled at the top of his voice.

"Ow! Leggo! Yow!"

"There!" exclaimed Wharton. "That's for being a little too smart! Don't you tell us any more fairy tales!"

"You slab-sided chump!" roared the American. "It wasn't a fairy tale. I tell you the Courtfield fellows were there, and they snowballed me."

"Rats!"

Marjorie and Clara were laughing heartily—they could not help it.

"Don't—don't!" exclaimed Marjorie, too late to save Fisher T. Fish, however. "It is quite true the Courtfield boys were building it for us."

"Oh!"

"They are going to rebuild it," said Marjorie, "as the snow fight comes off to-morrow. I really hope that you will leave it standing this time."

"Yes, rather!" said Miss Clara severely.

Harry Wharton's face was very pink.

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "We hadn't the faintest idea, you know—"

"Not the faintest!" said Bob Cherry.

"The faintfulness of the idea was terrific!"

"Oh, never mind," said Marjorie, laughing. "Mind you turn up to time to-morrow. There may be a surprise in store for you."

"We'll be there."

"We sha'n't have all Cliff House girls in the fort," said Clara. "I suppose that makes no difference to you?"

"Not the least in the world."
"We can have anybody we like?"
"Certainly."

"Very well; that's understood."
"Anything short of the suffragettes," said Bob Cherry.

"Of course, we bar biting."
The girls laughed, and went up the road, leaving the juniors in the old gateway. Fisher T. Fish rose out of the snow, where he had been sprawling in a dazed condition for some minutes, and glared at the Removites.

"You howling chumps—" he began.

"Go it, old man," said Harry Wharton. "We were a little too previous, but if you like to take it out in slanging you can go ahead."

"You frabjous wasters—"

"Go ahead!"

"You wall-eyed hoboes—"

"Bravo!"

"You burbling guys—"

"Hurrah!"

Fisher T. Fish stopped at last. Words failed to express his feelings, and he snorted and stalked away.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Skinner Tries It On.

YOU don't seem to be getting on very rippingly with John Bull," Skinner remarked to Bulstrode that evening.

Bulstrode scowled.

"Hang him!" he said tersely.

"With pleasure!" said Skinner, rubbing his chin reminiscently. "I'd give twopence any day to see him hanged! But you were going to make use of him, you told me, instead of—ahem!—thrashing him."

The Remove bully gritted his teeth.

"I could thrash him if I liked," he said.

Skinner winked at the ceiling.

"Yes, of course you could, old fellow," he agreed, with an agreement that was more irritating than denial would have been. "We all know that, of course."

"Look here, Skinner—"

"My dear chap, it's all right! We all know you could simply wipe up the floor with young Bull if you tried, and you're only letting him off because—because he's a new boy, and you're so tender-hearted."

Bulstrode clenched his fists.

"I mayn't be able to wipe up the floor with Bull, but I could wipe up any floor with you or three like you, Skinner," he said, between his teeth, "so you'd better keep a little more civil."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Skinner. "Don't get ratty. I like the idea of setting young Bull on Harry Wharton quite as well as you do. Only you don't seem to have made much of a success of it."

"I tried it on."

"And he wasn't taking any?"

"No," Bulstrode confessed.

"I suppose you showed the little game too plainly. You need diplomacy in a matter like this," said Skinner sagely.

"I suppose you think you could manage it better than I did?" Bulstrode exclaimed angrily.

Skinner nodded coolly.

"I know I could," he said.

"You'd better try, then!"

"I'm going to. If Wharton licks him, jolly good; if he licks Wharton it will take that stuck-up prig down a step or two, so it's all right for us in any case. And this Bull chap is simple enough; I can twist him round my finger, I think."

"If you can I'll stand you a jolly good feed," said Bulstrode. "I'd like nothing better than to see those two going it hammer and tongs."

"Done!" said Skinner.

Skinner lost no time in putting his scheme into practice. Skinner considered himself very deep; and, indeed, he certainly was cunning in many ways. But it had never occurred to Skinner that frankness and honesty have always the advantage over cunning. Skinner was about to discover it now.

He strolled into the gymnasium, where Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were chatting, looking on at Nugent and Inky on the bars.

"Seen Bull?" asked Skinner, glancing round.

Wharton shook his head.

"Oh! You haven't been rowing with him, have you?"

"I—" said Wharton, in astonishment. "Certainly not!"

"Oh, good!"

"I don't see why you should suppose I have been rowing with Bull," said Harry. "He seems to me a very decent fellow."

"A bit of a swanker, don't you think?"

"I haven't thought about it at all."

"Oh, all serene!" said Skinner. "You needn't cut a fellow up so sharp. I was only thinking of what he said about you."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

NEXT
TUESDAY:

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

"About me?" said Wharton sharply.

"Yes. He thinks he could lick you in a fair fight," said Skinner. "What do you think about it yourself?"

Harry Wharton flushed.

"I don't care to think about it."

"You mean you wouldn't care to take him on?"

"No, I don't."

"Then you'd stand up to him if it came to that?" asked Skinner.

"I don't care to discuss it. It looks to me, Skinner, as if you're trying to set me against young Bull and make trouble."

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry with emphasis. "And I jolly well know the reason, too! Wharton's to play cat to your monkey and pull the chestnuts out of the fire for you. You can buzz off, Skinner; you won't bring about a row just now."

"Oh, I say—"

"Rats! Get out!"

Skinner retired, discomfited.

He had not expected to be seen through in this easy way. Skinner sometimes amused himself, in a cattish way, by bringing about rows between fellows who might have remained on perfectly friendly terms but for him. He had had a great deal of success in this line. He would ask one fellow if So-and-So hadn't a very swanking manner, and suggest that he needed taking down a peg or two. If his interlocutor agreed, Skinner would report to So-and-So that the other fellow considered him a swanker, and was ready to take him down.

With the amiable offices of the kind Skinner going on between them, two fellows would frequently come to blows without either having the least real grudge against the other.

Skinner found this sort of thing very amusing. But it did not seem to work with Harry Wharton.

But Skinner had no doubt about his success with John Bull junior. That youth, coming straight from the country as he did, was surely no match in cunning for the astute Skinner. At all events, that was what Skinner thought.

John Bull was in the gym a little later, and Skinner strolled up to him, with a most agreeable expression upon his face.

The new junior looked at him.

There was a bluff directness about John Bull that was a little disconcerting, but Skinner was not easily disconcerted.

"I hear you're having some trouble with Wharton," he remarked.

"Oh?" said Bull. "This is the first I've heard of it."

"You know Wharton's Form captain, I suppose?"

"Yes, somebody told me so."

"Form captains have a certain amount of authority at Greyfriars," Skinner explained. "A chap has to be civil."

"Well, I suppose I shall be civil."

