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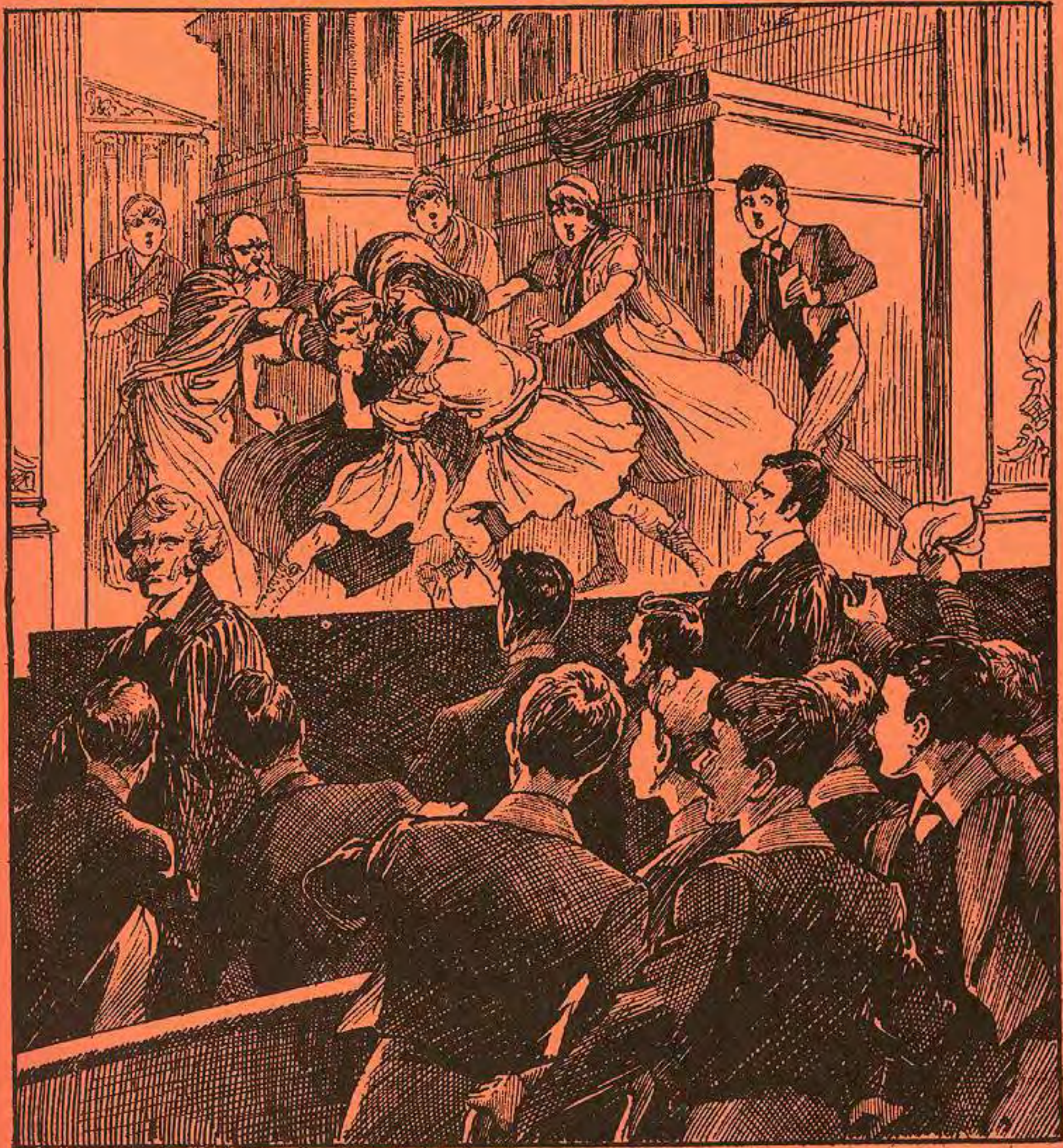
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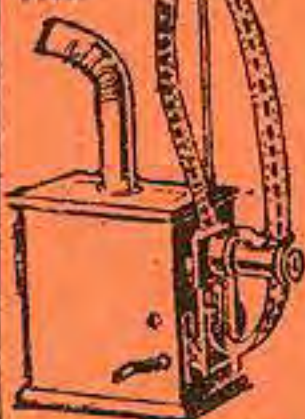
Vol. 6



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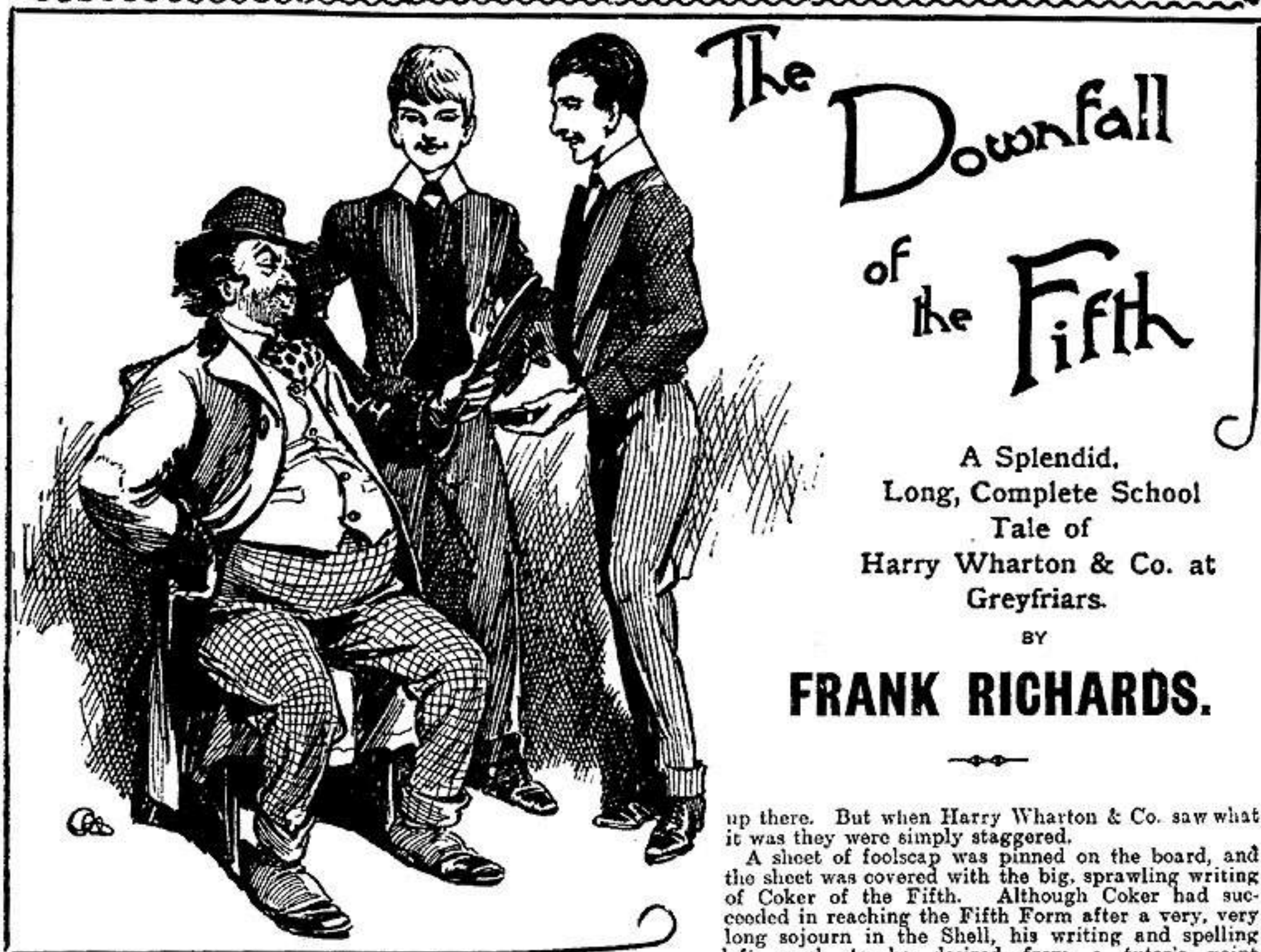
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The Downfall of the Fifth

A Splendid,
Long, Complete School
Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. at
Greyfriars.

BY

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Like Coker's Cheek.

"THE—tho cheek!" gasped Harry Wharton.
"The nerve!" ejaculated Nugent.
"The blessed impudence!" roared Bob Cherry. "We're not going to stand it! We're jolly well not going to stand anything of the sort!"

The three chums of the Remove Form at Greyfriars were red with anger and indignation. And they had cause to be indignant. They had just come out of the Form-room after morning lessons, and they had halted to look at the notice-board in the hall. A crowd of fellows were gathering round the notice-board, their exclamations showing that some notice of unusual interest was posted

up there. But when Harry Wharton & Co. saw what it was they were simply staggered.

A sheet of foolscap was pinned on the board, and the sheet was covered with the big, sprawling writing of Coker of the Fifth. Although Coker had succeeded in reaching the Fifth Form after a very, very long sojourn in the Shell, his writing and spelling left much to be desired from a tutor's point of view. The writing greatly resembled that of a Third-Form fag, and the spelling resembled nothing but Coker's spelling—a thing that was fearful and wonderful. But the meaning of the notice was quite clear, in spite of the original system of orthography adopted by Coker of the Fifth.

"NOTISE!

"The Fifth Form Dramatic Society will give a performance of Shakespear's Julius Sæsar on the evening of next Wensday. Curton rises at seven sharp. All are invited, and there will be no charge for admision. Fags are expected to wash and put on clean collars. N.B.—This also applies to the Remove.—Signed, HORACE COKER."

"The cheek!"
"The awful nerve!"

Next
Tuesday:
Grand Christmas
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page 28

Removites crowded round the board, looking at the notice, snuffing with indignation. It was not only the insult of being classed with the fags—the Remove having quite recently victoriously made good their claim not to be considered as fags. It was not only the little gibe about clean collars. The injury was deeper than that. Harry Wharton & Co. could scarcely believe their eyes.

"Julius Cæsar," ejaculated Wharton—"Julius Cæsar"!

Our play?"

"Our performance!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Our idea!"

"Our wheeze!"

"The swindlers!"

"The blessed burglars!"

"We're not going to stand it!" howled Bob Cherry. "Why, we've been rehearsing 'Julius Cæsar' for a dog's age, and we've got it practically ready for performance—costumes and all! The horrid frauds!"

"They've heard us rehearsing!" exclaimed Wharton. "They know it's our play! Why, they never thought of having a blessed dramatic society in the Fifth at all until they heard that we had started one in the Remove!"

"Rather not!"

"And we had planned the performance for next week, and had asked Mr. Quelch to get us the lecture-hall for the giddy performance!" shouted John Bull.

"Faith, and it's robbery intirely!" ejaculated Micky Desmond.

"Sheer swindling!"

"Just like Coker!"

"Just like the Fifth!"

"The bounders!"

"We're not going to stand it!"

"Not much!"

"Never!"

Harry Wharton waved his hand to the excited crowd of Removites. He was as excited as all the others, and he was ready for anything. It was too much! Coker of the Fifth, it was well known, suffered from a burning desire to distinguish himself. But Coker was not blessed with the necessary brains. Coker fancied himself at many things, and made a "muck," as Bob Cherry expressed it, of all of them. He never had an idea in his life that was his own; and all Greyfriars knew that he would never have got out of the Shell into the Fifth if he had not grown so big that the masters were simply ashamed to see him still a junior. On his own merits he would have stayed in the Shell till he grew a beard. That Coker—Coker the dunce—Coker the duffer—Coker the silly ass—should calmly and cheerfully appropriate the play selected by the Remove Dramatic Society, and announce it as his own selected performance, was a little too "thick." That Coker should think of acting at all was absurd—at least, from a Remove point of view. Coker ought to have been pleased to be admitted to see the Remove performance and to clap the speeches. And the date fixed for the performance was only the morrow. The Fifth-Form dramatists had evidently sprung the thing suddenly on the school so that the Remove players should have no time and no chance to forestall them. It was too bad!

"We're not going to stand it!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"The rotters!"

"Come and see Coker about it," shouted Harry Wharton.

"We'll put it to him plainly. We'll give him some plain English about boning ideas from other chaps!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on!"

There was a rush of the Removites in the direction of the Fifth-Form passage. The Fifth had been out of their Form-room ten minutes or so, and Harry Wharton did not doubt that he would find Coker & Co. there. He was right. As the excited crowd of juniors came swooping up the passage sacred to the Fifth Form the voice of Coker himself was heard proceeding from Coker's study.

"Friends, Romans, and countrymen! Lend me your ears!"

"That's Coker!"

"I'll jolly well lend him a thick ear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bang!

Bob Cherry's boot—a large size in boots—crashed on the half-open door of Coker's study, and it flew open. There was a yell from a Fifth-Form fellow who was standing just inside as the door caught him and projected him across the study. He jumped up in a rage. It was Blundell, the captain of the Fifth.

"What the——" he roared.

The juniors crowded in.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Bulstrode were the first, and behind them

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READ the splendid tale of Tom "HELD TO RANSOM," in this week's "GEM" Library. Merry & Co., entitled: Price One Penny.

were Tom Brown, and Mark Linley, and Leigh, and Vane, and Mauleverer, and Micky Desmond, and Ogilvy, and a crowd more of the Remove. Half the Remove belonged to the Form Dramatic Society, and they took their amateur theatricals very seriously. They crammed themselves into the study, crimson with indignation, and all speaking at once.

"Yah!"

"Rotters!"

"Pilferers!"

"Pickpockets!"

"Frauds!"

Coker of the Fifth stared at them. Coker was a big, powerful fellow, with a somewhat heavy face, good-natured in expression, but with very plain traces of obstinacy in it. Blundell and Bland and Potter of the Fifth were in the study with him, and they all had papers in their hands, with lines of "Julius Cæsar" scrawled upon them in writing more or less decipherable.

"Hallo!" said Coker. "What do you fags want?"

"Yah!"

"Cad!"

"Burglar!"

"Let our play alone!"

"Yah!"

Coker pointed towards the doorway. "Will you fags get out?" he asked politely. "We're rather busy now—rehearsing our new play——"

"Your new play!" shouted Wharton. "It's ours!"

"Ours!" yelled the Remove.

"Ours, you ass!"

"Ours, you bounder!"

"Ours, you rotter!"

Coker smiled indulgently.

"I believe the copyright of Shakespeare's plays has expired," he remarked. "Anybody who likes can perform them. The Fifth-Form Dramatic Society is giving a performance of 'Julius Cæsar' to-morrow evening. You juniors can come if you like. There is no charge for admission. So long as you wash your necks it's all right."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fifth fellows.

"But we'll be obliged if you'll buzz off now," said Coker cheerfully. "We're rehearsing."

"We—we—we—" gasped Wharton, words failing him.

"Wee—wee—wee!" mimicked Potter of the Fifth.

"We've no time to listen to you doing the guinea-pig act now, Wharton! Clear!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're not going!" roared Wharton. "We're going to talk to you! You're not going to perform our play!"

"Rush the bounders!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Come on!"

"Bump them!"

"Wreck the blessed study!"

"Hold on!" yelled Coker, as Bob Cherry commenced operations by seizing him round the neck, and getting his head into chancery. "Hold on——"

"I'm holding on!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I mean leggo! I—— Oh!"

"Pile in!"

"Bump the cads!"

"We'll teach them to steal our play!"

"Hurrah!"

In a moment Coker's study resembled a battlefield. The four amateur dramatists of the Fifth were swept over by the rush of the Removites, and they went down, with the juniors sprawling over them.

"Oh!" roared Coker. "Rescue!"

"Yah!"

"Bump them!"

"Help! Ow!"

"Yaroo!"

Crash!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Rough on the Remove.

PANDEMONIUM seemed to have broken loose in the study of Coker of the Fifth. The Removites were too excited to think or care what they were doing. They rolled the Fifth-Formers over and bumped them, and in the wild struggle the table went flying into the fender, and the bookcase was heaved over with a terrific crash. The din resounded along the Fifth-Form passage, and through the greater part of Greyfriars. Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, and head prefect of the school, came tearing along the passage with a cane in his hand and a very angry face. He stopped in the doorway of the study, and stared at the terrific commotion within.



"This is where we really begin," announced Coker, and, in less time than it takes to tell, the Fifth Former had mounted a chair, and the contents of the treacle-pot were relentlessly poured over Bolsover's head and face. "Groo! Grr-r! Chuck it! You cads!" roared the Remove Form bully. (See chapter 8.)

"Stop that row!" he roared.

"Yah!"

"Rotters!"

"Cheeky fags!"

"Thieves!"

"Booh!"

Wingate frowned. The combatants, seniors and juniors, were too excited to listen to his voice. But his cane was likely to command more attention.

The captain of Greyfriars strode into the study and lashed right and left. Fresh and louder yells arose as the lashing cane stung arms and legs and backs. The fighting crowd separated at last, and the conflict ceased. Then, and not before, Wingate's cane ceased to rise and fall.

"Ow!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Chuck it, Wingate! Yow!"

"Yah! Stop it!"

"Faith, and it's over now!" yelled Micky Desmond.

Wingate grinned.

"Now, what's all this row about?" he demanded. "What are you Lower Fourth kids doing in a Fifth-Form study making a row?"

Coker staggered to his feet. Coker looked an extremely dishevelled object. He was dusty from head to foot, and his collar was torn out, and his hair was like a mop. He held one hand to his nose and the other to his ear, and gasped for breath.

"K-k-kick them out!" he gasped. "Ow!"

"What's the row about?" demanded the Greyfriars captain.

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"Those cheeky fags——"

"Raided us!" gasped Potter. "Ow!"

"They've stolen our play!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Boned it!"

"Filched it!"

"Bagged it!"

"Yah!"

Wingate shook his cane at the vociferating juniors.

"Silence!" he roared.

"But they——"

"They've got our play——"

"They've bagged it!"

"Stolen it!"

"Silence! You explain, Wharton! If you other kids speak, you'll get touched up with this cane! Now then, Wharton!"

"Faith, and I—— Yaroop!"

"I warned you, Desmond. Go on, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton panted for breath.

"They've got our play!" he gasped.

"What play?"

"'Julius Caesar.'"

"Your copy of it, do you mean? A book?"

"Oh, no! The play!"

Wingate looked puzzled.

"I've always understood that Shakespeare wrote that play," he said. "Are you claiming to be the author?"

There was a chuckle in the study.

"I don't mean that," said Wharton. "You see, I founded a Dramatic Society in the Remove, quite a long time ago. Coker has bagged the idea, and founded a rotten thing he calls a Dramatic Society in the Fifth. Of course, they can't act—"

"Never mind that!"

"Very well. We were going to give a performance of 'Julius Caesar' next week, and these horrid bounders have heard of it, and they've bagged it. They've put up a notice in the hall that they're playing 'Julius Caesar' to-morrow."

"Faith, and—Yowp!"

"Yes, I've seen the notice," said Wingate, as Micky Desmond backed away rubbing his arm. "It is quite an original document—"

"I wrote it!" said Coker complacently.

"As far as the spelling goes," went on Wingate. "So it seems that both you sets of young donkeys are going to give the same play."

"Oh!"

"Why can't you do it in peace, instead of rowing?" demanded Wingate.

"But it's our play!" exclaimed Wharton indignantly.

"The same thing can't be given twice. If the Fifth give it to-morrow, we can't give it next Wednesday. It would be absurd!"

"It would be absurd anyway, if you give it," said Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up, Coker!" said Wingate. "Now, what do you kids want?"

"We want Coker to chuck it."

"We want him to stop boning our wheezes."

"That's the music!"

"Yes; rather!"

Wingate wrinkled his brow with a puzzled expression.

"I don't see how the Fifth are to be stopped from giving a dramatic performance if they want to give one," he remarked.

"But it's our play!"

"We selected it!"

"It's ours!"

"What do you say, Coker?" asked the captain of Greyfriars, turning to Coker, of the Fifth.

Coker snorted.

"We're going to give the play to-morrow," he said.

"These kids may have thought of giving the play—"

"You know we did!" yelled Nugent.

"But Fifth Formers can hardly be expected to take much notice of what the Remove kids are doing," said Coker loftily.

"Why, you cheeky rotter—"

Wingate rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, if Coker refuses to drop the idea—" he began.

"And I jolly well do refuse!" said Coker promptly.

And the Fifth Formers chimed in, with emphasis:

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, in that case, Wharton, you must put up with it. Any chap here can perform plays, or make an ass of himself in any other way, if he pleases," said Wingate. "You kids had better buzz off, and don't make any more rows in the Fifth Form passage, or you'll hear from me."

"But, I say—"

"Fair play!"

"It's our play, you know!"

"Well, you kids can play the thing the same evening, or this evening, you know," said Wingate.

"Well, you see—"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Coker generously. "I'll take in half a dozen of the Remove kids as supers—first citizen, second citizen, and conspirators, and so on. That's a fair offer!"

There was a yell of derision from the Remove.

"Rats!"

"Well, that's the best I can do," said Coker. "My advice to you kids is to chuck the idea! You know you can't act. Come and see our play, and learn how to do it! Then—"

"Yah!"

"Rats!"

Wingate laughed.

"Well, no more rows," he said. "Any Remove kid coming into the Fifth Form passage again will be licked! Now buzz off!"

"Look here, Wingate—"

"Buzz off!"

And Wingate, waving his cane, drove the juniors before him out of the study like a flock of sheep. And as they crowded indignantly down the passage, the Removes heard the voice of Horace Coker from behind, in dramatic tones:

"Friends, Romans, and countrymen! Lend me your ears!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Remove Mean Business.

FEELING ran very high in the Remove.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not even go down to footer practice. All their thoughts were given to the unexpected and unjustifiable raid of Coker & Co.

Even the fellows who were not in the Dramatic Society felt as keenly about it as those who were. It was felt to be up against the whole Form.

The Remove were very proud of their amateur theatricals. There was no doubt that they had acted plays, with more or less success, before the Fifth had thought of it. In fact, Harry Wharton & Co. claimed to be the originators of the idea at Greyfriars.

It was true that once a year the Sixth Form gave a Greek play. People listened to it because they had to, as Bob Cherry put it in plain English. Nobody understood a word of what it was about. It was strongly suspected that the Sixth themselves didn't. But the Head listened, nodding with approval, and the school took their cue from the Head; and the visitors, of course, were very proud to hear their sons declaim sounding lines from Sophocles. But the juniors held that that couldn't be considered acting. It was an annual infliction that had to be borne with.

The Remove's Dramatic Society was quite a different matter. They played Shakespeare, and sometimes wrote plays for themselves, which some of them considered a cut above Shakespeare. In fact, on this very occasion, Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, had offered a play called "The Hoboes of Manhattan," written by himself in the American language—an offer which had been declined. Billy Bunter had offered to finish a five-act tragedy he was engaged upon, and had been warned off the course, so to speak. Bob Cherry had so far imposed upon trusting friendship as to read aloud a play in one act to Harry Wharton & Co. on the subject of the death of Brutus. Brutus seemed an unconscionably long time dying to the yawning juniors. When Bob Cherry had finished reading it out, he had asked the general opinion, and it was given in one word:

"Rotten!"

And the play had not been seen since. After long discussion, and generous offers of splendid tragedies and screaming farces from all quarters, the Remove Dramatic Society had decided in favour of their old friend William. Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" had been selected and adopted, and the parts had been assigned, and the rehearsals were going on splendidly. And now, like a bolt from the blue, came the raid of the Fifth. Coker & Co. had borrowed the idea, adopted the very play, and were going to give it on the morrow, a week before the date fixed by the Remove!

It was too much!

The Removes raged, but they were helpless. Certainly, it was impossible for anybody to be forbidden to act Shakespeare if he wanted to. The Fifth had as much right as the Remove to the works of genius bequeathed to us by the immortal William. It was playing it pretty low down, as Fish said, in his language; but it could not be helped. What the Remove were to do was a question.

They held a meeting on the subject instead of going down to football practice. Raiding the Fifth was out of the question. They had tried that, and had had the satisfaction of bumping Coker & Co., but that was all; and now Wingate had forbidden them to enter the sacred precincts of the Fifth Form again. And the captain of the school was monarch of all he surveyed. His decrees were like unto the laws of the Medes and Persians.

Johnny Bull proposed attending the play on Wednesday evening—or Wensday, as Coker had it in his "Notise"—and hissing the performance, and stamping on the floor every time the actors made a speech. That suggestion met with approval, till it was discovered that the Head had promised to be present. Interrupting the play with a riot, in the presence of Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars, was out of the question, and the juniors were compelled reluctantly to drop Bull's idea.

"It's simply rotten!" said Harry Wharton. "They've got us at every point. Fancy Coker having brains enough to do the Remove in this way."

"He hasn't the brains of a bunny-rabbit!" growled Bob Cherry. "It must have been Potter who thought this out for him, or Hobson, of the Shell. Hobson's been given a part in the play—he's Julius Caesar. They've let him have that because Caesar gets killed so soon, and they think by letting a Shell fellow in they'll get all the Shell there to clap."

"And I suppose they will, too!" said Nugent.

Bob Cherry snorted.

"It will be a rotten show," he said.

"I know that. Imagine Coker as Mark Antony!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 199.

READ the splendid tale of Tom "HELD TO RANSOM," in this week's "GEM" Library. Merry & Co., entitled: Price One Penny.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "And Potter as Brutus."
 "Oh, it's too funny!"
 "And we sha'n't be allowed to laugh if the Head's there," said Tom Brown.
 "Rotten!"
 "Not even to pitch a festive egg or two!" remarked Ogilvy.
 "Shame!"
 "They've done us in the eye!" said Bulstrode. "But I'm blessed if I feel like sitting down and taking it quietly! The Fifth will chortle no end."
 "There's what Wingate suggested," said Wharton slowly.
 "What is that?"
 "We could forestall the Fifth by giving the play to-night ourselves."
 "Phew!"
 "No time!"
 "We haven't got a room to give it in. The lecture-hall is being used to-night. Old Prout, of the Fifth, is giving one of his rotten geographical lectures."

EVERY TUESDAY, **The "Magnet"** LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

"I was going to offer to take the part of Brutus—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Look here," exclaimed Billy Bunter, blinking wrathfully at the juniors through his big spectacles, "you know what kind of an actor I am—"
 "Ha, ha! We do!"
 "I'm a dab at amateur theatricals, and I don't think I ought to be kept out of the cast by personal jealousy. As Brutus—"
 "You can have the part of Brutus's father," said Bulstrode.
 Bunter blinked at him.
 "Brutus's father!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know he appears in the play."
 "He doesn't!" said Bulstrode sweetly.
 "Oh, really, Bulstrode—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 The Owl of the Remove blinked angrily at the juniors, and

NOTICE!

Certain silly asses in the school having booked the Remove play, to give it on Wednesday night, the Remove have decided to give it to-night, Tuesday, instead.

Julius Caesar will be performed in the Remove form-room this evening, commencing at seven sharp. All are invited. Fellows who want to bag other people's ideas are invited to come to learn how to act when they bag plays. Fifth-formers will be expected to keep quiet, and not bring toffee or bullseyes in their pockets to eat during the performance.

Signed H. W. Bunter.
 President Remove Dramatic Society.

NOTISE!

The Fifth Form Dramatic Society will give a performance of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar on the evening of next Wednesday. Bunter rises at seven sharp. All are invited and there will be ^{no} charge for admission. Fags are expected to wash and put on clean collars.
 N.B. This also applies to the Remove. Signed Horace Coker!

The above are small reproductions of the two notices which appeared on the notice-board at Greyfriars, and caused the trouble between the rival theatrical companies of the Remove and Fifth Form.

"Just our luck!"
 "We could give it in the Form-room."
 "Good!"
 "And if the seniors go to Prout's lecture instead of coming to our play, so much the worse for them," said Harry Wharton.
 "Hear hear!"
 "Well, I'd almost rather see Coker's 'Julius Caesar' than go to Prout's lecture," said Nugent, with a nod. "I've heard all about the bears he shot when he was in the Rocky Mountains in '95. I'm fed up with his grizzlies!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Lots of the fellows would come," said Harry Wharton.
 "Let's have a last rehearsal immediately after school to-day, and then give the blessed play! We've got all the costumes, and if we're short of scenery we can request the public to overlook it owing to the rush."
 "Good egg!"
 "I say, you fellows—"
 "Shut up, Bunter!"
 "Oh, really—"
 "Buzz off!"

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rolled away. Nothing would convince Bunter that he was not entitled to a name-part in the cast, and to a place in the Form football team, and to several other distinctions. The plainest of plain English on the subject never really enlightened Bunter as to his failings. But to do the Remove justice, they never slackened their efforts to enlighten him.

"It's settled, then," said Bulstrode. "We play 'Julius Caesar' to-night."
 "Yes, rather!"
 "Then we'll stick a notice up!"
 "Good egg!"
 "We'll stick it over the Fifth-Form notice," said Bob Cherry.

"Hurrah!"
 And the amateur actors streamed off to Bulstrode's study to draw up the notice in sufficiently crushing terms. Many heads were better than one in a work of that kind, and besides announcing the play, the Removites wished to convey in the notice what they thought personally of the Fifth. Quite a long document would be required to contain so much, and it was very probable that some of the words would have to be crossed out.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Rival Announcements.

COKER & CO., of the Fifth, came in from football practice looking very ruddy and very contented with themselves. Coker & Co. were very far from considering that they had played it "low down" on the Remove. From the sublime heights of the Fifth, they affected to regard the Remove, or Lower Fifth, as a crew of troublesome fags, who were to be tolerated as patiently as possible, but not otherwise taken notice of. The mere idea of the Remove acting Shakespeare was characterised by the Fifth as "cheek." And if their play had been taken out of their hands they really ought to feel rather pleased and flattered than otherwise at the Fifth recognising their existence in this way. That was how Coker & Co. looked at it, or affected to look at it.

Coker and Potter and Blundell and Greene paused in the hall to look at their notice. They knew how it had exasperated the Remove, and they had a suspicion that the juniors might have done some damage to it.

Coker uttered a sharp exclamation as he glanced at the board. The Fifth-Form Dramatic Society's notice was not to be seen.

"My hat!"

"They've covered it up!" howled Potter.

The Fifth-Formers stared wrathfully at the board. The notice they had pinned up there had a fresh sheet pinned over it, and the second sheet contained a notice written in the firm, clear handwriting of Harry Wharton.

"The cheek!" howled Blundell.

"Oh, read it!" said Greene.

The notice made the Fifth-Formers snort. It ran:

"NOTICE.

"Certain silly asses in the school having boned the Remove play, to give it on Wednesday night, the Remove have decided to give it to-night, Tuesday, instead.

"Julius Cæsar" will be performed in the Remove Form-room this evening, commencing at seven sharp. All are invited. Fellows who want to bag other people's ideas are invited to come, to learn how to act when they crab plays. Fifth-Formers will be expected to keep quiet, and not bring toffee or bullseyes in their pockets to eat during the performance.

"Signed,

"H. WHARTON,

"President Remove Dramatic Society."

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Coker.

"The cheek of it!" said Potter. "They're going to give our play!"

"They're jolly well not!" said Coker wrathfully. "Not after we've been to the expense of engaging a real actor to come down and take the part of Brutus! Why, this would muck up the whole thing!"

"Of course it would!"

"No good giving it to-morrow, if those cheeky kids give it to-night," said Potter.

"Not an earthly bit of good!"

"They've got to be stopped!"

Coker tore the notice down, and tore it into pieces. The Fifth-Form notice was disclosed underneath, but it was not undamaged. Across it was scrawled, with a brush dipped in ink, the expressive monosyllable:

"RATS!"

Coker turned crimson with rage.

"We shall have to write out a fresh notice!" he said, with forced calmness.

"I—I suppose so."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fifth-Formers turned round angrily. A group of Removites in the hall were yelling with laughter. Coker shook his fist at them.

"You young rotters—"

"No good putting a new notice up," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We'll paint 'Rats' across it as fast as you put it up!"

"You young villain!" yelled Coker. "Nobody's allowed to interfere with notices on the school-board, you know that?"

"You've just torn one up yourself."

"H'm!"

There was no denying it. Coker had torn the Remove notice to pieces, and the fragments lay at his feet.

"We'll leave them sticking up together, if you like," said Bulstrode. "Fair play's a jewel. Live and let live!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

Coker tramped away to rewrite his notice. When he returned he found that a duplicate of the Remove paper had already been pinned on the board. His hand went up to it.

but he hesitated. Finally, he pinned his paper up beside Harry Wharton's, and the two notices flourished side by side, for all Greyfriars to read.

Most of Greyfriars read them.

The Sixth read them, and condescended to grin—whether at the cheek of the Remove, or the ambition of the Fifth, or Coker's spelling, we cannot say. The masters read them; Mr. Quelch, of the Remove, and Mr. Prout, of the Fifth, paused together in front of the board, and read the notices with smiling faces. But it was observed that Mr. Quelch smiled more than Mr. Prout did. Harry Wharton's well-written and very neat paper contrasted glaringly with the sprawling handwriting and bad spelling of Coker of the Fifth. Mr. Prout even frowned a little over Coker's orthography. Coker was not a pupil for a Form-master to be especially proud of.

Even the Head paused to glance over the papers, and a smile was seen on his kind old face as he read them.

The notices were still on the board when the juniors went in to afternoon lessons, thinking more about the death of Cæsar and the speech of Mark Antony than about the various branches of knowledge which it was Mr. Quelch's duty to impress into their minds. The selected actors mumbled their lines over their work, much to the detriment of the work. Mr. Quelch had never found his class so uninterested in early Roman history, in maths., or in any other subject. He snapped at Bob Cherry after speaking to him thrice unanswered.

"Cherry?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bob, coming to himself.

"What do you come into this class-room for, Cherry?" demanded Mr. Quelch severely.

"I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him!" replied Bob Cherry. "I—I mean—"

Mr. Quelch stared at him.

"Cherry!"

"I—I'm sorry, sir! I—I was thinking of 'Julius Cæsar,' sir!"

"Take fifty lines!"

"Yes, sir!" said Bob.

"You come into this class-room to learn, not to mumble," said Mr. Quelch. "If more attention is not given to work, I shall detain the whole class one hour."