"Only Wharton wants a fellow to be more than civil," said Skinner. "He wants every chap in the Form to jolly well kow-tow to him."

"Stuff!"

"Well, you'll see it for yourself later. As for you, he was saying just now that he'd like nothing better than to stand up to you and give you a licking in a fair fight."

"He said that, did he?" said Bull.

"Yes."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, he said you wanted taking down a peg, and that he'd be jolly glad to do it if you gave him half a chance," said Skinner, drawing upon his imagination in a way worthy of Billy Bunter.

"Oh? Any more?"

"Well, if you'd take a friend's advice, you'd put a stop to that sort of thing at once," Skinner remarked. "You don't want the fellows to think you're afraid of a fellow like Wharton, do you?"

"I suppose not," said John Bull, looking at the mischief-maker, with a very peculiar expression.

Skinner felt that he was getting on very well indeed.

"That's just it!" he continued. "Now, my impression is that you could lick Wharton as easily as falling off a form. What do you think?"

"I think I'll ask Wharton whether he really said the things you say he said," said John Bull in his slow, solid way.

Skinner started.

"You'll what?"

"Come with me to Wharton."

"I—I'd rather not. You see—"

"You will come, please."

"I've got an engagement just now," stammered Skinner.

"I've just remembered some lines I must take in to Mr. Quelch before prep."

"Come with me."

"I must be off!"

Skinner made a movement towards the door.

21
A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chimes
of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

John Bull stepped quickly towards him, and pulled him back by the shoulder.

Then he slipped his arm through Skinner's. The latter made an effort to escape, but he was as a child in the hands of the sturdy new junior.

John Bull grinned.

"No, you don't!" he said.

"Look here—"

"Come with me to Wharton."

"I don't want to."

"That makes no difference. If you've been telling me the truth, it's all right. I think you've been telling lies. But we'll see. Come on."

"I—I won't!"

"Yes, you will."

"I—I— Oh!"

"This way!" said John Bull.

And, as Skinner resisted, he grasped the cad of the Remove by the back of the collar and propelled him in the direction of Harry Wharton by sheer force.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

And the Result.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"My hat!"

Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton looked at John Bull in surprise, as he propelled Skinner towards them with a grip on the back of his collar.

Skinner was resisting, but his resistance counted for nothing. He was in a grip that seemed like a grip of iron.

John Bull marched his panting prisoner straight up to the juniors, and halted in front of them. A crowd of fellows, attracted by the unusual sight, soon gathered round, wondering what was up.

Skinner was crimson in the face, and gasping for breath. John Bull junior was perfectly calm and undisturbed.

"What's the row?" asked Wharton.

"Skinner has been telling me something about you," said Bull, in his direct way. "He wouldn't come and say it before you of his own accord, so I've brought him."

There was a laugh.

It was a novel and direct method of dealing with a back-biter, and quite in accordance with the character of John Bull.

"Faith, and it's a broth of a boy he is!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "Phwat stories have ye been telling now, Skinner darling?"

"What did he say?" asked Harry, with a glance of contempt at the crimson, panting Skinner.

"I fancy he wants to make trouble between us," said Bull. "If you really said the things he says you said we'll have the gloves on at once and have it out. If you didn't say them I'll give this chap a hiding for lying to me. That's business."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you say that I wanted taking down a peg, and that you'd be glad to do it if I gave you half a chance?" asked Bull.

Wharton coloured.

"No."

"But Skinner tried to make him say something of the sort!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly. "He was here just now trying it on."

"Oh, I thought I saw his little game!" said Bull quietly. "He's got something up against both of us, and he'd like to see us punching one another."

"I suppose that's it," said Harry.

"Faith, and ye're right!"

"Well, I'm not going to be dragged into a quarrel to please a third party," said John Bull. "I don't care twopence whether I could lick you, or you lick me. It doesn't matter, that I can see, so long as we're on friendly terms."

"Just so," said Harry, laughing.

"We're not going to let this rotter make trouble, then?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then he'd better have a licking as a lesson."

"Good!"

"Leggo!" gasped Skinner. "You're cho-cho-choking me!"

"Well, you ought to be choked!" said John Bull, shaking him, a great deal as a terrier might have shaken a rat.

"Look here, you had better own up. You were telling lies to me a few minutes ago, weren't you?"

"I was—was j-joking."

"Wharton did not say what you said he said?"

"P-p-perhaps not exactly."

"You were trying to make trouble?"

"Ow! Leggo!"

John Bull released his prisoner.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

He faced Skinner, who was gasping for breath, and pushed back his cuffs. There was a grim, businesslike expression upon John Bull's face.

"Will you stand up to Wharton or me?" he asked.

"Goo!"

"You've got to do one or the other."

"Faith, and ye're right! Sure, I remember Skinner getting up a row between Ogilvy and me in the same way," exclaimed Micky Desmond indignantly. "Only Ogilvy was an ass, and he never saw the game."

"Well, you didn't either," said Ogilvy.

"But ye were unreasonable."

"You mean you were."

"Look here, you Scotch duffer—"

"Look here, you Irish chump—"

"Faith, and I—"

"Rats!"

It looked very much as if that former fistical encounter between Ogilvy and Micky Desmond would be renewed. But the juniors pushed them apart.

"Look here," exclaimed Skinner, "it was only a joke, and I—I don't want to fight either of you."

"Then I shall kick you out of the gym," said Bull.

"Hold on! I—"

"Here goes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

John Bull grasped Skinner by the shoulders and swung him round.

Skinner started forward to run.

As he did so, the new junior drove out his foot as if he were kicking for goal, and Skinner caught the full force of it, and went staggering forward.

"Ow!" yelled Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner broke into a desperate run, and dashed out of the gym, before John Bull could get in a second kick. He left the juniors roaring with laughter behind him.

Bulstrode was coming up to the gym, as Skinner dashed out, and they met outside, and Bulstrode put out a hand to stop his associate.

"Hallo! What's the matter?" he exclaimed.

Skinner stopped, gasping for breath.

"Oh, nothing!" he panted.

"What are you running for?"

"I—I—nothing."

"You've been trying on the little game," exclaimed Bulstrode, bursting into a roar of laughter, "and you've got handled over it. Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner scowled savagely.

"That chap Bull is an outspoken brute," he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can try it on yourself if you want it tried again," exclaimed Skinner angrily. "I'm done with it, I can tell you."

And he stamped on his way.

Bulstrode grinned as he went into the gym. He was disappointed, it is true, but Skinner's discomfiture in itself was a consolation to him.

But his grin vanished as he saw John Bull chatting with the chums of the Remove in the most amiable manner. The new junior was evidently on the best of terms with Harry Wharton & Co.