The Remove gasped. Being detained one hour would mean that the rehearsal would have to be cut! From that moment Mr. Quelch had a model class, and if he had not known the Greyfriars Remove so well he would probably have imagined that they were really keen on study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Talent Not Wanted.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came out of the Remove Form-room greatly relieved to find that none of them had been detained after all. There was only one subject in their minds now—a dress-rehearsal for "Julius Cæsar." The juniors hurried up at once to No. 1 Study to get into costume, and go over their parts to make sure that all was right for the performance. The eyes of Coker & Co. were on them as they went; but the juniors studiously ignored the Fifth. Coker, however, was not to be ignored. He came to the staircase as the Removites went up, and shouted after them.

"Wharton, hold on a minute!"

"Sorry! No time to talk to duffers!" said Harry.

"You cheeky young cub—"

"Rats!"

"Look here!" bawled Coker. "Are you thinking of giving that rotten play to-night, or are you only rotting. If you're going to make fools of yourselves—"

"We're not!"

"Then you've given up the idea?"

"Never had it; we leave that to the Fifth," said Wharton calmly. "You are ever so much better at it than we are."

"Are you going to play 'Julius Cæsar'?" yelled Coker.

"Oh, yes!"

"Then I tell you—"

"Sorry I can't stop!"

And Wharton hurried upstairs after his chums, without waiting to hear what Coker of the Fifth had to tell him. Coker rejoined his comrades in a fuming temper.

"We can't let them do it!" he said.

Potter shook his head decidedly.

"Certainly not!" he exclaimed. "It would spoil the whole thing. We've got to consider Slimfax, too—after engaging an expensive actor, we can't have the thing done over our heads, and our show ruined, by these reckless kids."

And the Fifth-Formers put their heads together over the matter. Meanwhile, Harry Wharton & Co. were changing into costume in No. 1 Study. Although the stage-manager,

H. Wharton, Esq., had considerably cut down the number of characters in the play, there were still enough to fill the study rather uncomfortably, especially when they were arrayed in their Roman garb. But that could not be helped.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Where's my blessed toga?"

"Isn't it in the bag with the others?"

"No; it's gone."

"It was with the rest," said Harry Wharton. "I—"

Hallo! Come in!"

The door opened.

"My only hat!" yelled Bob Cherry. "There's my toga!"

Billy Bunter presented himself in the doorway. The fat junior was arrayed in the garb of a Roman senator. There was a wreath upon his bullet head, and a toga round his fat form, and his manner very plainly indicated that he regarded his appearance in costume as very successful indeed.

"You cheeky porpoise!" exclaimed Bob Cherry angrily. "You've got my togs—I mean my toga!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Peel it off, fathead!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Take it off, you ass! I'm waiting to dress."

"Ahem! Look here, you fellows, I've been trying this on, and I think you must admit that it looks rather stunning."

"Enough to stun anybody," assented Frank Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Off with it, fathead!"

"I think you chaps ought to do the decent thing. I'm perfectly willing to play the part of Mark Antony—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just listen to me while I declaim the lines—"

"Life's too short," said Bob Cherry. "Take that rag off, or I'll have it off you, you silly ass! There's no time to waste."

"Friends, Romans, and countrymen! Lend me your ears—"

"Rats!"

"I come to bury Cæsar, not to raise him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Nugent. "Not to praise him, you ass!"

"Rot!" said Bunter. "I know the lines by heart! Mark Antony meant that he was going to bury the body, and not raise it. Don't interrupt."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I come to bury Cæsar, not to raise him!"

The evil that men do lives after them,

The good is oft interred with their loans—"

"Bones, you ass!"

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt me, Nugent," said Billy Bunter peevishly. "You put me out! I am going—"

"I'll jolly well put you out, too; if you don't go out!" growled Bob Cherry.

"So let it be with Cæsar—"

"Take those togs off!"

"The noble brutes—"

"Cheese it!"

"Hath told you Cæsar was ambitious!"

If it were so, it was a greasy skin—"

"A what?"

"A greasy skin," said Bunter. "That's in my written copy."

"Ha, ha, ha! A grievous sin, you chump!"

"Very well; I don't mind! If it were so," said Bunter, "it was a grievous sin—and grievously hath Cæsar—answered— Yow! Ow! Yaroo!"

Billy Bunter did not mean to say that Cæsar had really answered in that remarkable way; but Shakespeare stopped and Bunter started, suddenly, as Bob Cherry seized the Owl of the Remove by the back of the neck, and shook him.

"Ow! Ow! Leggo! Yowp!"

"Gimme those togs!"

"Ow! Oh, really, Cherry! If you sh-sh-shake me like that you'll m-m-mako my glasses fall off, and—groo!—if you break them you'll have to—ow!—pay for them— Yow!"

Bob Cherry jerked the costume off Bunter. The fat junior was reduced to his underclothing in a few seconds, and Bob Cherry bundled him out of the study. Walker, the prefect, was coming down the passage as Bob Cherry slammed

the door. Walker stopped and stared in blank amazement at Bunter.

"Bunter!" he rapped out.

"Ow! Yow!"

"How dare you go about the passages without your trucks on?" roared the Sixth-Former. "Go and dress yourself at once, you young rascal!"

"Yaroo!"

Smack, smack, smack!

The prefect boxed the fat junior's ears right and left, and Bunter did not stop to explain. He bolted for his study. Walker followed him, helping him along with his boot.

In Harry Wharton's study, the fat junior's yells passed unheeded. The amateur dramatists were busy getting ready for rehearsal.

Harry Wharton, who was stage-manager, had his hands full. As is not uncommon in amateur theatrical societies, many of the members had forgotten their lines, and some of them wanted to spout lines belonging to other fellows; and all the members who had small parts wanted especially to make those small parts into star turns. Wharton had plenty to do to keep them in order.

"Where's that blessed First Citizen?" rapped out Wharton.

"Here I am," said Elliott.

"Go ahead, then!"

"I've been thinking of a slight improvement in this part," said Elliott, looking round for support. "I think the First Citizen doesn't have fat enough—"

"He's got a fat head enough," granted Bob Cherry.

"Look here, Cherry—"

"Get on with the washing!"

"I was thinking of introducing a little humour—"

"Rats!"

"No gags allowed," said Harry Wharton. "Gagging is quite superfluous when you're playing Shakespeare. And there's a lot of humour in that part if you play it well. Get it off your chest, and don't try to improve on Spokeshave—I mean Shakespeare."

"But a little real humour—"

"Wire in, Elliott, or we shall have to cut the part."

Elliott grunted, and wired in. The others followed his lead, and the rehearsal was soon in full swing. It proceeded more or less smoothly as far as the speech of Brutus, after the death of Cæsar. Harry Wharton was Brutus, and he delivered the splendid lines with fine effect. The mob—represented for the present by the chairs and table in the study—listened without interruption.

"Not that I loved Cæsar less, but that I loved Rome more," said Wharton.

Crash!

Wharton got no further.

The study door burst open, and Coker & Co. rushed in.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Ragging the Rehearsal.

"GO for 'em!" yelled Coker.

In a moment all was confusion.

Nine or ten Fifth-Formers had rushed into the study, and the Removites were taken by surprise, and bowled right and left.

Their Roman costumes, too, however effective on the stage, were not calculated to give them free play for fighting, and the study was too crowded for much hitting.

Coker & Co. had it all their own way.

Brutus and Antony and their friends, Romans and countrymen, were bowled over like ninepins, and rolled right and left, under overturned chairs and books and table. Wild yells rang through the study and the Remove passage.

"Yaroo!"

"Help!"

"Ow! Oh!"

"Rescue, Remove!"

"Yowp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker. "Sock it to 'em!"

Crash, crash, crash!

Bump, bump!

GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER OF "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY NEXT TUESDAY.

TWO SPECIAL, LONG, COMPLETE STORIES BY FRANK RICHARDS AND MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Never had a study rag been so sudden and so thorough. In three minutes the study was wrecked, and the amateur dramatists were piled among the wreckage. Ink and cinders and soot smothered the ancient Roman costumes.

"Rescue, Remove!"

The yell rang along the passage.

Removites came running along from other studies, but the damage was done. Coker & Co. retreated into the passage, roaring with laughter. Coker paused in the doorway to deliver a final word or two.

"You'd better chuck it!" he said.

"Ow!"

"Oh!"

"Groo!"

"'Julius Cæsar' is our play, and we're going to play it—tomorrow," said Coker. "We've been to a lot of trouble and expense, getting a London actor to take the leading role, and all that, and we're not going to be done by a set of kids! You fags are to keep off the grass. Do you understand?"

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Rescue!"

"Come on," said Potter, grinning. "We shall have the young bounders round us like a nest of hornets soon!"

"Right you are!"

Coker & Co. tramped away.

The dramatic company slowly sorted themselves out of the wreckage. They sat up amid table, and chairs, and stools, and books, and papers, and cinders, and ashes, and blinked at one another in wrath and dismay.

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Was that a giddy cyclone?"

"Ow! Oh!"

"I'm aching—"

"Yow! So am I!"

"Faith, and it's kilt intoirely I am."

"Groo!"

"Yowp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the passage. And it was not only the Fifth-Formers who were there laughing. The Removites seemed as amused by the disaster as the Fifth themselves could have been. Some of the Remove, like Bolsover, and Snoop, and Stott, and Bunter, and others of the same kidney, were quite pleased. They had offered to take leading parts in the play, and their kind offers had been declined, and they were by no means sorry to see the fall of the dramatic company. But, indeed, the aspect of the wrecked Romans was so funny that anybody might have been excused for laughing as he looked into the study.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bolsover. "Look at them!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Snoop.

"I say, you fellows, you're funny! Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton struggled to his feet. His face was black with ink, and his torn toga was wound round him, and his tin sword was bent and sticking painfully into his ribs. He gasped for breath, and glared at the juniors outside the doorway. But his glare only made his inky face irresistibly comic, and the juniors shrieked hysterically.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!" roared Bob Cherry. "What is there to cackle at?"

"You! Ha, ha, ha!"

Some of the amateur actors could not help grinning as they looked at one another. Most decidedly they were funny to gaze upon. But Wharton was wrathful and dismayed. The raid of the Fifth-Formers had evidently been planned to stop the performance for that evening, and the worst of it was that it would succeed.

For the costumes were practically ruined, and there was no time to clean them and get them in order again. The tin helmets were dented in like concertinas, the tin swords twisted, and the actors themselves were so bumped, and bruised, and flustered, that they were far from being in a condition to go on the stage in an hour's time.

"My word!" said Elliott. "We're done!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the crowd outside.

"Looks like it!" growled Bob Cherry. "Slam the door, for goodness' sake, and shut out that silly cackling."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Slam!

The sound of cackling could be heard, however, through the door. The amateur actors surveyed the ruin wrought by the Fifth-Form raid. Their wrath was deep—almost too deep for words.

"The utter rotters!" said Nugent. "This is playing it low down, if you like! They've mucked up everything."

"Yes; it's rather thick, even for Coker & Co.!"

"We can't act now!"

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READ the splendid tale of Tom "HELD TO RANSOM," in this week's "GEM" Library. Merry & Co., entitled: Price One Penny.

"I—I suppose not!"

"We ought to complain to the Head!" exclaimed Elliott angrily. "The Fifth have no right to raid our study and smash up our things."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"We raided their study to-day and smashed up their things, and bumped them too," he said. "Besides, we can't complain; it would be sneaking."

"That's all very well—"

"And it wouldn't help us if we did," said Harry Wharton. "The worst of it is that the play is announced for seven."

"We might give it a bit later."

Wharton set his lips.

"We'll try. You fellows get the costumes in order, and some of those cackling duffers outside can go and get the stage ready in the Form-room."

"Right-ho!"

Wharton opened the door. Most of the Remove were still laughing, but they were quite ready to make themselves useful. Trevor and Russell and Leigh went down at once to begin in the Form-room. In three minutes they had returned to the study.

"What's the matter?" demanded Wharton.

"Can't get in," said Russell.

"Can't get in where?"

"Into the Form-room."

"Why not?"

"Door's locked and the key taken."

"My hat!"

It was another blow from the Fifth. Coker & Co. were evidently determined that the play should not come off that evening. Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances of dismay.

"Oh, it's rotten!" said Nugent. "They know we can't play the same games on them to-morrow, because the masters and the Head are coming to their show. It's taking a beastly mean advantage! Just like Coker!"

"The rotter!"

"The outsider!"

"We can't smash in the Form-room door," said Wharton thoughtfully, "and it would be no good asking Coker for the key."

"We're done!" said Mark Linley, with a shake of the head.

Wharton set his teeth.

"We must think of some other room," he exclaimed. "What about the junior common-room?"

"The Shell and the Upper Fourth are there, as well as the fags," said Bob Cherry. "They'd stop it, of course; they wouldn't let us appropriate the common-room for the evening."

"And the time's passing," said John Bull.

Wharton breathed hard through his nose. He was exasperated, but it seemed that the Remove were destined to be defeated at every turn.

Wharton changed into his own clothes, and went down to investigate. It was now very nearly seven o'clock, and the amateur actors had had no tea. But they did not mind that so long as they could bring the play off.

There was quite a crowd of fellows round the Form-room door, all laughing. Seniors and juniors seemed to be equally amused by the little difficulties between the rival actors. Wharton tried the door. It was fast, and the key was gone.

"Going to put off the play?" asked Loder, of the Sixth, with a chuckle.

"Oh, rats!" said Harry.

He returned upstairs. As he passed the end of the Fifth Form passage Coker & Co. came suddenly from the shadows, and he was surrounded.

"No play to-night, I suppose?" asked Coker blandly.

Wharton glared.

"Yes, you rotter!"

"I heard," said Blandell, "that the Remove-room was locked up, and you wouldn't be able to get in."

"We shall play it somewhere else, you rotter!" said Harry.

"Oh, will you? Collar him!"

"Hands off!" yelled Wharton. "Rescue, Remove!"

But before the shout was fairly out of his mouth five or six of the Fifth had seized him, and he was being whirled along to Coker's study. He struggled desperately in the doorway, hitting out fiercely, and Blandell and Greene both rolled in the passage; but then he was forced inside and flung into a chair.

"Got him!" gasped Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton leaped up.

"Let me go!" he shouted. "I—"

"Hold him!"



To tell the truth, Coker was not a little proud of leading the star turn along the passage to the lecture hall. The passages were lined with juniors, who thought the whole thing extremely comic. Mr. Slimfax improved the occasion. "Hie, ye merry youths; pay your dimes and swell the company of the gods!" he declaimed. "Hush! you mustn't talk like that to 'em!" said Coker anxiously. (See Chapter 14.)

Wharton was pinioned in a moment. Coker locked the door and put the key in his pocket. The Removeite, in the grasp of three or four of the Fifth, sat and glowered helplessly at the cool and smiling Coker.

"I don't think you'll be giving that play this evening, after all," said Coker agreeably.

And Harry Wharton could not help feeling that he was right.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Held by the Enemy.

"WHERE'S Wharton?"
"Where's that chap got to?"
"Downstairs, I think."
"I've looked for him there."

The Remove Dramatic Society were puzzled. They had not seen their president since he went downstairs to investigate. The time fixed for the performance of "Julius Cæsar" had long passed now. It was nearly eight o'clock, and many of the amateur actors, hungry as hunters, had gone to their studies to snatch a meal. Bob Cherry and Nugent and Bull and a few others, much puzzled by Harry Wharton's remarkable disappearance, went in search of him.

"Where the dickens can he have got to?" Bob Cherry exclaimed.

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Nugent uttered an exclamation.

"The Fifth!"

"What!"

"They've got him, of course!"

"My hat!"

"But the Fifth are bound to be at Mr. Prout's lecture," said Mark Linley.

Nugent sniffed.

"I'll bet you that Coker & Co. aren't at any giddy lecture!" he exclaimed. "They're in the Fifth Form quarters somewhere, and they've got Wharton with them."

"Most likely."

"Faith, and ye're right!"

"I'm going to have a look, anyway," said Frank.

"We're after you."

"Come on!"

Six or seven juniors tramped down the Fifth Form passage in search of Wharton. Most of the studies were dark and empty; the greater part of the Fifth Form, at all events, had turned up in the lecture-room for Mr. Prout. But it was soon clear that Coker & Co. were not with the rest of the Form. There was light under Coker's door, and a sound of voices and laughter from inside the study.

Bob Cherry growled wrathfully.

"They're at home!" he exclaimed.

Nugent tried the door. It was locked on the inside, and he kicked at it.

Coker's voice came from the interior of the study:

"Hallo! Who's there?"

"Us!" replied Bob Cherry. "Have you got Wharton there, you howling cads?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you there, Wharton?"

There was a gurgling sound, as if someone were trying to speak and someone else was holding a bag over his head or a cloth over his mouth. Then came Wharton's voice in breathless, gasping tones.

"I'm here! Rescue—res—"

The voice was cut short again.

There was a gurgle and a slight scuffle, and then all was silent.

"He's there!" said Bob Cherry between his teeth.

Nugent thumped on the door.

"Open this door, you cads!"

"Yah! Open the door, you rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In Coker's study the Fifth-Formers yelled with laughter. They had not the slightest intention of opening the door or of letting Wharton out while there remained the slightest chance of the Remove bringing off the announced performance that evening.

The juniors outside thumped and kicked on the door.

It shook and creaked and rang, but they had as much chance of pushing in the thick stone wall as the heavy oaken door of Coker's study.

They desisted at last, red and flushed and savage. A voice came from within the study.

"Hallo, there!" It was Coker's voice.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, you cad!"