As a matter of fact, Bull's directness, and his frankness in coming at once to Harry Wharton with the mischief-maker, had made a very favourable impression upon the Famous Four.

John Bull might be a little too outspoken in some respects, but there was no doubt that he was frank, sincere, and true to the core.

And they were qualities that appealed to Harry Wharton & Co.

"It was jolly decent of you to come and have it out like that," Harry Wharton said. "If you had been a hot-headed duffer like Micky here—"

"Sure, Wharton, and I—"

"Why, we might have been fighting at the present moment, and Skinner grinning at us," said Wharton. "Now Skinner's got what he deserves, though not as much as he ought to have, the rotter."

"Faith, and ye're right there!"

"Look here, John Bull, will you make one of our party to-morrow?" asked Wharton. "You are the sort of chap we want. We've got to make up twenty for the snow-fight."

John Bull nodded cheerfully.

"I'll come," he said.

"Good!"

"I suppose I'm coming with you to-morrow," Bulstrode remarked, looking at Wharton in a kind of challenging way.

Harry shook his head.

IMPORTANT!

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"No," he replied. "You asked me to leave you out."
 "Well, of course, I never really meant that."
 "You're out, anyway. Better say what you mean next time," said Wharton drily.
 And Bulstrode, thrusting his hands deep in his pockets, walked away scowling.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Garrison.

MARJORIE came out of the gates of Cliff House, with a scarf round her neck against the bitter wind, and a little shawl over her head. Miss Clara and Wilhelmina followed her, and Grace and Kate Flynn. The five girls walked down the lane towards the Black Pike, following the path cut in the snow of the lane.

There had been a fresh fall of snow that morning, and the feathery flakes were still falling lightly.

Marjorie & Co. were in the highest of spirits. The Cliff House challenge seemed likely to work out, after all, in a victory for the Cliff House girls, with the aid of the fellows from Courtfield. Trumper & Co. had promised to be there—fifteen of them from Courtfield County Council School—and Marjorie had handed to the Courtfield leader the necessary shawls and other things for disguise.

True, the Greyfriars fellows expected the fort to be manned wholly by girls; but all was fair in war, and Wharton had said that the girls could garrison the fort with whomsoever they pleased.

There would be a surprise for the juniors when they attacked.

Instead of carrying everything before them with perfect ease, they would find the fort held by a force as strong as their own; and with the advantage of snow walls to protect them, there seemed little doubt that Trumper & Co. would get the best of the combat, and that the Greyfriars twenty would be put to the run.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Miss Clara, stopping at the gap in the hedge which gave access to the slope upon which the snow fort was built.

The girls passed through the hedge.

A shout of welcome greeted them.

Fifteen lads of Courtfield School were there, and they had given the final touches to the fortifications.

The walls of snow were six feet high, and made of blocks firmly jammed together, and inside a raised step of snow ran round for the defenders to stand upon.

On this, in huge piles, were ready-made snowballs.

There was sufficient ammunition to allow the defenders of the fort to keep up a heavy fire for a very long time without stopping to renew supplies.

A narrow opening had been left in the snow wall to give admission to the girls when they arrived. Trumper stood in the opening, his cap in his hand, and a grin upon his bronzed face.

"How do you like the fort?" he exclaimed.

Marjorie's eyes danced.

"I think it is splendid," she said.

"Ripping!" said Miss Clara.

"I think it is ferry goot, ain't it, pefore?"

"We'll hold it against the Greyfriars bounders, anyway," said Grahame, with a laugh. "They're due in half an hour. They'll get a surprise."

"A thunning thurprise," remarked Solly.

"Come in," said Trumper. "We've got to block up that opening, and make it all safe, and then rig ourselves up. You'll help us there, won't you?"

"Yes, indeed," said Marjorie.

The opening in the snow wall was carefully blocked up, and now the circle of snow was unbroken, and offered no access to the assailants.

To get into the fort the Grey Friars had to charge up the slope, and scale the six-foot wall, in the face of the defenders' fire—a difficult task even for Harry Wharton & Co. to perform.

"Oh, it's simply top-notch!" said Miss Clara enthusiastically.

"Oh, Clara!"

"So it is, Marjorie. We'll wake them up this time."

"Yeth, rather, Mith Clara."

"Now for the wigs!" said Trumper.

The girls set to work. Marjorie opened a bag, in which were a number of tresses of artificial hair of various hues, which the girls had been accustomed to use in private theatricals. They came in useful for another purpose now.

Tresses of curly golden hair were pinned to Trumper's thick hair, and transformed his appearance wonderfully.

Then when a shawl was pinned round his shoulders, and a dab of paint put upon his cheeks, and a touch of charcoal on his eyebrows, there were few who could have recognised the leader of the Courtfield fellows.

His chums stood round grinning at him.

Trumper coloured a little.

"How do I look, you fellows?" he asked.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

NEXT
TUESDAY;

EVERY
TUESDAY, The "Magnet"
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"All there,ne," said Solly.

"Beautiful!" said Grahame. "I believe the Greyfriars chaps will be so struck with your beauty that they won't be able to come on. Ahem!"

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"Well, you're funny enough yourself," said Grahame.

"Yeth, rather."

Marjorie laughed, and went on with the work.

One after another the Courtfield fellows were daubed, wigged, and shawled.

The result, seen from close quarters, was curious.

The lads looked like girls—rather rough-looking girls, certainly—as far down as their waists, the shawls covering the upper part of them closely.

Below the shawls appeared their trousers and the tails of their jackets.

Grahame remarked that they looked something like mermaids, only not so good-looking. They could not help grinning at one another.

But seen from beyond the snow walls, only their heads and shoulders could be viewed, and there was no doubt that they would pass for girls, unless the assailants got inside the fort.

And that the Courtfielders did not mean them to do.

"There!" exclaimed Marjorie at last. "I think that will do, and I am sure you all look very nice."

"Better than usual, I am sure," said Miss Clara, with her usual frankness.

"I think so, after."

"It's nearly time for the Greyfriars boys to be here," said Grace, looking at her watch.

"Keep your weather eye open, my thons," said Solly Lazarus. "It would be thilly to be taken by thurprise, you know."

"Yes, rather!"

The Courtfield fellows kept a good look-out.

In a very few minutes after the preparations had been completed there was a shout from Barney O'Neil.

"Here the spalpeens come!"

Trumper snorted.

"Shut up, you ass!" he exclaimed. "Do you want them to hear you."

"Faith, and why not?"

"Chump!"

"Sure, and I—"

"You ass! They're to suppose there are only girls here. Do you think they'll take your blessed foghorn of a voice for a girl's voice?" demanded Trumper.

"Faith, and I think—"

"Shut up!"

"Trumper, darling—"

"Silence!"