"We've got Wharton tied in the armchair. Every time you bang the door we're going to pour treacle down his neck. You can keep it up as long as you like, but it will be rather rough on Wharton."

"My hat!"

"You rotter!" roared John Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites did not touch the door again. It was useless. They could not possibly open it, and they did not wish to bring about the threatened infliction upon the helpless prisoner in the Fifth Form study.

Bob Cherry raged in the passage, clenching and unclenching his hands, and the other fellows fumed and stamped.

But it was unavailing.

The Fifth had done them this time, and the only thing the Remove could do was to bear it, even if they could not grin.

As they fumed and raged in the passage a voice was heard from the study, and it was the voice of Horace Coker raised in dramatic declamation:

"Friends, Romans, countrymen! Lend me your ears; I come to bury Cæsar; not to praise him—"

"My only hat!" roared Bob Cherry. "If they're not rehearsing our play!"

"The cheeky rotters!"

"The bounders!" shouted John Bull. "Oh, we must get a them somehow!"

He rushed at the door and kicked with all his force. The door creaked and groaned, but it did not give way. There was a muffled yell inside the study, unmistakably in the tones of Harry Wharton.

"First dose of treacle!" called out Potter.

"Oh!" said John Bull.

Frank Nugent dragged him back.

"Chuck it, Bull! Wharton's getting it in the neck!"

"Poor old Wharton!"

"Groo-groo—ow! Yarooogoop!" came from within the study.

"The rotters!"

Coker's voice came cheerfully through the door:

"See what a rent the envious Casca made—"

"The ass!" growled Bob Cherry. "He can play Mark Antony about as well as he can play footer! Yah!"

"And as he plucked the blessed steel away—" went on Coker, after leaving out a line or two; Coker never could remember lines.

Potter interrupted.

"That's not quite right—"

"That will do," said Blundell.

"Mark how the blood of Cæsar followed it!" went on Coker.

"As rushing out of doors to be resolved

If Brutus so unkindly knocked or no—"

"Cheese it!" roared the Remove.

Coker went on, unheeding:

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READ the splendid tale of Tom "HELD TO RANSOM," in this week's "GEM" Library. Merry & Co., entitled: Price One Penny.

"For Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar's angel.

Judge, oh, ye gods, how dearly Cæsar loved him!

"This was the most unkindest cut of all!"

"Is that quite right, Potty?" asked Coker. "It doesn't sound grammatical to me."

"Well, it's Shakespeare's grammar, and you can let it rip," growled Potter. "Get on with the washing!"

"This was the most unkindest cut of all!"

For when the mighty Cæsar saw him jab—"

"Stab, you chump!" roared Potter.

"That can't be right," said Coker, puzzled.

"Yes it is, ass!"

"Sure those are the words?" asked Coker dubiously.

"Yes," yelled Potter.

"Oh, all right!"

"Do get on!" grunted Blundell.

"For when the mighty Cæsar saw him stab, you chump" went on Coker.

"What!"

"That's what Potter said—"

"Oh, you ass!"

"Look here, Potter—"

"Look here, Coker—"

"Oh, I'm fed-up with this!" said Bob Cherry. "Coker's rehearsing makes me ill! Let's buzz off! No good waiting here!"

"Right you are!"

And the juniors departed from the Fifth Form passage. They could not help Wharton, and their attempts at rescue only made matters worse for him. It was nearly an hour afterwards that Harry joined them. He came out of the Fifth Form passage, dusty and dishevelled, and with his collar adhering to his neck with drying treacle. He did not look a cheerful object, and he grinned ruefully as his chums gathered round him.

"I've been through it!" he said. "I wish you hadn't banged on the door, after what Coker said about the treacle—"

"I'm sorry," said John Bull. "We wanted to rescue you—"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"It's all serene; but we're done!"

"Yes; it's a quarter-past nine," said Nugent, glancing at the clock in the common-room. "We are done brown. No prep. done, even; and a row with Quelch in the morning over that."

"Yes; it's rotten!"

"The Fifth have scored all along the line," said Wharton. "I think they've played it a little low down, myself. But they've beaten us, and our play is off! What we've got to make up our minds about is one thing—their play to-morrow is going to be mucked up, too. That's got to be a cert."

"Yes, rather!"

The chums of the Remove were all agreed upon that point. But how they were to "muck up" the Fifth Form play was a problem they had yet to solve.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Raider Ragged.

THE Remove Dramatic Society had expected a great deal of sympathy and indignation in the Form on the subject of the mishap to the play. Indignation there was, at the conduct of the Fifth, but there was not much sympathy for the unfortunate actors. The Removites, and everybody else, persisted in regarding the matter as comic. The Fifth-Formers roared over it, the Shell and the Upper Fourth simply yelled, and even the Remove seemed as if they would never leave off chuckling.

It was really too bad.

Over the notice in the hall announcing the performance of the play in the Remove Form-room that evening a slip was pinned, bearing the ominous words:

"UNAVOIDABLY POSTPONED!"

The school read it, and laughed.

The postponement of the play was certainly unavoidable. The costumes having been ragged, and the Form-room locked up, and the leading actor captured and kept prisoner in Coker's study, it was pretty certain that the play would have to be postponed, and equally certain that the postponement was unavoidable.

Harry Wharton & Co., as a matter of fact, had to endure a great deal of chipping from their own Form, as well as the mirth of the other Forms.

"I say, you fellows, it's simply rotten!" Billy Bunter declared. "The Fifth have scored over us, and the whole coll. is cackling! We ought to have brought the play off, all the same."

"Oh, rot!" growled Bob Cherry irritably. "How could we bring it off, with Brutus looked up in Coker's study?"

"Oh, really, Cherry; I should have been quite willing to take the part of Brutus—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I—"

"Well, Bunter's right, as far as that goes," said Bolsover. "The Remove have been made to look ridiculous, and it's the work of Wharton and Bulstrode and the rest of those silly asses! What I think is that we want a new Form captain."

"Hear, hear!" said Snocp.

"And his name ought to be Bolsover, I suppose?" said Bulstrode sarcastically.

"I don't see why not," said Bolsover coolly. "If I were to take the lead, I shouldn't allow the Form to be let down in this way, I know that."

"Oh, don't gas!" said Bulstrode peevishly.

"The Fifth are cackling over us—"

"Well, stop 'em cackling!" said Bulstrode. "It's easy to talk. Go and stop the Fifth cackling, and then you can jaw!"

"I dare say I could do it if I tried!" said Bolsover.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, you know! Look here, suppose we raided Coker's study, and make a bonfire of the costumes that they're going to us to-morrow evening—"

"Well, it would only serve them right, after the way they treated ours," said Harry Wharton; "but I'm pretty certain that they keep them safely locked up. Besides, Wingate said we weren't to raid the Fifth, and it's no good backing up against the captain of the school. No good getting the Sixth down on us, too!"

Bolsover snorted.

"Who cares for Wingate?" he exclaimed.

"I do, for one," said Wharton quietly. "Wingate's a decent chap, and it's silly rot to pick a row with the head-prefect. We're not up against a chap who has always treated us well."

"Well, I'm not afraid of him," said Bolsover; "and, besides, one of us going to Coker's study isn't exactly a raid."

Bulstrode chuckled.

"You can go if you like," he said. "I fancy you'll come away again quicker than you go."

"I'll jolly well show you!" said Bolsover.

And he swung out of the common-room.

The juniors grinned as he went. Bolsover was a powerful fellow with his fists, and a great deal of a bully. He was a terror to small boys, and to some big ones. But he was not supposed to be specially gifted in a mental way, and nobody believed that he would succeed in getting the better of Coker & Co. But Bolsover had a very strong desire to come forth into the limelight, as it were, as the only fellow who could stand up for the Form at this juncture.

Coker's study was empty. Coker & Co. had gone down to the seniors' room for a chat before going to bed. There was a dying fire in the grate, glimmering in the gloom, but the gas was out and the room deserted.

Bolsover entered quickly, and closed the door. Then he lighted the gas, turning it just high enough to afford him light for what he was going to do. He cast quick glances about the study in search of the Roman costumes. If the costumes were raided, it was pretty certain that the Fifth Form play, as well as the Remove one, would be unavoidably postponed.

There was a large chest under the window, and Bolsover guessed that the costumes were in it. They were not to be seen in the study, and the chest was locked. Bolsover picked up the heavy iron poker from the grate.

Crash!

The lock of the chest cracked and split. Bolsover grinned with satisfaction. One or two more like that, and the Roman costumes would be his.

Crash!

The fact that he would be likely to attract attention did not strike Bolsover. He was out for the Roman costumes, and he meant to have them. The lid of the chest still refusing to open easily, he made merry with the poker.

Crash, crash, crash!

The lid was a mass of splinters. Bolsover proceeded to lift the remnants of the lid away so that he could get at the costumes. He was just screwing up a Roman toga under his arm, when the door of the study opened suddenly, and Coker & Co. appeared. The noise Bolsover made had brought them quickly to their study.

"Seize him!" yelled Coker.

"Out of it!" retorted Bolsover, dropping the toga, and putting himself on the defensive.

Confident, as usual, of his superior strength, he still affected to make light of what Coker & Co. considered as a difficulty.

"The cheek of him, you know!" said Blundell.

"Why don't you go for him?" roared Coker.

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And, suiting the action to the word, he rushed at Bolsover.

"Down with the brute!" said Potter.

And all three closed upon Bolsover.

The bully of the Remove met their rush coolly enough. But, strong as he was, he was not equal to three fellows like Coker, Blundell, and Potter. Coker was also big and strong, and Bolsover found it out to his cost.

"Take that!" he snapped, landing Coker a nasty knock on the mouth.

But Coker did not mind a knock or two, and, backed up as he was by his friends, he gave Bolsover as much as he bargained for. The Remove fellow struggled hard. But it was no use. For once he was receiving punishment instead of administering it. Coker more than repaid that first knock of Bolsover's several times. The bully of the Remove snorted like a wild animal. His nose was uncomfortably swollen.

"But I'll do you beggars; or I'll know why!" he bellowed, after the attentions of Coker & Co. for five minutes. "Take that!"

Coker grinned, and his hand shot up like a flash. He had been expecting something of the sort from Bolsover. As the bully's hand shot out he collared it in both hands. Blundell obliged Bolsover by doing the same for him with the other arm. Bolsover struggled like a lion; but, unfortunately for him, Potter had him round the shins, and in a moment he was graced on the rug.

With hardly any breath left in him, Bolsover still tried to continue the struggle.

But it was hopeless. Coker and Blundell had both his hands behind his back, and, lying with his face to the floor, Bolsover simply had no chance.

"Hand me a cord or something!" shouted Coker. "We'll show the rotter!"

"You'll be sorry for this!" snarled Bolsover.

"Rats! We've got you, old sport!" grinned Coker.

Taking the piece of rope which Potter had found, Coker bound Bolsover's wrists behind him.

"What shall we do with him?" said Blundell.

"I know what I'm going to do!" bellowed Bolsover.

Turning quickly on to his back, he began to land out with his feet.

"Look out!" cried Coker. "Hand me that poker, chaps; I'll jolly soon stop that!"

And one or two "playful" touches with the poker on Bolsover's ankles soon brought the bully of the Remove to "reason."

"Get up!" commanded Coker, prodding Bolsover with the poker. "And if you don't want to be hurt you'd better do as we tell you!"

Bolsover gritted his teeth. But he got up. Coker had made his ankles ache, and he had no relish for another touch with the poker.

"To start with, we're not taking any more risks," went on Coker. "Bind his giddy legs!"

While Coker kept watch and ward over the bully with the poker, Blundell and Potter tied Bolsover's legs together with braces. The bully of the Remove glared at Coker, but he did not attempt resistance. In a moment he was bound securely. He could not move hand or foot.

"This is where we really begin!" announced Coker.

"Bring out that treacle-pot in the cupboard, Blundell!"

Blundell did not quite like Coker's manner, but he complied. Bolsover turned pale.

"If you empty the thing over my head—"

"Ha, ha, ha! He's guessed it first time!" grinned Coker.

In less time than it takes to tell, Coker had mounted a chair, and the contents of the treacle-pot were relentlessly poured over Bolsover's head and face.

"Gr-r-oo! Gr-r— Chuck it! You cads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Time enough, old sport!" grinned Coker.

"Rather!" echoed Blundell and Potter. "We'll teach you to raid our study, my son!"

"I'll half kill you for this!" roared Bolsover, making vain endeavours to get the sticky stuff off his face by wonderful twistings of his countenance. "O-o! Gr-o-o-o-o!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The bully of the Remove was a sight. He seemed to ooze treacle from every pore. His features were unrecognisable for the sticky fluid.

"Let me go!" he yelled fiercely.

"Not till we've done with you!" said Coker grimly.

"You're not half pretty enough yet, Bolsover. We're going to make a giddy example of you before we part."

Handing the treacle-pot to Blundell, Coker took up the fire-shovel. Bolsover, with what little vision Coker & Co. had left him, noted the action with concern. Coker had dived

his arm up the chimney-trap. The shovel came back, laden with soot.

Blundell and Potter grinned with delight. Coker was a treat.

"If you chuck that muck over me—" yelled Bolsover.

"Guessed it again! Would you believe it!" said Coker pleasantly.

"Keep off, you cad!" roared Bolsover, as Coker approached him.

"I'm likely to, ain't I?" grinned Coker.

And without further parley, he poured the soot over the bully of the Remove.

"Geroo! Ooch! Geroo!"

"There's a picture for you!"

"Ain't he nice!" cried Blundell.

"Geroo! Ooch! Gr-r-r!" spluttered Bolsover.

"You came for costume, but, you see, we prefer to give you some make-up, instead," suggested Potter. "Anything else, Coker?"

"No, I think he'll do!" grinned Coker.

And Bolsover would do, indeed. He was a sorry spectacle. He looked something like the old man in "Sinbad the Sailor" might have looked after trying conclusions with a sweep. His face, under its dirty panoply, was twitching convulsively. He struggled madly to get his feet loose, and so far succeeded as to almost get one free.

"Look out!" cried Blundell, to his shrieking companions.

The warning was just in time. In another moment Bolsover would have been kicking the study and its occupants to bits. Coker promptly seized him. The door was flung open, and Bolsover measured his length in the passage outside.

"Ta, ta!" grinned Coker.

"Yaroo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover struggled away down the passage. A crowd of Removites met the Form bully at the end of it. There was a yell of laughter. Bolsover squirmed furiously.

"Let me loose, you fatheads!" he roared. "Yow! Let me loose, you chumps! Untie me, you idiots."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry, laughing almost too much to move, unfastened Bolsover. The Remove bully gave one furious glare round at the juniors, and rushed away, followed by a wild yell of laughter.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton Has an Idea.

BOLSOVER was looking decidedly cross as he came into the Remove dormitory with the rest of the Form at bedtime.

The result of his raid upon the Fifth Form quarters had been far from gratifying to himself, and he had certainly not distinguished himself in the eyes of the Form.

Harry Wharton & Co. grinned as he came in scowling. It was their turn to grin. Bolsover had grinned quite enough over their misfortunes, and he had taken on the task of raiding the Fifth in such a swaggering spirit that he certainly deserved very little sympathy for his failure.

The chums of the Remove would have been glad enough if he had succeeded. After the lawless raiding of the Fifth, anything, almost, was justifiable in getting even with them. Coker & Co. had stopped at nothing to prevent a performance of the Remove play, and Harry Wharton & Co. could not be expected to stop at anything to prevent the Fifth Form performance. But Coker & Co. had been too many for them again. The loss of the costumes would have been irreparable in the time. But Coker & Co. had not lost them. And now they were disposed of in a place of safety.

That idea had to be dropped. Bolsover's scheme was useless. But the chums of the Remove were none the less determined to carry on the warfare. They were discussing it when Wingate came in to see lights out. Wingate was smiling. Perhaps he was thinking of the announcement of the Remove performance of "Julius Cæsar," and the fact that it was "unavoidably postponed."

"Good-night, kids!"

"Good-night, Wingate!"

The light went out.

The dormitory door closed behind the captain of Greyfriars, and the juniors were left to slumber—or, rather, to talk. Nobody was thinking of slumber just then. They had matters far more important to think of.

"It looks to me as if the Remove will have to take it lying down," said Bulstrode despondently. "Coker & Co. have done us in the eye! It's impossible to crow at the performance and boo it, with the Head present."

"Yes, that's so!"

"And we can't get at the costumes."

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READ the splendid tale of Tom "HELD TO RANSOM," in this week's "GEM" Library. Merry & Co., entitled: Price One Penny.

"Faith, and ye're right."

"Of course they can't act," said Bulstrode. "The play will be a failure as far as that goes, but I don't suppose Coker minds that. So long as he can put on a toga, and spout out Mark Antony's lines, he'll be happy."

"The audience won't," said Tom Brown.

"No, but Coker doesn't mind that."

"And the play won't be quite rotten, either," said Frank Nugent. "They're going to have a real actor down from London, and he's going to coach them a bit in the parts, and take the role of Brutus himself."

"That will cost money," said Hazeldene.

"Coker's got heaps of money."

"Of course, we can't expect to compete in that sort of thing," remarked Vane. "But our acting would have been miles better."

"Of course it would!"

"Only a professional man in the cast will pull the thing together, especially with the tips he can give them," said Wharton. "It was jolly deep of Coker. As a matter of fact, he's borrowed our idea of a dramatic society, and improved on it. I wonder what his man Slimfax is like. I heard them bragging that he was a first-class actor."