"But sure—"

"Dry up, you chump! Miss Marjorie, you'd better speak to the Greyfriars chaps when they come up. We shall have to keep mum."

Marjorie nodded.

She mounted upon a heap of snow inside the defences, and scanned the lane in the direction of Greyfriars.

Over the snowy hedge she could see the juniors.

There were a score of them, with Harry Wharton & Co. at their head, advancing down the lane, most of them laughing as they came.

It was pretty clear that they regarded the attack upon the snow fort garrisoned by girls in the light of a huge joke. They caught sight of Marjorie, and every cap came off at once.

Marjorie nodded back.

The Greyfriars contingent marched on till they reached the gap in the hedge, and then they scrambled through into the field.

Marjorie held up her hand.

"Halt!" she said.

The Greyfriars juniors halted.

"We're here, ready for you," said Marjorie.

"So we see," said Harry Wharton, with a smile. "I hope you won't be too hard on us, Marjorie."

"Oh, we'll let you off lightly, if you know when you've had enough," said Marjorie loftily.

There was a chuckle from the juniors.

"I guess that's all O.K.," remarked Fisher T. Fish.

"Stuff!" said John Bull.

"Are you ready?" asked Marjorie.

"Quite ready, Marjorie."

"Then you can come on as soon as you like."

"Right-ho!"

Marjorie stepped down from view.

In a moment more the snow wall was lined with heads, and snowballs began to fly.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Holding the Fort.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. were under fire at once. They were within a short distance of the snow fort, in easy range for snowballs; and the missiles flew with a force that surprised them, considering that they came from girls.

Smash, smash, smash! came the snowballs.

Some of the juniors scrambled back hastily into the road. Others rushed up the slope to the attack, and were fairly bowled over by the shower of heavy snowballs that poured upon them.

Then they went scrambling back, too, and the whole party streamed out into the lane, where the hedges covered them from the fire.

Wharton rubbed the snow out of his eyes.

"By Jove, this will be warm!" he exclaimed.

"They're going to put up a good fight, anyway," Bob Cherry remarked.

Fisher T. Fish sniffed.

"Go for 'em!" he exclaimed. "Some of us can snowball every head that shows over the walls, while the others make a rush. I guess that's the way to take the giddy fort, and that's business."

Wharton shook his head.

"They might be hurt," he said.

"I guess—"

"Rats! We're not going to snowball girls."

"But they'll tumble to it that we're only making believe," remarked Bull.

"No. You can chuck light balls that won't hurt."

"We shall not get into the fort that way, Wharton."

"Then we'll keep out," said Harry decidedly.

"I guess—"

"Oh, choose it, Fishy!"

"The cheesefulness should be terrific, my worthy Yankful chum," murmured the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I kinder guess you'll get left, if you go on this way," said Fish.

"We'll get left, then."

"I guess—"

"Bosh!"

"Well, let's get on!" exclaimed Nugent. "It's jolly cold standing here, talking."

"The coldfulness is terrific."

"Come on, then," said Wharton. "We'll try a rush right up the slope. As soon as we get in, they'll throw up their hands, you know. We've only got to stand the fire till we get into the fort."

"Buck up, then!"

"I guess—"

"Come on!"

The juniors scrambled through the hedge again, and made a rush.

Up the slope they went, scrambling and tramping through the snow.

"Fire!" cried Marjorie, within the snow fort.

The wall was lined with heads, while hands grasped snowballs.

Whiz whiz, whiz!

Crash, smash, smash!

"Oh—oh!"

"Ow!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Grooh!"

"Ooooh!"

Smash, smash, smash!

Half way up the slope went the charging juniors, but several of them were rolling dazedly in the snow now.

The others faced the incessant fusillade bravely, but they were growing confused, and half-blinded by the smashing snowballs.

Fisher T. Fish was rolling over, and John Bull junior rolled over him, and Nugent, Bob Cherry, Tom Brown, and Mark Linley, added themselves to the heap.

Ogilvy, Morgan and Micky Desmond had crashed into the hedge, and were trying to extricate themselves.

The rest scrambled on blindly but resolutely.

Crash, smash, smash! came the whizzing snowballs.

It was amazing to the Greyfriars juniors that girls' arms could hurl missiles with so much force, and keep up the fire at such a speed.

From what Wharton could see, about a dozen or fifteen of the defenders were keeping up the fire, while the others stood behind, handing them a constant supply of snowballs for use.

The fusillade was incessant, and the air seemed to be thick with whizzing snowballs.

One after another the Greyfriars juniors rolled over.

Harry Wharton and three or four more were all who reached the snow wall at last, and strove to climb over it.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

IMPORTANT!

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But as they dragged at the snow, snowballs simply rained upon them from above, and they were hurled back, blind and breathless.

John Bull had picked himself up, and he came charging up the slope again like the animal from whom his name was derived.

Bull's chief characteristic was his obstinate determination, as the Greyfriars fellows had already discovered.

It showed up to good advantage now, and stood the new junior in good stead.

Careless of the snowballs that smashed on his face and chest and legs, the new Removite pushed forward.

He reached the snow wall, as Harry Wharton & Co. reeled away from it, blinded with snow, and out of breath.

John, Bull grasped at the snow wall, and, driving his hands deep into it, began to clamber over.

Snowballs rained upon him from above.

He did not heed them.

Smash, smash!

With his eyes shut to keep the snow out, and his teeth clenched, John Bull fought his way on.

He was twice pushed off the wall by the sheer force of the snowballs raining upon him, but each time he dragged away whole armfuls of the defences, and thus effected a breach in the wall.

For the third time he came on, plunging desperately into the wall, and forcing a passage through.

Another minute, and he would have been in the fort, and Harry Wharton & Co., rallying on the slope, would have followed him in.

But a pair of powerful hands grasped John Bull, and he was whirled round, and sent spinning down the slope.

He was so astounded by that powerful grasp that he made not the least resistance, and was flung away without a struggle.

He crashed into Harry Wharton, and sent the Remove captain whirling, too, and both of them rolled over in the snow. John Bull had clutched at his assailant for a moment, and had caught something in his hand, and it was in his hands still as he rolled over. He did not know what it was, but he kept hold of it.

He rolled into the hedge with Wharton, and they scrambled out into the road. The rest of the juniors, baffled and breathless, and covered with snow, followed them.

"By Jove!" gasped Harry Wharton. "It's not so easy after all!"

John Bull panted for breath.

"We've been done!" he said.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"They're not girls in the fort."

"What?" yelled a dozen voices.

"Somebody took hold of me, and chucked me out," said John Bull. "You know I'm not weak, but he was quite as strong as I was. And look here, this came off in my hand."

He held it up to view.

It was a tress of yellow hair.

The Greyfriars juniors stared at it in amazement.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Wharton, at last. "It's a jape on us! They've got some fellows there to help them!"

"The japefulness is terrific."

"That accounts!" exclaimed Tom Brown. "I was jolly certain that girls couldn't chuck snowballs in that way. Why, it was like facing blessed cannons!"

"I guess so. Jevver get left?" grinned Fisher T. Fish.

"I wonder who they are!"

"We'll soon know!" said Wharton determinedly. "I saw Marjorie and Clara, but I shouldn't wonder if all the rest are fellows. They're doing the snowballing—I can see that now—and the girls are keeping them supplied. What asses we've been not to guess it!"

"I guess I smelt a rat—"

"I guess you didn't! But we'll jolly soon have the fort now!" said Harry Wharton. "Back up, you fellows!"

And the Greyfriars juniors gathered round their leader.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Well Won!

TRUMPER & CO. were rejoicing. The Greyfriars attack had been beaten hollow; and, so far as the garrison of the snow fort knew, the jape had not been discovered. Trumper hardly thought the enemy would come on again.

"They've been licked to the wide!" he said, with great satisfaction.

"Yeth, rather!" agreed Solly.

"Keep a look-out though!" said Marjorie. "I am sure Harry will not give in very quickly."

"All there, Mith Marjorie! But they haven't an earthly, you know."

"Faith, and here they come!" exclaimed O'Neil.

"Hallo! Look out!"

"Fire!"

The Courtfielders were on their guard again at once; and once more faces lined the wall, and snowballs whizzed through the air.

But they had a more dangerous attack to face this time.

Harry Wharton knowing that he had boys, and not girls, to deal with, had made a complete change in his tactics.

Half the Greyfriars party were stationed at the hedge, with heaps of snowballs, to keep up a fire over the heads of the attacking party.

The rest were to charge after Wharton up the slope.

The party behind, who had Bob Cherry to lead them, were to keep up a fire as fast as they could; but as soon as the attack was in full swing Nugent was to lead half a dozen of them round the field, and attack the fort on the other side.

Harry Wharton & Co. charged the fort.

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz! came the snowballs.

Crash! Smash!

The juniors reeled over under the flying missiles, which smashed and broke upon them on all sides; but they picked themselves up, and charged again.

And the fellows behind hurled snowballs with just as much vim and vigour as the enemy, and the faces of the Courtfield fellows suffered.

They had to look over the walls to aim their missiles; but every head that showed above the line was a target at once.

Smash! Smash! Smash!

Back reeled the defenders from the walls, as the snowballs broke in their faces, and the defence slackened, the fire faltering.

Harry Wharton & Co. took immediate advantage of it, rushing on with renewed speed, and they gained the wall.

It had already been damaged by their previous attack; and, instead of trying to climb over it, they set themselves to drag the snow away and make a breach through it.

The snowballs rained upon them from above.

But they stuck to the work.

Meanwhile, Nugent was leading his followers round to the rear of the fort, which was left quite unguarded by Trumper & Co. in the haste and hurry of repelling the frontal attack.

"Go for 'em!" shouted Harry Wharton. "Sock it into 'em!"

"The sockfulness is terrific!" panted the Nabob of Bhani-pur. "Ow! I have a terrific snowball in my esteemed eye!"

"Ha, ha ha!"

"Stick to it!"

"Go for 'em!"

Crash! Smash! Plunge!

Harry Wharton and John Bull, side by side, went plunging through the snow wall, and rolled head and heels into the fort.

"Faith, here they are!" yelled Barney O'Neil.

"All there! Chuck them out!"

"Courtfield cads!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Give 'em socks!"

"Hurrah for Greyfriars!"

"Back up!"

Wharton and Bull were grasped in strong hands, and sent whirling out the way they had come, and they rolled over, and sent several of their followers rolling over, on the snowy slope.

But, like Antæus of old, they seemed to gather strength from the earth every time they went down, and to jump up with renewed vigour to return to the attack.

They came on again undauntedly.

But the numbers, as well as the position, were against them, and the attack would have been repulsed but for a sudden diversion in the rear.

Frank Nugent and the rest of the Greyfriars party had arrived on the other side of the snow fort.

They scrambled over the snow wall almost without interruption, and announced their arrival with a yell.

"Hurrah for Greyfriars!"

Then they tumbled into the fort.

Marjorie called out, and Clara shrieked, and Wilhelmina screamed. Trumper & Co. swung round to face the new enemy.

Wharton saw the slackening of the defence, and knew that his opportunity had come. He shouted to his comrades:

Then he leaped through the breach into the fort.

Trumper grasped him, and they closed, and rolled on the ground together, and several other fellows rolled over them.

But Wharton's followers were pouring in.

Nugent and his party were all inside, and Wharton's comrades quickly joined them; and now the combat was at close quarters.

Snowballs were no longer of any use, and the Courtfield fellows and the Greyfriars juniors wrestled and pommelled excitedly.

The Cliff House girls, of course, were out of the conflict.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

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They knew now that the Greyfriars fellows knew the facts, and the affair was between the rival schools.

And, now they were at close quarters, the odds were on the side of the Greyfriars party, for they were twenty to fifteen.

The Courtfielders were rolled over, breathless, and bumped in the snow; and Trumper, releasing himself from Harry Wharton at last, and, jumping up, found that he was almost the only fellow left standing.

Greyfriars were triumphant!

"Sock it to 'em!" roared Bob Cherry. "Sock it to the bouncers! Down with Courtfield!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go for 'em!"

"Chuck 'em out!" shouted Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha! Hurrah!"

Solly Lazarus was the first to go. Grasped by Wharton and Ogilvy, he was hurled out of the fort and sent rolling down the slope. He stuck in the hedge at the bottom and remained there, gasping and snorting.

Trumper was collared next, and sent rolling after him.

Then went the other Courtfielders one after another, struggling helplessly in the grasp of the juniors, but going all the same.

Grahame was the last to go, and he put up a stout fight, and it took three of the Grey Friars to hurl him forth.

But hurled forth he was, and he joined the rest of the Courtfield party at the bottom of the slope.

The Greyfriars party burst into a breathless cheer.

"Hip-hip-hurray!"

The ground was strewn with wigs, tresses, and shawls. The disguised Courtfielders had lost all their borrowed plumes in the final struggle.

Harry Wharton turned towards Marjorie & Co. after the last of the Courtfielders had been sent rolling.

"Well, here we are!" he remarked.

Marjorie was trying not to laugh.

"Yes, I see you are," she said.

"Horrid of you!" said Miss Clara, with a toss of her golden curls. "I did not think you could be so rough and horrid!"

Wharton stared.

"B-b-but you challenged us to capture the fort!" he said.

"I know we did!"