Bob Cherry snorted.

"A first-class actor wouldn't come down to take a part in a schoolboy play!" he said.

"No fear!"

"I suppose he's resting, as they call it," said Wharton.

"Out of a berth for a time, and glad to earn a couple of guineas and his railway fare. Coker can easily afford that. I believe Coker's stood most of the expense of the dramatic society. The other chaps wouldn't give such a duffer a leading part, excepting for that."

"Yes, rather."

"And Slimfax, the professional, will make the rotten thing a success!" said Nugent disconsolately. "We're done!"

"I wonder—"

"Well?"

"I wonder—" Wharton paused again.

"Oh, get it off your chest!" said Bob Cherry.

"I wonder whether anything could be done with Slimfax," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "Anybody know what time he's coming?"

"I heard Coker say he would be here a couple of hours before the performance. He's going to coach them."

"And the performance is at seven," said John Bull.

"Then he gets here at five," said Harry Wharton reflectively. "I suppose he'll come by the four-thirty at Friar-dale."

"Most likely."

"And as it's half-holiday to-morrow, the Fifth beggars will be having a dress rehearsal, and will have everything ready when he comes."

"I suppose they will," said Nugent, puzzled. "What are you getting at, Harry?"

"I was thinking—"

"Thinking what?"

"Suppose he didn't come!"

"Didn't come!" said Bulstrode.

"Yes."

"But why shouldn't he come?"

"He might be stopped," said Harry Wharton, sinking his voice to a whisper.

"My hat!"

The juniors were silent now. The idea that had come into Harry Wharton's mind was a rather startling one, but it favourably impressed the chums of the Remove. But the dormitory was not the place to talk it over.

"My only chapeau!" repeated Bob Cherry, after a pause.

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"Mum now!" said Harry. "We'll talk it over in the morning. Walls have ears, you know."

"Good egg!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Go to sleep. Bunter!"

"What are you fellows talking about?"

"The subject under discussion."

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"Oh, go to sleep!"

"If you chaps are arranging a feed—"

"Ha, ha, ha! We're not!"

"Oh!" grunted Bunter. "Why couldn't you say so, then?" And the fat junior closed his eyes and settled himself to sleep. Anything but the arrangements for a feed did not seem to Billy Bunter worth staying awake to listen to.

Harry Wharton was still thinking over his idea when he fell asleep, and he dreamed of the most exciting dramatic adventures. He was Julius Cæsar, having the gloves on with Brutus in the gym, when the rising-bell awoke him in the morning, and he came back to the world of realities.

Bolsover turned out of bed rather painfully. He was still stiff from the rough handling he had had in Coker's study the previous evening, and there were still traces of treacle and soot about his hair and his ears. He was in a very bad temper that morning, and he buzzed a pillow at Bunter when that tactless youth asked him how he felt.

But Harry Wharton was looking unusually cheerful. His idea was working in his mind, and taking definite shape there. The Fifth Form were not to have things all their own way, after all!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Coker Is Willing.

COKER & Co. were punting a ball about in the Close when Harry Wharton & Co. came down. They paused to glance at the Removites, with grinning faces, as the latter came out into the Close for a run before breakfast. The Removites took no notice of the Fifth Formers. They walked on with their noses high up in the air, and with expressions of lofty disdain upon their faces. At which Coker & Co. grinned the more.

Under the elms, leafless now in the wintry winds, Harry Wharton & Co. could discuss their latest idea without fear of eavesdroppers. Most of the Remove, it is true, could be relied upon in a matter against the Fifth. But it was safest when a plot was being plotted to keep the knowledge of it to a select circle.

"I've been thinking over that wheeze," said Harry Wharton abruptly, "and I don't see why it shouldn't work."

"About Slimfax?"

"Yes. He's pretty certain to get down from London by the four-thirty at Friardale, and, anyway, we can find out. The Fifth are swanking about having a real actor coming down to help them, and they're not keeping anything about it a secret. Suppose we meet Mr. Slimfax at the station?"

"That's easy enough," said Nugent.

"Quite easy, and without the Fifth knowing it, either," remarked Bulstrode. "They were getting their props ready for the play, and getting through a dress rehearsal. I know they're going to have a full dress rehearsal this afternoon. Coker's been telling all the Fifth that they've got to stand by him, and see that the rehearsal isn't interrupted by any juniors. We sha'n't have a chance to rush them."

"But that will leave us a clear field at the station," said Wharton. "I don't know what this man Slimfax is like, but I've no doubt we can handle him."

"Nobody at Greyfriars has ever seen him, I suppose," said Bulstrode. "I hear that Coker got him through a dramatic agency. Of course, Coker hasn't any personal acquaintances in the theatrical profession."

"I suppose not. But what I was going to say is this. Whatever sort of a man he is, half a dozen of us could handle him."

"Handle him!" said Nugent, with a whistle.

"Yes," said Wharton firmly. "We meet him at the station, and he comes with us quite without suspicion, as we're Greyfriars chaps. We take him away, and keep him away. It's quite simple. We'll see that he doesn't lose anything by it. Coker won't pay him if he doesn't turn up, but we can have a whip-round to raise the money for the fee. Of course, it wouldn't be fair to make the chap lose money. But if he's paid, he'll have no cause to grumble; and, anyway, if he does grumble, it won't hurt us."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quite so!"

"If he agrees to take the train back to London, well and good. If he doesn't, we'll keep him under our eyes," said Wharton; "and when their special London actor doesn't arrive, I rather think that the Fifth will look blue."

"Yes, rather!"

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Next Tuesday: **GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER OF THE "MAGNET."**

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ONE
PENNY.

"It's a bit risky," said Bulstrode thoughtfully, "but I think we can do it. Anyway, I'd be willing to take a lot of risk to muck up their show, as they've mucked up ours. All's fair in war, and the Fifth haven't stuck at much to bust our show."

"They've stopped at nothing," said Harry, "and we're going to stop at nothing, either. We've got to find out for certain if the chap arrives by the four-thirty, and be there to meet him; and the rest ought to be easy."

And that was decided upon.

There were grinning faces to greet Harry Wharton & Co. when they came in to breakfast. The broadest grins came from the Fifth Form table. But the juniors did not mind. They thought that the Fifth would cease grinning before the day was over.

It was not at all difficult to obtain the information they desired. Coker was a little given to swanking, and he was exceedingly proud of the fact that an actor was coming down from London to take a role in the Fifth Form play. All the circumstances connected with Mr. Alfonso Slimfax, of the Theatre Royal Somewhere, were known, and were talked over by the Fifth, for all Greyfriars to hear.

Mr. Slimfax was coming down by the four-thirty, and was expected at Greyfriars before five o'clock. During the afternoon there was to be a full-dress rehearsal of "Julius Cæsar" by the Fifth Form company. It was a fine clear day for football, but the heroes of the Fifth did not give a single thought to the great winter game. They were too busy with theatricals.

In season and out of season the Fifth players recited their lines. Fellows were heard in the passages, and the studies, and the Form-rooms, and the Close, and the Cloisters declaiming their parts in dramatic tones.

From Mark Antony down to the First Citizen, the company were keen and enthusiastic. In the fulness of his heart, at the anticipation of histrionic triumphs, Coker condescended to extend the olive-branch to the much-injured Remove. He met Harry Wharton when the Lower Fourth came out after morning lessons, and tapped him on the shoulder in a patronising way. Harry looked at him.

"Quite sorry about your play," said Coker affably.

"All serene!" said Wharton. "You'll be sorrier before we've done with you."

Coker grinned.

"Look here," he said, "we bear no malice!"

"I should jolly well think you don't, when you've done all the damage."

"Ahem! What I mean is, we're willing to let bygones be bygones, and look over the whole matter," said Coker generously. "We'll let you kids come to the performance."

"Oh, we'll come!"

"You'll have to be quiet, of course. The Head is going to be present, and so is Mr. Quelch, and our Form-master, Prout. You won't be able to do any stamping or ragging, you know. The prefects would jump on you at once," Coker explained.

"We don't want to stamp."

"Then you're going to take it quietly?"

"Very quietly."

Coker looked at him suspiciously.

"Look here, Wharton, if you're thinking of some rotten game—"

"Oh, rats!"

"The best thing you can do is to take the matter quietly," said Coker. "It was like your cheek to set yourself up against the Fifth, in the first place, and you should have expected to get it in the neck. We're willing to let bygones be bygones, and you can come and see the play."

"More rats!"

Coker looked wrathful. Harry Wharton walked away with his chums, leaving the Fifth-Former standing in the passage. Coker rejoined Potter and Blundell.

"Looks to me as if Wharton's got some idea of interrupting the performance," he remarked.

Potter shook his head.

"Couldn't be done, with the Head there," he said. "He's only ratty. And they can't interrupt the rehearsal, as we're going to have nearly all the Form on the watch, and the Shell are backing us up now Hobson's in the cast. Wharton can go and eat coke; he can't hurt us."

"Well, I suppose you're right," agreed Coker.

"Let's get the things ready for the rehearsal."

"Good!"

And the Fifth-Formers were soon busy, and forgot all about the Remove. But the Remove did not forget.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Cash In Advance.

"FOOTER this afternoon?" asked Hazeldene, after dinner. Harry Wharton shook his head. "Not for us!" he said. "You chaps can play. In fact, it's just as well to get up a scratch match, and give the Fifth the impression that we're busy."

"What are you doing?" asked Russell.

"Going out."

"Where?"

"On the warpath."

"Up against the Fifth?" asked Leigh.

"What-ho!"

"Good!"

The juniors did not ask any more questions. If Harry Wharton had intended to take them into the secret he would have told them all. At present there were five fellows in the little plot for the discomfiture of the Fifth—Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent, Bulstrode, and John Bull. Five were quite enough to "handle" Mr. Alfonso Slimfax, if he required "handling," and quite enough to keep the secret.

"I'll tell you more about it later, kids," said Harry. "It's better not to jaw too much at first; there are too many ears about. You fellows get up a footer match, while we go out, and keep mum."

"Right you are!"

And a crowd of Removites went down to the footer-ground a little later, Harry Wharton & Co. going with them. It was not necessary for the heroes of the Remove to leave yet.

Coker & Co. looked out of the window of the Fifth Form-room, where they were preparing for their dress rehearsal, and grinned as they saw the Remove trooping off to the playing-fields.

It certainly looked as if the Lower Fourth had dropped the idea of any further interference with the Fifth.

"They're quite done!" Coker remarked.

"Yes, rather!" agreed Blundell. "We've done them brown; and serve them jolly well right for their cheek. The Remove have wanted putting in their place for a long time. Let 'em come and see our performance, and clap; that's their business."

"Yes, rather!"

And the Fifth-Formers went on with their rehearsal contentedly. They wanted to get it through before the arrival of Mr. Slimfax at Greyfriars.

On the footer ground, Harry Wharton & Co. joined in the scratch match, and played out the first half. Then they quietly changed, in the pavilion, and strolled away towards the gates, leaving the other fellows still playing, with fresh players in their places in the team.

One pair of eyes, however, noted their defection, and they belonged to Billy Bunter. The fat junior rolled after them. Harry Wharton & Co. quickened their pace, and the fat junior broke into a run.

"I say, you fellows!" he shouted.

Wharton snapped his teeth.

"The fat rotter!" he muttered. "Of course, he was bound to spot us. Better stop!"

The juniors slackened down again. Billy Bunter came up puffing and blowing breathlessly.

"Don't hurry, you fellows!" he gasped.

"What do you want, Bunter?"

"I'm coming with you."

"Bosh! You're not!"

"Look here, Wharton, it's not fair to leave me out of a feed."

"You ass! There's no feed on!"

"Then what are you going out for?"

"We're going to Friardale," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, but what for?"

"Mind your own bizney." Bunter blinked at him.

"That's all very well!" he exclaimed. "But I suppose I can go to the village, too, if I like? Under the circumstances—"

Bob Cherry clenched his hand.

"Look here, we don't want you!" he exclaimed. "Why can't you buzz off and let a fellow alone? Go and eat buns."

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"The fact is, I'm rather short of money," said Bunter, blinking at the chums of the Remove. "I was expecting a postal-order this morning—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Oh, really, Nugent, I was expecting a postal-order, but it hasn't arrived, somehow, and I'm stony for the present. Of course, it's simply a delay in the post, and the postal-order will be here by the next delivery. I wonder if you fellows would hand me the cash in advance, and take the postal-order when it comes?"

"Go and eat coke!"

"It's for five bob," said Bunter persuasively.

"Rubbish!"

"Oh, all right! I'm sincerely sorry you can't trust a fellow, Bob Cherry. I shouldn't like to have a suspicious nature like yours. But I'm coming to Friardale."

The chums of the Remove glared at Billy Bunter. He did not know what they were going to the village for, but he knew that they did not want him, and he meant to make the most of it.

"If you could oblige me by cashing my postal-order in advance, you fellows, I could go in to Mrs Mumble's and have a bit of a feed," said Bunter.

"Here you are, you fat bounder!" said Harry Wharton.

He tossed two half-crowns to the Owl of the Remove. It was worth the monetary sacrifice to keep Billy Bunter's eyes off them that afternoon. Bunter might be short-sighted, but he had a way of finding things out, and he would have had no scruple about selling his information to the Fifth if he had discovered the Remove plan.

Billy Bunter caught the half-crowns, and blinked at them with satisfaction. The juniors turned away.

"I say, you fellows—"

Bunter rolled after them. Bob Cherry turned upon him so fiercely that the Owl of the Remove started back in alarm.

"What do you want now?" roared Bob

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"What is it, you fat chump?"

"Now I come to think of it," said Bunter, "my postal-order will most likely be for ten shillings. If you could give me the other five—"

"You—you—you—"

"Well, I want to treat you chaps generously," said Bunter. "Suppose you give me another four, and that will make nine. I'll hand you the whole of the postal-order when it comes, so you make a shilling clear profit. I—Ow! Yow!"

Bump!

Billy Bunter descended upon the hard ground with a bump that made him ache all over. Then the juniors walked out.

"Beasts!" howled Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. disappeared through the gateway, and Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet and set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose. He dusted his trousers, and rolled away towards the school shop. After all, he had the five shillings, and five shillings would go a long way, expended in tuck, even with Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked down to the village in the gathering dusk of the winter afternoon. They arrived at Friardale Station at a quarter-past four.

"Heaps of time!" John Bull remarked.

"Yes, rather! Let's get into the station."

The porter touched his cap to the juniors as they went in. Harry Wharton & Co. were well known there, and popular, too, as they were very liberal with tips. The five juniors went upon the platform to wait for the train to come in. The London train came as far as Courtfield, where passengers for Greyfriars had to change into the local to Friardale.

The local train was descried at last puffing down the line.

"Here she comes!" said Bulstrode.

"Good!"

The train came puffing in. The juniors watched it eagerly. Only one passenger alighted, and he was unmistakable. He was a short, plump man, and his clean-shaven face, with traces of grease-paint still to be discerned upon it, his shabby black soft hat, worn at a rakish angle over oily curls, his wide-open collar

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Mr. Slimfax listened with a critical air while Coker declaimed his lines behind the scenes. He interrupted frequently without the slightest regard for the growing rage of the amateur actor. "More free action, my boy!" exclaimed Mr. Slimfax. "You don't want to recite like a horse. Don't wave your hand, it's ungrateful! And speak up!" (See Chapter 15.)

and gorgeous necktie, and the bag in his hand, all betrayed the actor. It was, undoubtedly, Mr. Alfonzo Slimfax, and the juniors could have picked him out anywhere as a third-rate actor with whom fortune had not dealt kindly.

Mr. Slimfax stepped upon the platform, and walked at once in the direction of the exit.

Five juniors stepped into his path, all raising their hats at the same moment.

"Mr. Slimfax?" said Wharton.

The gentleman with the oily locks looked at him.

"That is my name."

"Going to Greyfriars?"

"Yes."

"Very pleased to meet you, sir," said Wharton politely.

"We belong to Greyfriars, and we've come to meet you at the station."

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Slimfax the First.

MR. SLIMFAX bowed gracefully to the juniors. Like many gentlemen in the histrionic profession—especially the second-rate gentlemen in that profession—he was an actor off the stage as well as on it. As a sweep finds it difficult to get rid of his soot during his hours of leisure, or a tanner to get rid of the smell of the tanyard, so the hero of the footlights finds it difficult, if

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not impossible, to abandon stage manners and customs in private life.

Mr. Slimfax was no exception to the rule. He would ask for a pot of beer in the voice of Hamlet, and greet a man he met every day as if he were a long-lost brother. He would talk about the weather in a Napoleonic attitude, and dispute with his laundress with his voice at the "So-much-for-Buckingham" pitch.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Slimfax, "I am pleased to meet you. I am honoured!"

"The honour is on our side, sir," said Frank Nugent solemnly. "We don't have a chance of meeting a great London actor every day!"

It was the first time in his career that Mr. Slimfax had heard himself alluded to as a great London actor. He came very near hugging Nugent to his manly bosom at that moment.

"It's a great pleasure to meet you, sir, indeed," said John Bull, sincerely enough.

The whole scheme of the Removites depended upon their meeting Mr. Slimfax.

"Aha! You are Master Coker, I presume?"