"We weren't going to be rough at all, even if we got licked," said Wharton. "Only Bull found out that there were boys here, and not girls, and then we went for 'em."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"I guess we've captured this fort," said Fisher T. Fish.

"Jever get left, Miss Marjorie?"

"Dry up, Fishy! After all," said Harry Wharton, struck by a sudden idea, "this doesn't count as a defeat for Cliff House, you know."

"Doesn't it?" said Miss Clara dubiously.

"Certainly not. It isn't you who have been licked; it's the Courtfield chaps," said Wharton eagerly. "You haven't taken part in the thing at all, except in looking on, and—and just handing those chaps snowballs. They've been licked, and—and we've been very nearly licked; but you haven't been licked at all. You come out of the affair the best of the lot really."

Marjorie's cheeks dimpled as she smiled.

"That is a very nice way of putting it, at all events," she said. "Upon the whole, I think we can forgive you."

"Yes, I think so," assented Miss Clara.

Wharton did not quite see what there was to be forgiven. But he accepted the forgiveness with a proper meekness.

"Thank you!" he said. "And, now it's all over, we might all go and celebrate the—the victory, you know, in the tea-shop at Pegg—the Courtfield chaps and all."

"That will be ripping!" said Miss Clara, with sparkling eyes.

"It is very kind of you, Harry!" said Marjorie softly.

"I'll speak to Trumper."

The Courtfield fellows had picked themselves up, and were debating whether to charge the fort, when Harry Wharton called to Trumper:

"Trumper, old son, will you make it pax now, and come and have a feed with us in the village? The girls are coming."

Trumper grinned.

"Will a duck swim?" was his counter-query.

And a party—somewhat battered some of them, but very merry all the same—left the snow fort behind, and all rivalry was soon buried in the cheerfulness of a hospitable board.

And so, cheerfully, ended the contest caused by the Cliff House challenge.

THE END.

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A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chaps of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS



STANLEY DARE

The Boy Detective

INTRODUCTION.

Stanley Dare, the Boy Detective, is visited one day by a man named Martin who has had sent to him at different times four raven's feathers accompanied by a warning letter. Dare promises to try and find the sender, but the same night Martin is mysteriously poisoned. Dare's investigations lead him to a Jew's house where he is admitted to one of the rooms. He converses with two men he finds there. Suddenly the lights are put out, the floor gives way from under his feet precipitating him into an underground vault. The young detective is rendered unconscious. When he recovers he finds that all exits to the vault are closed up. "I am trapped," he mutters. "Do they mean to leave me here to die slowly of starvation?"

(Now go on with the Story.)

IN THE UNDERGROUND TUNNELS.

Stanley Dare knew that it was more than likely that this was the case. He had fallen into the power of the "Ravens," of that he felt assured—the gang of miscreants who had compassed the death of his client, Lawrence Martin—and from what he had learnt about them—little enough though that was—he knew that it would be useless to look for any mercy from any member of that band of thieves and murderers. In all probability they would not even trouble to descend and remove his body after they were sure of his death. The vault would make an excellent tomb.

The outlook was black indeed for Stanley Dare. But a maxim which the young detective believed in implicitly was the time-worn one: "While there is life there is hope"—or, as the British tars used to put it in the good old days, when they fought in the "wooden walls of England," "Never say die while there's a shot in your locker!"

Dare was considerably handicapped by having to explore the place in rather more than semi-darkness, for his stock of matches was getting low, and he could not venture now to use more than one at a time.

"If I could only find something that I could make into a sort of a torch," he exclaimed, "I should be a bit more comfortable! Ah, there is something on top of that heap of fallen masonry! A rope, by jingo! The very thing!"

He caught hold of it, but it came to pieces in his hand as he gave a pull on it. It was rotten with extreme age. The match went out. He had clambered up on to the top of the rubbish-heap, and, sitting down upon it, leaned his back against the wall.

All at once something gave way behind him and he was precipitated backwards, turning a complete somersault, and landing in a sitting posture on some loose earth and stones.

"It seems to be my fate to have some uncomfortable surprises," muttered Dare. "Where on earth am I now? Fallen through some old blocked-up side-chamber of the vault, I expect. Well, I think I must be extravagant and use three matches all at once to give a decent light to investigate my new surroundings."

The wax matches flared up, the flame burning brightly and steadily. Dare held the miniature torch above his head and peered through the gloom.

Then a cry of horror burst from his lips, and he recoiled a pace, for, out of the darkness, and advancing, as it seemed, slowly towards him, came the figure of Death itself!

It stopped before it reached him, for which the young detective felt decidedly thankful, although his nerves were of steel. A gruesome visitor of that sort was the very reverse of pleasant under such circumstances; but, having no superstitious fears or fancies, Dare meant to have a closer look at it.

There were some pieces of worm-eaten wood and a few fragments of rotten rope on the ground; so, after kicking these together in a heap, he set fire to them and soon had a decent blaze, which was decidedly comforting in those chilly vaults.

Then by the wavering red light he made a clear inspection of the affrighting thing which at first had seemed like Death itself come to claim him.

It was a skeleton. That, of course, he had realised the moment he got over his first shock of surprise. But how

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came it that a skeleton had the power to move? For that the gruesome object had moved there was not the shadow of a doubt.

An explanation of the phenomenon was soon forthcoming. The skeleton was fastened on to a wooden frame which worked in a groove, and the fall of masonry which Dare had broken through when he leaned back had by some means or other set the frame in motion.

The arms of the grisly relic were extended, and rusty nails that protruded through the bones of the hands and feet were pretty conclusive evidence that the poor wretch whose flesh had once clothed this now mouldering skeleton had been brought down there and crucified.

What crime he had committed, who could guess now? Perhaps he had merely broken some strict monastic rule—perhaps been guilty of some far greater crime. No doubt many a deed of horror had been committed in those vaults in the olden days; and now, hundreds of years later, a gang of desperate criminals were keeping up the record, though their crimes were not committed in the name of religion.

"What could be the idea of the movable frame?" Dare asked himself. "Was it for the purpose of scaring other persons out of the vaults whose prying eyes might have found out too much? Or did it conceal some secret means of exit? Those old time monks and friars were not in the habit of constructing things which were of no use."

There was a slight current of air passing through the cell, and the young detective reflected that to produce a draught there must be an inlet and outlet. The aperture might be too small even to allow his hand to pass through; but if it could be found it might be enlarged.

Stepping past the framework with its ghastly burden, Dare pushed his way along the stone-paved tunnel on the further side of it. The unsteady flame of the fire threw queer, moving shadows here and there, like phantoms starting up to see who this venturesome stranger might be, daring to penetrate their haunts.

But what was that shining a little way in front of him? A point of light, steady and untwinkling! It was certainly not a reflection of the fire he had built, for it was beyond the radius of illumination from that source.

He scrambled on, over debris of every description, and more than once over human bones. But he cared nothing for that. He was getting accustomed to horrors, and ceased to heed them. The point of light grew larger and brighter as he advanced.

Then suddenly there rang out upon the silence of those ghostly vaults a harsh, croaking voice that trolled out a song which for gruesomeness was thoroughly in keeping with the place:

"Down in the vaults the dead men lie,
And their fleshless lips are grinning.
But as iron crumbles away in rust,
So their bones will crumble away to dust."
Then why play the game when the stake is high,
And Death is always winning?"

The weird verse ended in a burst of cackling laughter that was even worse to hear than the song.

Dare came to a standstill. Who could this uncanny singer be who indulged in such ghastly merriment in this abode of horrors?

"Weel, weel," murmured the professor, Seth MacAndrew, as he puffed calmly at an old briar pipe that was a regular veteran among pipes, "it's a queer world! Here am I gaeing on a wild-goose chase intae the East of London, and, maybe, running ma heed intae danger, when I ought to be sitting doon tae ma books or tae a nice comfortable dinner—for I'm needing a bit rest. But it is twenty-four hours sin' the laddie quitted the hoose, and he wasna expecting tae be awa' half that length of time. I'm anxious aboot him, so I'll need tae try and find oot what has become of him."

The worthy Scotsman started to hunt for his hat. He used to put his hat down anywhere on coming into a house, but he never seemed to have the remotest idea where he had put it, consequently this search for his headgear was quite a common occurrence when he wanted to go out again.

"It's an awfu' trouble and waste of time, having tae take a hat off, and leave it—Hey, here it is!"

He crammed it on his head, took a heavy walking-stick from the stand, and went down the stairs into the street. Here he paused for a moment to consult a notebook.

"The old shop—Denyer Street, East," he said. "I could verra weel do with a plainer direction. But I'll find it."

Mounting on to a Blackwall omnibus at the corner of Chancery Lane, the professor, after making a number of inquiries, found himself staring into the window of a second-hand shop in Denyer Street, exactly as Stanley Dare had been doing twenty-four hours previously.

"This must be the place," he muttered. "It's an auld shop, sure enough, and the things that are in it are—weel, if they're not auld, they're verra dirty."

Glancing up, he read the name over the shopfront—"Isaac Cohen." With a half-suppressed smile twitching the corner of his mouth, Professor MacAndrew entered the second-hand emporium. He was a rare student of human nature, and the prospect of a bargain-tussle with a gentleman of the Hebrew persuasion was likely to afford him a grand opportunity for the study of character.

For the moment he had almost forgotten the young detective, and that he had come East to try and obtain news of him rather than to study character.

He had qualified in his younger days, and started a practice, but had long since given it up.

"But you don't practith in thith neighbourhood?" observed Cohen.

"No," said MacAndrew.

He did not consider it necessary to inform the Jew that he did not practise at all now—at least, not in the ordinary way.

"Vell, then," pursued Cohen. "I'm glad you came into my shop. There ith a man in—vell, in a room down below, who hath met with a bad accident. He wantth medical attention, and a high fee will be paid to the doctor who prescribeth for him. But there are conditions."

"Name them," replied MacAndrew.

On hearing the Jew's words, a terrible foreboding had seized him—that the man who was supposed to have met with a bad accident was really Stanley Dare, who had been the victim of foul play, perhaps. If this was the case, and his life was in peril, he (MacAndrew) might find a means of saving him. That the Jew—and, presumably, his associates—should want a doctor to see him was not so strange a request as might be supposed. They probably wanted to find out whether he would live or die, so that they could shape their actions accordingly.

"Come into the back parlour," said Cohen. "Ve can't talk thith business over in the shop."

Professor MacAndrew followed the grimy old Israelite into a small room at the back of the shop that was even more grimy than himself. Here a well-dressed man was seated, smoking a very large cigar. He glanced curiously at the professor as he entered with the Jew. The man was Tony Bassett, one of the pair who had trapped the young detective.

"Thith ith a doctor," observed Cohen, going through a sort of introduction. "He hath half promised that he vill prescribe for our friend who hath met with an accident. I have told him there are conditions, and he would like to hear them."

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Isaac Cohen came forward, rubbing his clawlike hands together.

"Vat can I do for you, sir?" he inquired.

"I'm wanting to look at some old china," replied the professor.

"You've come to the right shop," Cohen hastened to assure him. "I thell the real sthuff. No faked-up marksh here."

He produced a willow-pattern plate, a very fair imitation of genuine old china; but MacAndrew, who was an excellent judge without being a collector, detected the fraud at once. He blew off the dust and examined it.

"Hoo much a dizen would ye be wanting for plates like this?" exclaimed MacAndrew drily. "Ye could get some more, I'm thinking, frae the manufacturer."

The Jew's face fell. He had had to deal with Scotsmen before, and knew that there was a possibility of his coming out second-best in a bargain with one. But he stuck to his guns.

"That'sh genuine old china," he persisted. "How can any more be made? I'll thell you that one for fifteen shillings. There ain't a dozen more like it in London."

"I'm glad tae hear it!" retorted MacAndrew, putting the plate back on the counter.

He was trying to think how he could frame an inquiry as to whether Dare had called in at the shop on the previous evening without exciting the old Jew's suspicion; for he guessed, as the young detective had done, that the ostensible business of selling second-hand goods and curiosities was a mere blind to cover far less innocent transactions. A box of surgical instruments caught his eye.

"Let me look at those instruments," he said. "Age doesn't add to their value, anyhow."

Isaac Cohen darted a sharp glance at him from under his shaggy eyebrows as he handed him the case.

"Are you a doctor, thir?" he asked.

"I am," replied the professor.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 151.

NEXT TUESDAY:

"The conditions are very easily told," said Bassett, as he flicked the ash from his cigar. "If you care to agree to them you will earn a large fee, Dr.—Dr.— I beg your pardon, I did not catch your name."

"My name doesna' matter," replied MacAndrew. "I am a stranger in this neighbourhood, so ye'd be none the wiser if I told ye. But I am willing to earn a large fee if I find I can comply with your conditions."

"You are cautious," laughed Bassett. "Well, I won't quarrel with you for that. We don't want to engage a man who talks. The conditions are these: You must submit to be blindfolded when you are taken from this room to the place where your patient is now lying; that you make no attempt to find out who he is, or anything more about us than you know at present; and that you will not afterwards make any reference to anything you see or hear while acting in your professional capacity for us."

"Your condeetions are peculiar," replied MacAndrew; "but I see no objection to complying with them."

"That vas all right, then," said the Jew.

"I must warn you," pursued Bassett, "that, having once undertaken to abide by them, it will not do for you to break your word. Swift and terrible retribution will follow a betrayal of your promise."