"Oh, no, sir! Coker's busy," explained Wharton. "They're rehearsing this afternoon. We belong to another Form, and we've come to meet you on our own account."

"That is indeed very kind of you, young gentlemen," said

Mr. Slimfax. "Perhaps you will show me the way to Greyfriars School, then? I am a stranger in the land."

"This way!" said Wharton.

He led the way out of the station. Mr. Slimfax followed him unsuspectingly. Johnny Bull insisted upon carrying the great man's bag, and the great man willingly allowed him that honour. The bag was heavy. Nugent and Bull carried it between them as they left the station with Mr. Slimfax.

It was already getting dusk, and there was a slight mist in the village street. Mr. Slimfax pulled his shabby coat a little tighter about him, and shivered a little. He cast a glance towards the gleaming lights of the Red Cow, near the station, and then looked dubiously at the juniors.

"Ahem!" he remarked.

"This way!" said Wharton.

"Ahem! On a misty evening," said Mr. Slimfax, "I generally take a little liquid of an alcoholic nature to clear my throat before a performance. I am not, of course, a drinker—I despise such—but my throat has to be taken great care of. Perhaps you young gentlemen will wait a few minutes while I step into this hospitable hostelry and obtain the necessary fluid?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Wharton.

"I will detain you but a brief minute."

Mr. Slimfax stepped into the Red Cow, and the folding doors swung to behind him. The juniors looked at one another. Judging by the hue of Mr. Slimfax's nose, and the general colour-scheme of his countenance, he was in the habit of lubricating his throat in this way at very frequent intervals during the day and the night, and they guessed that he would detain them a very long minute. They were right.

Fully ten minutes had elapsed when Mr. Slimfax emerged into the street again, wiping the back of his hand suggestively over his mouth as he came forth. The tint of his countenance had deepened, and there was a look in his eyes that recalled the expression of a codfish. But he seemed to be in a very kind and merry humour.

"Just three minutes," he remarked, glancing at his watch. The watch did not go, which perhaps accounted for Mr. Slimfax's mistake in the time. "Let us hence, my young friends."

And they started again. They left the village behind, and tramped down the lane in the direction of Greyfriars, and then crossed a stile into the footpath through the wood. Mr. Slimfax looked a little surprised, but he concluded that it was a short cut, and followed the juniors without any remark. They tramped on through the deepening dusk, under the leafless trees, through heaps of fallen, rotting leaves. Mr. Slimfax paused at last.

"The way grows long and lonesome," he remarked. "Might I inquire whether there is any—ahem!—place of liquid refreshment near at hand? My throat is bad again."

"I dare say it's often bad, sir," said Nugent sympathetically.

"Ahem! You see—"

"We stop here," said Harry Wharton, halting.

Mr. Slimfax halted, too, and gazed round him in astonishment. He was surrounded by gaunt, leafless trees and dead leaves and straggling bushes. There was no sign of the school, and no sign of any human habitation.

"Say, where may we be?" he inquired. "I understood that you were guiding me to the ancient scholastic establishment—"

"Sorry!" said Wharton politely. "Would you mind waiting a few minutes, while we explain to you?"

"My hat! This is a trick!"

"Quite so."

"Where am I?" exclaimed Mr. Slimfax, now genuinely alarmed.

"You are in the middle of Friardale Wood," said Wharton. "You couldn't possibly find your way out alone; and if we left you, you'd wander about here all night."

Mr. Slimfax stared at him speechlessly.

"It's a little game," Wharton went on to explain; "but it's not up against you, sir. We have been treated badly by that Coker chap, who's sent for you to come to Greyfriars, and we're going to deprive him of your services. See?"

"Muck up his play!" explained John Bull.

Mr. Slimfax raised his hand.

"By my faith! A scurvy trick!" he exclaimed.

"Wait till we explain," said Wharton.

Mr. Slimfax struck an attitude.

"I wait!" he replied.

Wharton explained. In concise terms he told of the arranged play, of the unexampled villainy of Coker & Co. in collaring it, and of their violent interference to prevent the performance coming off. Wharton dwelt eloquently on the subject, and the other juniors chimed in, with all the more emphasis as they detected a lurking grin upon Mr. Slimfax's face.

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"Now, what do you think of that?" wound up Wharton.

"If this be so, then you have had much wrong," said Mr. Slimfax, whose remarks often ran into blank verse.

"My youthful friends, it was a scurvy trick."

"So we're going to muck up their play in return," Wharton explained. "They're expecting you to arrive, and you won't arrive. See?"

Mr. Slimfax looked troubled.

"But, although I sympathise with you most heartily, my young friends, I am under an engagement to play to-night for Master Coker," he said. "I cannot break my engagement."

"You can't keep it," said Wharton. "You couldn't find your way to Greyfriars without our help."

"Oh!"

"The question is, whether you give in willingly or unwillingly," said Nugent. "We don't want to give you trouble, Mr. Slimfax. But we can't let you go to Greyfriars."

"But—but—" Mr. Slimfax looked very distressed. "Hear me yet. There are the base and vulgar considerations of mere money; I'm not rich. Not to put too fine a point upon it, I have been resting for a considerable time, owing to the jealousy and envy of a group of actor-managers in London, and I had to borrow my railway-fare here this evening. If I lose my fee, you perceive that I am placed in a most awkward situation."

"Oh, that's all right!"

"Ahem! It does not appear all right to me," said Mr. Slimfax severely. "When I return to London, I have to continue an argument which my landlady commenced to-day before I left, and without money in my purse, young gentlemen, I shall get decidedly the worst of the argument."

"But you won't lose your fee, sir."

"Master Coker will not pay me unless I appear—"

"But we will!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Slimfax.

"Tell us what your fee is, and we'll pay it, and an extra guinea, sir, for the trouble we've given you," said Wharton.

"That alters the case," said Mr. Slimfax, becoming more cheerful at once. "I sympathise with your wrongs from the bottom of my heart. And I do not deny that there is a select circle of kindred spirits in a certain place, not far from the Strand, to whom I should be overjoyed to return immediately if I could but return with cash in my pockets. As for Master Coker, I can write to him, and explain that I was not to blame."

"Of course! Besides, we shall explain to-morrow, and we shall make it quite clear that we guided you into the wood, sir, and you couldn't help yourself."

"Then only one question remains—ahem!"—said Mr. Slimfax, with a cough—"whether you have the necessary funds, young gentlemen?"

"How much, sir?"

"If I must descend to the commonplace vulgarity of naming a sum of money," said Mr. Slimfax, with a sigh, "my fee was to be two guineas for the evening, and a guinea expenses."

"We'll make it four, sir, with pleasure!"

"My young friends, you overwhelm me!"

"And you'll promise to return at once to London, sir, and not communicate with Coker in any way until to-morrow, if we pay up and guide you out of the wood?" said Wharton.

"On my honour, as a gentleman, sir!" said Mr. Slimfax.

Bob Cherry dexterously turned a chuckle into a cough.

"It grows chilly in these woods of an evening," he remarked.

"It does—it does," said Mr. Slimfax. "I shall be glad to leave this spot, sylvan and interesting as it is. My throat—ahem!—is very bad."

Wharton was counting money from a little bag. The plotters had made a whip round for the expenses, and John Bull and Mauleverer, the two richest fellows in the Remove, had contributed handsomely.

Four golden sovereigns and four shillings were handed over to Mr. Slimfax, who pocketed them with a great deal of pleasure. And Mr. Slimfax's manner indicated very clearly that he was only too anxious to get back to town, now that he had a supply of cash in his pockets. It was very probable that his throat would receive a great deal of attention that evening.

"Ahem! I thank you, young gentlemen—I thank you!" said Mr. Slimfax. "I shall be glad to learn the way back to the station."

"We're halfway to Courtfield now, sir," said Wharton. "Better strike in that direction, and you can catch the five-thirty express for London."

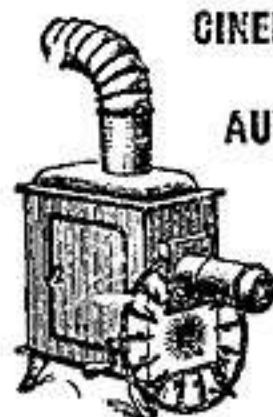
"Very good—very good indeed!"

"Bull and Nugent will take you to the station, as you

(Continued on page 18.)

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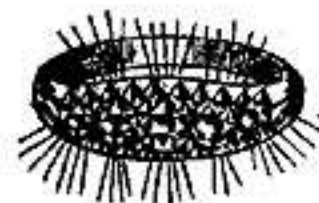
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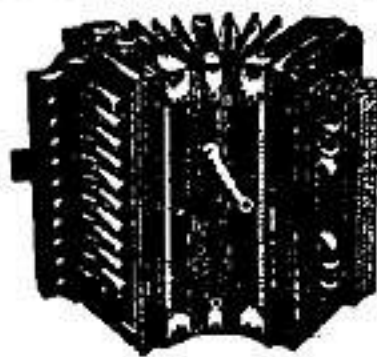
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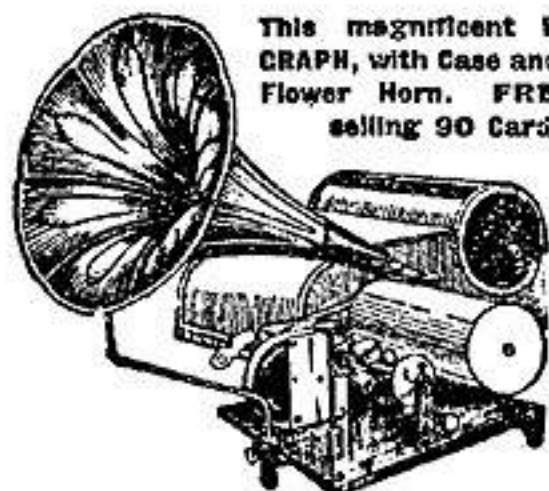


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don't know the way," said Harry Wharton. "You fellows don't mind?"

"Certainly!"

"Farewell!" said Mr. Slimfax, with a wave of his shabbily-gloved hand to the juniors as he departed. "Our short acquaintance has been productive of pleasure and—ahem!—profit. I trust that some day I shall have the pleasure of receiving you in a palatial theatre in London, when the name of Alfonso Slimfax rings through the land. Farewell!"

The juniors grinned.

"Good-bye, sir!"

Mr. Slimfax disappeared in the darkness with Nugent and John Bull. Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Bulstrode took their way back to Greyfriars. Bob Cherry and Bulstrode were chuckling, but Harry Wharton was strangely silent. Bob Cherry slapped him on the shoulder.

"We've done them, Harry!" Bob exclaimed.

"Yes!"

"What are you thinking about?"

"I've got an idea!"

"Another one?"

"No, the same—only this is the rest of it! It's only just occurred to me! My hat!"

"Well?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the——"

"Coker & Co are expecting Alfonso Slimfax——"

"Oh, I know they are!"

"It seems a shame to disappoint them!"

Bob stared.

"What!"

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Bulstrode.

Wharton chuckled.

"I mean what I say!" he replied. "They're expecting Slimfax, and it seems a shame to disappoint them, so I vote we don't do it!"

"You don't want to fetch Slimfax back——"

"Oh, no!"

"What then?"

"Find another!"

"What!"

"What's to prevent another Slimfax going to Greyfriars, and taking in Coker & Co. all along the line?" roared Wharton.

"My hat!"

"It's easier to make up as a hairy, baggy boulder like Slimfax than as Julius Cæsar—and I can do that!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Bob Cherry.

He stared blankly at Harry Wharton for some moments. Then he burst into a roar that rang through the trees.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Slimfax the Second.

"FRIENDS, Romans, countrymen! Lend me your ears!" It was the voice of Coker of the Fifth. It sounded from the Fifth Form-room, as three juniors came into the School House. The three exchanged a grin.

"There he goes!" said Bob Cherry.

"They're not through the rehearsal yet, then," said Bulstrode. "That's hardly the middle of the play!"

"All the better; they won't be looking for Slimfax!"

"Good egg!"

The Removites hurried up to Harry Wharton's study. On the way back to the school they had discussed Wharton's scheme in all its bearings. It was a startling plan enough; but the very audacity of it made it likely to succeed. The Fifth were looking for nothing of the sort—it was too utterly unheard-of! When Mr. Slimfax arrived, if he did arrive, the Fifth would take him at face value, as Bob put it; there was no reason why they should have the slightest suspicion.

And if the scheme should fail, it would be no worse than not trying it. But Wharton was convinced that it would succeed.

There was no time to lose. The various "properties" belonging to the Remove Dramatic Society were turned out at once, and selections made. A character such as that of Mr. Slimfax was one of the easiest to assume. Baggy clothes, and a shabby overcoat, and a slouched soft hat, were what were chiefly required, and these wants were easily met. Wharton locked the door of the study, and proceeded to make up.

A little padding was judiciously disposed of about him, and then he donned the shabby clothes. Bulstrode and Bob Cherry lent their aid at making up his face, and the complexion of Mr. Slimfax was artistically reproduced. Even if the Fifth noticed grease-paint upon his face it was not likely to excite remark. They would naturally expect something of the sort in a professional actor.

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Grease-paint and wrinkles added twenty years to Wharton's age as soon as he was in man's clothes. As for size, that was no difficulty, as Wharton was taller than the genuine Mr. Slimfax.

The juniors kept Mr. Slimfax's appearance in their minds' eye as a model, but there was no need to make Wharton his actual double, for the professional gentleman was quite unknown at Greyfriars, and no one there knew him by sight.

The handle of the door was suddenly tried, and Bob Cherry, who was dabbling at Wharton's cheek, dabbed in his eye.

"Yow!" roared Wharton.

"Oh! Sorry! I——"

"Hallo! What's this door locked for?" came a shout from the passage.

Bob drew a breath of relief. It was Nugent's voice. He had returned with John Bull from Courtfield. For a moment Bob had feared that it was Coker & Co.—on the track.

"All right, Franky—hold on a minute!"

"What's the row?"

"Shut up, and wait and see."

"Oh, rats!"

Bulstrode opened the study door. He opened it cautiously about a foot, and signed mysteriously to Nugent and Bull. They stared at him in astonishment.

"What the——"

"Who the——"

"Come in quietly; and don't jaw——"

"But I say——"

"Shut up, you ass!"

Nugent and Bull stepped into the study in wonder, and Bulstrode closed the door again quickly and locked it. The two new-comers stared blankly at Harry Wharton in the midst of the process of transformation.

"My—m-m-my only hat!" gasped Nugent.

"Gr-r-reat Scott!"

"Quiet!" said Bulstrode.

"B-b-but what's the little game?" gasped Nugent.

Wharton laughed.

"Behold Slimfax the Second!" he said.

"W-w-what!"

"I'm Slimfax—Slimfax the actor—Slimfax the Second—Slimfax deuxième—Slimfax secundus—Slimfax II!"

"But—but—but——"

"Don't you catch on to the wheeze?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Blessed if I do!" said John Bull, in wonder.

"Seen Slimmy off at the station?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes; we ran him into Courtfield, and he caught the express nicely," said Nugent. "We saw him into the train in case he should change his mind; though there wasn't much doubt about it, I think. He's anxious to get back to that little place off the Strand that he was speaking about to give his throat some attention."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, as it seems a pity to disappoint the Fifth, I'm going to turn up as Slimfax," said Harry Wharton.

"What—what!"

"That's the wheeze!"

"Great Christopher Columbus!"

"What do you think of the idea?" grinned Wharton, as he dabbed his face.

"Oh, gorgeous!"

"Ripping! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Terrific!" gasped Nugent.

"I'm nearly ready," said Harry. "Slimfax is due here before this, but the Fifth are still busy, and they haven't missed him, yet."

"No," said Frank, with a chuckle. "They were still going strong when I passed their Form-room just now. They've got as far as the ghost."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"When I'm done, I'll turn up, rehearsal finished or not," said Wharton. "How do you think I shall pass?"

"Rippingly, as they've never seen the real Slimmy! You might be his first cousin," said Frank, surveying Wharton in wonder. "You certainly look the same age, and in the same line of business. I shouldn't have known you."

"No fear!" assented John Bull.

"Good! I think I shall pass!"

Nugent and John Bull lent a hand in finishing the disguise. When it was completed the picture was perfect. Wharton's nearest and dearest relation would not have suspected his identity.

"Oh, ripping!" exclaimed the juniors, all together.

And Harry Wharton, looking into the glass, thought it was indeed ripping. He was quite satisfied with his disguise.

ANSWERS

"What about getting down?" said Nugent dubiously. "Mr. Slimfax is supposed to arrive from the railway-station, and not from a Remove study."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's all right," said Wharton. "It's dark in the Close, and if I come into the House no one can tell whether I came from the gates or not. I can say I walked from Friardale; and certainly that's quite true."

"Quite!"

"If they run on me before I get out of the House, I'll say I came up somehow into this part of the building—which will be true also. But I think I shall be able to slip down by the back stairs, and out of the side door, without being noticed—by any but Remove fellows, I mean," said Harry. "Then I can come round the House to the front door. Pack my costume into a bag ready, and grease-paint and things. I must have the whole bag of tricks with me."

"Yes, rather!"

Five minutes later Bulstrode cautiously opened the door of the study. Many of the Remove fellows were at tea in their studies, but some were in the passage. These stared in amazement at the new Mr. Slimfax as he appeared. But a word was sufficient to enlighten them, and they shrieked with laughter as the disguised Removite hurried down the passage, and to the back stairs. In two minutes more Wharton, without encountering danger, was safe in the gloom and mist of the Close.