"I perfectly understand the compact," said MacAndrew. "You can take me to your patient as soon as you like. I must tell you that I have no surgical instruments with me if they should be required; and, of course, no drugs."

"I think we shall be able to supply all you need in that respect," answered Bassett. "If not, we can procure anything that you require. And now, if you are ready, we will blindfold you."

"I am quite ready."

The Jew produced a handkerchief, which, not being one of his own, was, fortunately, clean, and quickly bound it over the professor's eyes, a task at which he seemed to be an adept. Then Bassett took hold of his hand, and led him out of the room, along a short passage, and down a long flight of stone stairs.

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

The air was cold and clammy, by which sign the professor knew that he was in a deep underground chamber or passage. Isaac Cohen now came to the other side of him, and he was led forward between the two men. He counted the paces he took after descending the stairs one hundred and ninety—then they came to a halt.

Bassett gave a peculiar whistle, which it would have taken a considerable amount of practice to imitate. Bolts were shot back, a key was turned in a lock, and a door creaked on its hinges as it was swung open.

"Vun shtep up," directed Cohen.

MacAndrew, still led between the two, took the upward step, and then forward about half a dozen paces, when a halt was made again. The bandage was removed from his eyes.

MacAndrew cast a rapid glance around him. He had the faculty of being able to grasp all the essential details of his surroundings almost instantly.

He found himself in a large, oblong room with a stone floor. It was lit by a gas jet at one end. A table, three chairs, and a truckle-bed comprised the furniture, and a small American stove kept the place warm.

His patient, the man who was supposed to have met with an accident, was lying on the bed with his head bandaged. MacAndrew heaved a sigh of relief as he saw that it was not Stanley Dare. But what had become of the young detective? The question puzzled and troubled him. However, he could not try to work out an answer to it just then. First of all, he must see what he could do for the wounded man.

He was about to remove the blood-stained bandage from his head, when the man opened his eyes, and stopped him with a gesture.

"That is nothing!" he gasped. "It is the stab in my side that is the worst. If you could just give me a little ease—"

He was covered up to the chin with a rough horse-blanket, which was made to serve for bed-clothing. The professor removed it, and saw that the man's shirt on the right side was soaked with blood. With his penknife he ripped the shirt up, and a ghastly wound was revealed, the only attempt to dress it having been the placing of a pad of medicated wool over the gash.

"Mon, I'm thinking my surgery will not be of muckle avail here," said MacAndrew. "You must be taken to a hospital."

"That is out of the question," interposed Bassett. "You must do your best for him, that is all. At least, you can let us know whether he is likely to pull through."

He spoke callously, puffing at a cigar.

The shrewd Scotsman guessed that all Bassett and his associates wanted to make sure of was whether there was any likelihood of the man recovering. And it was tolerably certain that they hoped he wouldn't.

There were two others of the gang in the room in addition to Bassett and the Jew. They were sitting at the table playing cards, and did not trouble to interrupt their game, except to dart a suspicious glance at the professor when he referred to a hospital.

A look in the wounded man's eyes and a slight motion of his hands conveyed to MacAndrew the idea that he had something to say to him which he did not want the others to hear. It was difficult to find out a way to arrange that, for the Jew and Bassett were standing close beside the wretched bed.

His only plan was to ask for various surgical instruments, antiseptics, etc., which he thought it possible they would have to go and fetch from the shop above or from a chemist.

But in the end he was disappointed. Three out of the four things which he asked for were produced at once by the Jew. The fourth, a drug, he was informed could not be obtained.

"But ye told me I could have anything I required," said the professor.

"Anything in reason," corrected Bassett. "We can't obtain the drug

for you, so there's an end to the matter. Your patient seems to have revived a bit since you came, so he may be able to answer a few questions that is necessary I should put to him."

"You will get no answers from me!" cried the wounded man, with a sudden accession of strength. "You can kill me, but you can't make me speak! You have killed me, you murderer! You and Scathe, you cowards! Look here, sir!"

He laid his thin hand on MacAndrew's arm.

"You can do nothing for me now," he went on. "I am past the help of doctors, but I may put a spoke in the wheel of the coward who stabbed me. It was Scathe, though he was helped by Bassett and others! I am a member of this gang—the Ravens—and they planned to kill a man who had once done me a good turn. I meant to warn him, but I was too late. They found out what I was going to do, and this is the result. But they want to get a secret from me before I die. They won't! I denounce Bassett as the murderer of—"

With a snarl of rage, Bassett sprang forward and struck the dying man a savage blow upon the lips. The wanton brutality of this cowardly act roused the usually calm professor to such a pitch of indignant anger that, without stopping to consider what the consequences might be, he gripped the fellow by the throat, and shook him as a terrier would shake a rat; for the Scotsman was as hard as nails, and stronger than most men supposed. Then he flung him from him, and Bassett fell heavily, striking his head sharply on the stone flags.

Having accomplished this feat, MacAndrew turned again to the wounded man, and bent over him. But he was, indeed, beyond human aid now.

Professor MacAndrew drew himself to his full height and faced the miscreants, who were moving towards him with threatening looks.

"The man is dead!" he said, pointing to the body. "Ye'll know among ye who has the guilt of his murder on his soul!"

Bassett had by this time staggered to his feet, somewhat dazed by his fall, but with his face convulsed with fury.

"You shall pay for having laid hands on me!" he cried.

"And you know more now than is good for you more than we allow outsiders to know of our affairs. You have seen an example of the manner in which we deal with a man who is a menace to us. Self-preservation is the first law of Nature, you know, Mr. Scots doctor; and we mean to preserve ourselves, though it may cost a dozen lives to do so! Catch hold of him, and slip the irons on him!"

The two men addressed rushed at the professor, and, after a short struggle, managed to force him, face downwards, on to the table, while his arms were jerked up behind him.

Isaac Cohen had produced a pair of handcuffs, and was leaning forward to snap them on MacAndrew's wrists, when a sharp report echoed through the room.

At the same instant, with the ring of metal upon metal, the handcuffs were struck from the Jew's grasp by a bullet.

There were shouts and oaths and momentary confusion, during which MacAndrew was released. His assailants had no clear idea from which side of the room the shot had been fired, and still less who had fired it, for there was no one visible save themselves.

They were, however, to be enlightened in a startling manner. A clear voice broke in upon their mutterings.

"Hands up, you four miscreants! I have you covered, and the man who does not obey will be shot!"

The Jew did not hesitate. He put his hands above his head with the greatest alacrity, for he was terribly scared. The others only hesitated for a moment; then slowly and sullenly they, too, raised their hands.

As they stood there, baffled, at the mercy of an unseen foe, a weird, uncanny laugh echoed through the chamber of death.

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