"All serene!" whispered Nugent. "Buzz off!"

And he closed the door behind Wharton.

Mr. Slimfax II. quietly made his way round the School House, and approached the front of the building, bag in hand, his hat slouched over his face. With unshaken nerve he walked into the House and asked for Master Coker.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Slimfax Gets to Work.

"THIS was the noblest Roman of them all!"

So said Coker.

The rehearsal in the Fifth Form-room was over.

Coker in the garb of Mark Antony, pronounced that famous eulogy over the dead body of Brutus—the dead body being represented, for the nonce, by a rolled-up rug—the gentleman who was to take Brutus's part not having arrived.

"Hear, hear!" shouted Potter.

"Oh, good!"

"It's gone off splendidly!"

The Fifth-Formers were elated. They were perfectly satisfied with the result of the rehearsal. Everything had gone off ripingly—at least, in their judgment. Perhaps they were easily satisfied.

In the keen interest of the final rehearsal, they had hardly noticed the passage of time. Coker gave quite a jump as he looked at his watch and saw that it was nearly half-past six.

"My only hat!" he exclaimed. "Do you see the time?"

"Phew!"

"And the play begins at seven!" said Blundell.

"Well, we're all in costume, ready, if Slimfax is here," said Bland. "The chap ought to have been here long ago. Has he missed his train, I wonder?"

"Very likely, the ass!" said Blundell. "If he did, he wouldn't get here till six."

"Then he ought to have arrived by now!" said Coker anxiously. "Hang it all! It would muck up the play frightfully if he didn't come in time for his role."

"I could take the part of Brutus, if you like," said Hobson of the Shell modestly.

There was a general snort.

"One of us would have to do it if he didn't come," said Greene. "But he must come! He's bound to be here!"

"Let's go and look for him."

"In this rig?"

"Oh, my hat! But—"

Tap!

"There he is!" exclaimed Coker, and he ran to the Form-room door.

It had been locked in case of any attempt at a surprise by the juniors. Coker opened the door. A gentleman in a shabby coat, a scarf, and a slouched, soft hat was standing there, with a crowd of Fifth Form fellows round him.

"Here he is, Coker!"

"Here's Mr. Slimfax!"

"Just arrived."

"Glad to see you, Mr. Slimfax!" said Coker. "Take his bag, Potty! You're late, sir!"

Mr. Slimfax II. coughed.

"I walked from Friardale," he said. "Unfortunately, the path is unknown to a stranger from London. I trust I am not too late!"

"Not at all!" said Coker. "In fact, we hadn't noticed that you were late at all until a few minutes ago. Have you had your tea?"

"I have had a snack, Master Coker, which will be quite

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ONE
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sufficient for me," said Mr. Slimfax, in a somewhat wheezy voice. "I am quite ready to begin."

"Come right in, then!"

Mr. Slimfax, relieved of his bag by Potter, walked in. The Fifth Formers all looked at him with great interest. Here was the London actor, upon whom they were depending to make the play a howling success. Perhaps they were not very much impressed by the first glance. He certainly looked like an actor. His trousers were baggy at the knees, his hair was shiny, his hat was on a little sideways, and he did not take it off on entering the room—all these little things smacked of the stage. But fellows who had had Sir Henry Irving in their minds could not help feeling a little disappointed.

But they consoled themselves with the reflection that Mr. Slimfax would appear very different in the make-up of the hero of Shakespeare. After all, if he had been a second Irving, or even a Beerbohm Tree, he would hardly have come down to the country to help a schoolboy play for a fee of three guineas, including expenses.

And Mr. Slimfax bustled about, getting ready in a way that was certainly business-like. He opened his bag, and took out a heap of properties.

"Let me see!" wheezed Mr. Slimfax. "When do you start?"

"Seven sharp," said Coker.

"Where is the performance to be given?"

"In the lecture-hall."

"And where are the dressing-rooms?"

"Ahem! We are dressed now," said Coker. "You can dress here."

Mr. Slimfax stared.

"I am accustomed, as a leading London actor, to have a first-class dressing-room," he said stiffly.

Coker coughed.

"Ahem! I'm afraid it can't be helped, sir. You see, when they built Greyfriars, they didn't foresee anything of this sort."

"Really—"

"I dare say you can manage to dress here," said Coker; "and the sooner the quicker, you know. If we keep the audience waiting, they will begin to rag."

"Very well," said Mr. Slimfax. "But it must be distinctly understood that this is not the sort of thing I am accustomed to!"

"Oh, all serene!" said Coker.

"And—I will put up with it," said Mr. Slimfax, in approved heavy lead style. "Ye gods! To think that I, Slimfax, of a hundred nights at the Lyceum, should come to this!"

"I'm sorry—really, Mr. Slimfax! But you'll be ready at five minutes to seven, won't you?"

Mr. Slimfax drew himself up majestically before he answered Coker. One hand was tucked away in his breast; his head was thrown back defiantly.

"Ay, laddie!" he said. "One touch of grease-paint, and I'll be with ye."

Coker went away very much impressed.

"Disturb me not!" called out Mr. Slimfax after him. "I invoke the tragic muse while I don the raiment of Thespis."

"You will not be interrupted!" called out Coker.

When Mr. Slimfax was sure that Coker was well away, Mr. Slimfax proceeded to put on the costume of Brutus. He chuckled considerably as he did so, and if Coker had heard he might have had some doubt about Mr. Slimfax's tragic muse. Mr. Slimfax, moreover, seemed to suddenly become young. He skipped about the dressing-room like—Harry Wharton.

"My only hat!" he laughed. "I'll give them Brutus, quite as well as Mr. Slimfax would have done it, I'll bet!"

And he began to put the finishing touches to his make-up before the glass. Remembering that Mr. Slimfax I. was a pronounced disciple of Bacchus, Harry Wharton made up his nose as if art and nature ill-agreed. The result was really clever, and calculated to deceive even the closest observation. No one would have thought for a moment that the Brutus now dressing was other than "the" Mr. Slimfax.

"Thus will I strut it afore the vulgar gaze," grinned Harry Wharton, as he finished.

Quite pleased with himself for his Shakespearean language, he sat down to wait. Very soon the patter of feet sounded outside. Coker was coming down the passage, and the patter meant that he was receiving much unwelcome attention.

There was a knock at the door.

"Hi, hi!" said Harry Wharton.

"Are you ready, sir?" said Coker, putting his head in.

"What hour is it?" said "Brutus."

Next Tuesday: GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER OF THE "MAGNET."

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Order
Early.

"Nearly five to," said Coker anxiously.

"Let us away, then!" said Mr. Slimfax II., with a majestic wave of his toga.

Coker obeyed like a little boy.

To tell the truth he was not a little proud of leading the star-*turn* along the passage to the lecture-hall. The passages were lined with juniors, who thought the whole thing extremely comical.

Mr. Slimfax improved the occasion.

"Hie, ye merry youths! Pay your dimes, and swell the company of the gods!" he declaimed.

"Hush! You mustn't talk like that to 'em!" said Coker anxiously.

"Off his giddy rocker, I say!" remarked Temple, of the Fourth.

"Thou too, Brutus!" grinned Fry.

"Oh, rather!"

"You kids shut up, and go and get your places in the lecture-hall, if you want to see the show," said Coker severely.

"Blessed if this isn't the best part of the show!" grinned Temple. "We don't often see noble Romans stalking about the passages at Greyfriars."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thou too, Brutus!" grinned Fry.

"Ha ha ha!"

Coker frowned majestically, and piloted his companion to the door at the upper end of the lecture-hall, where the masters were accustomed to enter. The great doors at the lower end were wide open, and the whole school was thronging in.

So far as audience went the Fifth would certainly have nothing to complain of. All the Fifth who were not in the cast were in the audience, and most of the Sixth turned up to clap Hobson. Many of the Sixth had condescended to come because the masters had promised to be there, and the affair was under the patronage of the Head himself. As for the fags, they came in crowds because it was a show for nothing, at all events, and if they could not weep at Shakespeare's tragic muse, they could laugh at the actors, which they would like just as well, if not better.

At the upper end of the lecture-hall, on the stage, a portion of space was divided off by curtains. The scenes were already in position, and the big curtain in front was all ready to be raised. Fifth-Formers were doing the work of stage-hands, and doing it really well. It really seemed as if Coker & Co. were going to score a triumph, and put the unhappy Removites very much in the shade.

Yet the Removites in the hall did not seem to be down-hearted. Nearly all the Remove knew of Harry Wharton's disguise by this time, and they were anticipating great fun. The Remove had turned up in full force, and the Fifth, as they saw it, were surprised that the enemy should come to swell their triumph in that way. The Fifth did not yet know everything.

Mr. Slimfax II. peered through a chink in the curtain at the crowded hall.

"By my halidom!" he exclaimed. "You have a goodly audience!"

Coker nodded with satisfaction.

"Yes; pretty nearly all the school," he remarked.

"We will entertain them worthily," said the actor. "I understand that you want me to coach you a little, my esteemed young friends?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Hobson.

"Very well. We have a little time before the curtain goes up."

"It's close on time now," remarked Potter.

Mr. Slimfax waved his hand.

"Rot!" he remarked.

"Eh?"

"Rot!" repeated Mr. Slimfax.

"Really, Mr. Slimfax—"

"Do not interrupt me, sir! On the stage I submit to dictation from no man, not even from the actor-manager, sir!" said Mr. Slimfax loftily. "Master Coker!"

"Hallo!"

"Go through your lines, and I will correct you where necessary."

"But—"

"You are playing the part of Mark Antony, I understand?"

"Don't I look like it?" growled Coker, rather sharply.

"No," said Mr. Slimfax, "you don't! You look as if you had just come out of a rag bag, if you want my opinion."

"What!" roared Coker.

Some of the cast chuckled. There were many supers in the crowd who considered that they were more entitled to play the part of Marcus Antonius than was Horace Coker. They were not sorry to see him slated by the London actor.

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"If I take part in this play," said Mr. Slimfax severely, "it has got to be played. I am not going to have it mucked up! You understand?"

"If!" yelled Coker. "Of course, you'll take part in it! What do you mean? You jolly well won't get paid if you don't!"

"Paid!" ejaculated Mr. Slimfax. "Do you think, young sir, that your paltry bribe of filthy lucre has any temptation for a noble Thespian?"

"A which?"

"A histrionic artiste, sir, scorns such base inducements!" said Mr. Slimfax. "I cast your fee in your teeth, Master Coker!"

"What!" yelled Coker.

"I withdraw from the cast!"

"What—what!"

"Hold on!" shouted Potter, as Mr. Slimfax II. made a dramatic movement towards the door. "Hold on, you ass—I—I mean, sir! Stop a minute! We can't possibly play without Brutus!"

Mr. Slimfax pointed a dramatic finger at Coker.

"I will not play unless Coker apologises," he said.

"What!" roared Coker.

"You heard what I said, young sirrah!"

"I won't!" roared Coker.

Mr. Slimfax folded his arms.

"Very well; I retire."

"I tell you—"

"I am insulted! I retire, unless I receive an apology!" said Mr. Slimfax, in dramatic accents. "Under any circumstances I shall not accept the fee. I fling it into your teeth with contempt! What! Shall we, who struck the foremost man of all the world, contaminate our fingers with base bribes, and sell the mighty space of our large honours for so much trash as may be grasped thus?"

And Mr. Slimfax, apparently forgetting that the curtain was not up, rolled out the noble lines of Brutus with great unction, and in a voice that could be heard to the end of the lecture-hall, and finished up with an imposing gesture.

There was a chuckle from beyond the curtain.

"They're tuning up!" said a voice.

And there was a laugh.

"Shut up, Mr. Slimfax!" said Coker fiercely. "You're turning the whole blessed thing into a farce! Shut up!"

"Apologise!"

"I won't!"

"Then I retire!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Potter; and he whispered fiercely in Coker's ear: "Apologise, you ass! What does it matter? We can't do without Brutus. The chap's cracked, but we can't do without him. Do what he wants, you fathead!"

"Look here—"

"Apologise, you ass!"

"I am waiting!" said Mr. Slimfax, with dignity.

And he folded his arms majestically, and waited.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Coker is Not Pleased.

HORACE COKER breathed hard through his nose.

That the man he had hired to make the performance a success should get his ears up in this manner was distinctly exasperating.

Mr. Slimfax's place was to do as he was told, not to issue orders, and Coker was simply furious to see him take the upper hand in this way.

But he did not see what was to be done.

It was far too late to think of assigning the important part of Brutus to a Fifth Form fellow who had not even read up the part.

Without the assistance of Mr. Slimfax the whole performance would fall to the ground; it could not come off at all, or if it came off it would be a miserable failure. The only hold Coker had upon Mr. Slimfax was the promised fee. But Mr. Slimfax evidently did not care for the fee; in fact, he had declared that he would not accept it. He had to be conciliated, therefore; there was no other way.

The other fellows had realised that already, but understanding always came rather slowly to Coker, of the Fifth.

Potter and Greene and Blundell were whispering to him, all together, and Coker gave way at last, with an angry frown.

Mr. Alfonso Slimfax was still standing in a Napoleonic attitude, waiting for his apology.

Coker turned to him, with a grunt.

"Well, I'm sorry if I offended you," he said ungraciously.

Mr. Slimfax II. waved his hand.

"Enough, my boy!" he exclaimed. "Between two noble Thespians an apology is sufficient. But don't do it again, I charge you."

"Let's get on with the bizney."

"Very good! I will manage the whole affair—"

"You jolly well won't!" growled Coker. "I'm stage-manager."

"Sirrah!"

"Look here—"

"Oh, cheese it, Cokey!" said Potter. "A professional chap will arrange matters much better than you can."

"Look here, Potter!"

"Shut up, old man!"

Coker gritted his teeth. He was beginning to feel very angry indeed. But he felt that he had to submit. Indeed, the masterful ways of Mr. Slimfax, of London, were making a great impression upon the Fifth, and they were more inclined to pay attention to Mr. Slimfax than to Coker.

"Master Coker!"

"Hallo!"

"I am specially particular about the speech over the body of Cæsar. Kindly run through it before the curtain goes up!"

"But—"

"Do as I tell you, please."

Coker fumed.

"But there's no time!" he exclaimed. "Hang it all, sir, there's no time. The play was booked to start at seven, and it's a quarter-past now."

"Plays have been late before," said Mr. Slimfax.

"The fellows will begin making a row."

"Let them!"

"But I tell you—"

"roared Coker.

Potter tugged at his toga.

"Let him have his way, Cokey," he whispered. "As a matter of fact, old man, your Mark Antony's oration is a bit rotten."

"Yes; I noticed it myself," said Greene, with friendly candour.

Coker glared at them.

"Oh, you did, did you?" he exclaimed savagely.

"Yes," assented Potter. "Let Mr. Slimfax run you through it, and it may be a success after all. Who knows?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Greene.

Coker clenched his hands. There was very nearly a fight between Mark Antony, Julius Cæsar, and Cassius on the spot; but Blundell, alias Casca, pushed in between.

"For goodness' sake, don't row now!" he said. "Do as Mr. Slimfax tells you, Coker! The audience are beginning to buzz."

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"Hang Slimfax!"

"Do be reasonable! The whole thing will be mucked up hopelessly if that fellow gets his back up, and he seems half-cracked. I suppose all actors are a bit mad, and he certainly seems off his rocker," whispered Blundell. "Do be careful!"

"Oh, all right!"

"I wait!" announced Mr. Slimfax, with dignity.

Coker peeped through the slit in the curtain into the hall. The hall was full. Almost the whole of Greyfriars, seniors and juniors, had come in. The Head had not yet taken his seat, but the prefects were there and several of the masters. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was chatting with Mr. Prout, of the Fifth. He had a programme in his hand, and was reading over the cast. Some of the juniors at the back of the hall were beginning to buzz ominously, as a sign that the performance was already late and they were getting impatient.

Coker gritted his teeth at the thought of making the beginning still later to please the fancy of Alfonso Slimfax. He began to suspect that Mr. Slimfax had been drinking on the way to Greyfriars. But there was no help for it. Alfonso Slimfax was determined, and he had to have his way. Coker, with a very bad grace, commenced the recitation of Mark Antony's famous lines.

Mr. Slimfax listened with a critical air. He interrupted Cokey frequently, without the slightest regard for the growing rage of the amateur actor.

"More free action, my boy!" he exclaimed. "You don't want to recite like a horse! Give your figure free play, and don't wave your hand; it's ungraceful! And speak up!"

"Look here—"

"Those words are not in the part."

"I was speaking to you—"

"Then don't speak to me. Get on with your lines!"

"For Brutus, as you know, was Cæsar's angel," growled Coker.

"Judge, O, ye gods, how dearly Cæsar loved him!"

"Louder!" said Mr. Slimfax.

(Continued on page 22.)

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"The audience will hear."
 "That cannot be helped."
 "Look here, Mr. Slimfax—"
 "Louder!"
 "I tell you—"

"Go on with your lines, louder!" said the inexorable Slimfax.

"This was the most unkindest cut of all!" howled Coker.
 "For when the mighty Cæsar saw him stab,
 Ingratitude, more strong than traitor's arms,
 Quite vanquished him—"

"Louder!"
 "I'm shouting already."
 "Louder!"
 Coker snorted.

"And in a mantle muffling up his face," roared Coker,
 "Even at the foot of Pompey's statue,
 Which all the while ran blood, great Cæsar fell!
 Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen!"

There was a sound of irrepressible laughter from the outer side of the stage curtain. The stentorian tones of Coker rang from one end of the lecture-hall to the other, and echoed from the roof. The audience were partly amused and partly astonished. They had never attended a dramatic performance before in which this kind of a prelude was given. Coker turned crimson as he heard the laughter from the hall.

"The whole blessed thing is being turned into a joke!" he growled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the hall.

Coker clenched his fist.

"I've had enough of this!" he exclaimed. "We get to business now, or we don't get to it at all! That's flat! It's half-past seven."

There was a shout from the hall, in the unmistakable tones of Frank Nugent, of the Remove:

"Are you going to begin to-night?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or is the performance unavoidably postponed?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker ground his teeth.

"Line up for the first scene!" he exclaimed. "You chaps, standy ready with the curtain! Now then, Hobby, you're first citizen."

The crowd of amateur actors retired from the stage, leaving it for the opening scene of the play. In the wings, Mr. Slimfax tapped Coker on the shoulder. The burly Fifth-Former towered over the actor, and frowned down upon him.

"Look here, Master Coker—"

"Well?" growled Coker.

"I have not been accustomed to dictation—"

"Oh, rats! Up with the curtain there!"

The curtain rose on the first scene of "Julius Cæsar." Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars, had been waiting ten minutes for the performance to begin, and the hardiest of the Fifth-Formers could not venture to keep him waiting longer, ready or not.

The Head looked at the stage, and nodded approvingly.

"Very well got up, Mr. Quelch," he remarked—"very well indeed!"

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

"It is very gratifying to see the boys taking up such serious work as Shakespeare in this serious spirit, Mr. Quelch."

"Quite so, sir!"

"I trust we shall have an instructive and pleasant evening," said the Head. "Any slight faults in the performance can be excused to young and enthusiastic actors."

"Oh, of course!"

And the Head watched with great and kindly interest. Behind, farther down the hall, the Remove were packed together, and they were grinning with anticipation. Mr. Slimfax had already been at work, they knew, but there was more to come. When Alfonso Slimfax II. got on the stage there was certain to be an entertainment—especially for the Remove.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Extraordinary Conduct of Alfonso Slimfax.

MR. SLIMFAX stood in the wings, looking on at the opening scenes as they progressed with more or less success. There was a thoughtful expression upon his made-up face, and whenever he looked at Coker he frowned. Suddenly he started.

"I think—" he began.

Coker made an angry gesture.

"Shut up, or speak lower!" he muttered. "They can hear you in the hall!"

"Sirrah!"

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READ the splendid tale of Tom "HELD TO RANSOM," in this week's "GEM" Library. Merry & Co., entitled: Price One Penny.

"Shut up, I say!"

"I decline to shut up!"

"Look here!" said Coker, in a fierce whisper. "I'm bigger than you are, Mr. Slimfax, and if you give any more trouble I'll give you a thundering good hiding! Do you understand that?"

"Hold on, Cokey!" murmured Potter

Mr. Slimfax backed away a little.

"Sirrah!" he ejaculated.

"Shut up, then!"

"I think—"

"Speak more quietly, please, Mr. Slimfax," urged Potter. "They can hear it all in the hall, you know. It spoils the effect."

"I am not satisfied with the way the thing is going."

"But—"

"I think that perhaps a little comic effect would relieve it," said Mr. Slimfax. "I think I had better go on now—"

"What!"

"It isn't your cue."

"A really great actor is above cues," said Mr. Slimfax loftily. "I am going on—"

"Hold on!"

"Stop!"

"Look here—"

Coker made a wild grab at Mr. Slimfax's mantle. But the Roman senator eluded him, and ran upon the stage.

There was a yell from the back of the hall:

"Here's Brutus!"

"Good old Brutus!"

"Thou, too, Brutus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker & Co., behind the scenes, ground their teeth with rage. They could hardly have any doubt any longer that Mr. Alfonso Slimfax had been drinking, or else that he was "off his rocker." They could not follow him upon the stage to drag him away without revealing themselves to the gaze of the audience, which, of course, was not to be thought of. They watched him in silent fury.

Dr. Locke stared at Brutus.

"Dear me! Surely his appearance at this juncture is incorrect," murmured the Head of Greyfriars.

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"Perhaps the Fifth Form are not very particular, sir," he said.

"Dear me!"

Mr. Slimfax advanced to the front of the stage and bowed to the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen—"

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"By Jove!"

The audience stared, open-mouthed.

For Brutus to talk in that familiar way to the audience was something new in Shakespearean performances. The Remove understood, and they chuckled. The rest of the audience did not understand, and they stared blankly and ejaculated.

"Ladies and gentlemen—"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Extraordinary!" murmured the Head.

"Ladies and gentlemen, pray allow me to address a few words to you. I feel called upon to explain that these shockingly bad actors are not really to be blamed, because they are doing their best, and cannot help it."

"My hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Brutus!"

"Pile it on, Brutus, old boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We can't stand this!" muttered Coker desperately. "He's mucking up the whole thing! Come and yank him off!"

"What will it look like?" muttered Potter.

"Not worse than letting him talk like that. He must be drunk!"

"Yes, let's have him off!" said Greene.

"Come on and collar him!"

Three or four Roman senators rushed on the stage and ran at Mr. Slimfax. There was a roar from the audience, who were entering into the spirit of the thing, and beginning to enjoy the unexpected comic effects introduced into Shakespeare's great tragedy.

"Look out, Brutus!"

"Dodge them!"

"Keep your peepers on Mark Antony!"

"Fair play, there! Give Brutus a chance!"

"Give 'em socks, Brutus!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Brutus seemed to be quite able to take care of himself.

He eluded the rush of the Fifth-Formers, and dodged round the crowd of Roman citizens. Coker succeeded in getting hold of his mantle, but a drive in the ribs made Coker let go, and he fell upon the stage with a crash. His tin sword clattered down and bent, and he gasped on his back, while the audience rose to their feet and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Brutus!"

"On the ball, Mark Antony!"

There was a wild chase round the stage. Brutus was headed off at last, and escaped into the wings. The curtain was rung down amid wild roars of merriment and applause from the audience. Dr. Locke was laughing as much as the rest. He could not help himself.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed, "This is most extraordinary! What boy is taking the part of Brutus, Mr. Quelch?"

Mr. Quelch looked at the programme.

"Mr. Alfonso Slimfax," he read out. "Ah, that is the London actor who has come down to assist Coker and his friends in the performance, sir."

"Bless my soul! He has chosen a very singular way of assisting them!"

"I must say he has," agreed Mr. Quelch.

The audience yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on again, Brutus!"

"Give Brutus a chance!"

The Head rose and made a sign for silence. The laughter died away, but the sound of irrepressible chuckling broke forth frequently. Even the Head's presence could not wholly subdue the mirth of the audience.

But as soon as silence was somewhat restored in the hall, voices could be heard raised in loud and angry altercation behind the scenes.

"You disgraceful rotter! You're drunk!"

"Sirrah!"

"How dare you——"

"What do you mean?"

"You've mucked up the whole thing!"

"Do you call yourself an actor, you fathead?"

"You blithering idiot!"

And the audience grinned. Feeling was evidently running high behind the scenes. Coker & Co., as a matter of fact, were utterly exasperated, hot, indeed, without reason. Mr. Slimfax, instead of being a help, was considerably more than a hindrance. How to reduce the audience to a properly grave and attentive frame of mind again was a puzzle the "Julius Cæsar" Company could not solve. Whatever they did now the audience were pretty certain to take it in a comic spirit, and laugh.

"You ought to be scragged, you silly ass!" said Coker, shaking his fist at Mr. Slimfax. "What on earth made you break out like that?"

"He's drunk!" said Greene.

"Sirrah!" ejaculated Mr. Slimfax. "I am a strict teetotaller. Has not the immortal Shakespeare exclaimed: 'Oh, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains!'? Sir, I am as sober as yourself!"

"Well, you'd better be a bit more careful!" growled Coker. "If you break out again you'll get kicked out of the place, so I warn you!"

"Sirrah!"

"Another word to the audience, and we'll smash you!" said Potter.

"Sirrah!"

"Let's get on with the washing," said Blundell. "The audience seem to have calmed down a bit. We've got to make the thing go somehow."

"The Remove will never let us hear the end of this!" growled Coker.

"Well, we've come a worse mucker than they did, so far," said Bland.

"Let's get on."

"Up with the curtain!" said Coker, in a growling voice. "Mind, Slimfax, any more rot, and you get smashed!"

Mr. Slimfax folded his arms majestically. Coker would gladly have kicked the gentleman from London off the stage there and then. But what was he to do without Brutus? "Julius Cæsar" without Brutus would certainly be like "Hamlet" with the Prince of Denmark left out. But Coker clenched his hands hard as he said to himself that if there was any more "rot" from the London man he would make him squirm for it. If the play was mucked up there would be some satisfaction in hammering Mr. Alfonso Slimfax.

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ONE
PENNY.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Not According to Programme.

THE audience watched with keen interest as the curtain rose and the play proceeded. They were waiting for some further outbreak on the part of Brutus. There was no doubt that the greater part of the audience preferred a comedy to a tragedy, and liked "Julius Cæsar" better in a farcical spirit.

The Remove, especially, were watching with all their eyes. The scheme that the Famous Four had schemed was working without a hitch. The Fifth-Formers had completely "mucked up" the Remove performance of "Julius Cæsar," but it was pretty certain that they would come a worse "mucker" themselves before Harry Wharton had finished with them.

The play proceeded with more or less success as far as the assassination of Cæsar. Brutus played his role with gravity up to that point, perhaps not above the satisfaction of playing it well to so large an audience.

There was no doubt upon the subject that when Brutus took his part seriously he was by far the best actor in the cast. In spite of the strange outbreak on the part of Mr. Slimfax, the audience concluded that Coker & Co. had done wisely in strengthening the cast with a London actor. Only the Remove knew that it was a member of the Remove Dramatic Club who was in reality playing the role, and they grinned as they heard the whispered comments of the rest of the audience.

They were not sorry for it to be shown that a Removite was a better actor than any of the Fifth, for, of course, it would come out before the end of the evening who Mr. Slimfax really was. At the same time, they were growing impatient for some more fun. It was all very well for Wharton to show a Removite's powers as an actor, but he was not there to make the play a success.

The Remove began to get impatient. "Go it, Brutus!" sang out Johnny Bull suddenly.

Wingate rose and looked round with a frown.

"Silence!" he called out.

Johnny Bull grunted.

"Shut up, Johnny!" whispered Frank Nugent. "Wharton's only biding his time."

"Faith, and ye're right," murmured Micky Desmond. "Look at the omadhaun!"

"Poor old Greene! They're going to murder him!"

Greene's hour had come—as Julius Cæsar, of course. The conspirators stabbed him, and at last it came to Brutus's turn to strike. Greene prepared to muffle himself in his mantle and fall with Cæsar-like dignity, but as Brutus stabbed he gave a wild yell.

"Ow!"

There was a gasp from the audience.

With so many stabs in his person Julius Cæsar must certainly have felt hurt, but historically he never, certainly, exclaimed "Ow!" as he fell. He was supposed to say "Et tu, Brute!" But Greene didn't. He said "Ow!"

"You ass!" muttered Potter—Cassius. "Say your line!"

"Yow! I'm punctured!"

"Fathead!"

"Groo!"

"It's that idiot Slimfax again!" murmured Blundell—Cassius.

"Sirrah!"

"Shut up!"

"Yow! The idiot's nearly busted my ribs!" moaned Julius Cæsar. "Yow! Oh!"

The audience yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gerooh!"

"Die, you chump!" muttered Coker from the wings, almost showing himself to the audience in his anxiety. "Die, you ass! It's time for you to die, you silly fathead!"

"Groooooop!"

"Oh, you fathead! Die quick!"

Greene drew his mantle round him and died. He fell gracefully at the foot of Pompey's statue, but under his mantle his hand could be seen moving, rubbing his damaged ribs, though he was now quite dead—or should have been.

And it quite spoiled the tragic effect. The audience giggled and chuckled, and even Dr. Locke could not repress a smile.

When Mark Antony came in, at his cue, he scowled ferociously at Brutus. But he managed to get through his lines without bursting into temper.

At the end of the scene Potter and Blundell linked arms with him off the stage to keep him from committing assault and battery upon Mr. Slimfax.

"He's doing it on purpose!" growled Coker. "If it were possible, I should think that the Remove rotters had got at him and bribed him to muck up the show."

"Oh, rot!" said Potter. "How could they?"

"Well, I suppose they couldn't," agreed Coker; "but—"

"It was an accident, jabbing Greene like that—"

"Well, he's had too many accidents!" snapped Coker.

"If he has any more I'll give him an accident he won't get over in a hurry!"

"He's been playing jolly well!" said Bland. "He's the best actor in the piece, with one exception."

"Excepting me, do you mean?"

"Well, no, I was thinking of myself," said Bland innocently.

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

"Look here—"

"Order!" said Blundell. "Time!"

"If that silly fathead—"

"The audience are waiting!"

"Oh, blow the audience!" growled Coker.

Mr. Slimfax gave a hitch to his toga. He intended to distinguish himself in the speech to the people after the death of Cæsar, and he did! Coker watched him from the wings, and frowned.

"The blessed ass seems to get on all right with the audience!" Coker growled. "Blessed if I know why!"

Potter grinned.

"He's a good actor, Coker, all said and done," he answered.

"Jolly good thing Coker selected a man so useful," said Blundell, pouring oil on the troubled waters, so to speak.

"Well, yes, he's useful when he behaves himself," said Coker, somewhat mollified.

"Get ready, Cokey, old man! Mind how you do that funeral oration!" said Potter.

"Rats! I can do it rippingly!"

"Don't mix it with the soliloquy from 'Hamlet,' as you did in the rehearsal the other day."

"Oh, bosh!"

"Get on!" said Hobson from the stage.

It was Coker's cue. Brutus had retired, and it was time for Mark Antony to address the mob over the body of Cæsar.

Coker was greeted with a murmur of applause from the Fifth-Formers in the audience as he came on. It encouraged him, and he prepared to do himself justice. The lines assigned to Mark Antony in the scene are indeed so good that an actor must be very bad indeed if he cannot make something out of them. Coker's powerful voice rang through the hall:

"I come to bury Cæsar, not to praise him!
The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Cæsar!"

There came a whisper—a stage whisper—from the wings, perfectly audible to all the audience in the lecture-hall of Greyfriars:

"Louder!"

Coker snapped his teeth. It was too bad to have his splendid speech interrupted in this way. But Mr. Slimfax appeared to think that he had all the rights of a coach even while the performance was proceeding. And Coker could not stop him without going off the stage and leaving his oration unfinished.

He raised his voice a little as he proceeded, in the hope that Mr. Alfonso Slimfax would be satisfied, and would leave him alone. His stentorian tones boomed through the hall:

"The noble Brutus
Hath told you Cæsar was ambitious.
If it were so, it was a grievous sin,
And grievously hath Cæsar answered it!"

"Louder!"

Coker breathed hard through his nose. The audience were grinning gleefully, and loud chuckles came from the Remove.

"You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?
When that the poor have cried, Cæsar hath wept—"

"Louder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me!" murmured the Head.

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Coker ground his teeth.

"Ambition should be made of sterner stuff!"

"Louder!"

"You—you—you—" stammered Coker, beginning to forget his lines in his rage and excitement. "You—you all did shove him once—"

"Love him, you ass!" whispered Potter, from the prompt side.

"Love him once," said Coker confusedly.

"What cords withhold you, then, from—from— Lemme see—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason! Bear with me!
My heart is in the coffin there, with Cæsar,
And I must pause till it come back to me!"

And Coker paused.

It was time. He was almost choking with rage, and growing confused and mixed. The remarks of the crowd of Roman citizens gave him a chance to pull himself together, and he cast a furious glance towards the wings, which did not pass unnoticed by the audience. When he resumed he caught the eye of Mr. Slimfax II. fastened on him from behind the scenes, and he almost choked over his words. He knew that there was more to come.

"How many thousands of my poorest subjects—" began Coker, inadvertently delivering a line from "King Henry IV.," which the Fifth Form Dramatic Society had lately been rehearsing.

"Wrong!" came in a stage whisper from Potter.

"Ahem!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker tried to remember his lines. Lines from "King Henry IV." and from "The Merchant of Venice" came confusedly into his mind, and he blundered them out, hardly knowing what he was saying, with surprising effects.

"How many thousands of my poorest subjects

Are in six parts, and every part a ducat?"

There was a roar from the audience.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cæsar's mantle, you ass! Cæsar's mantle, you clump!" came a fierce whisper from the prompter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right!" said Coker inadvertently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I remember the very time Cæsar put this mantle on," said Coker, in his confusion turning the stirring lines into very modern English. "It was the day he settled the Nervii!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The audience shrieked.

"See what a rent the envious Blundell made—I mean Casca—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Louder!" came a thrilling whisper.

"And here's the place where Brutus ran his dagger through—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And as he plucked the giddy steel away,
Mark how the blood of Cæsar followed it,
As, buzzing out of doors, to be resolved,
If Brutus so unkindly knocked, or no!
For Slimfax—I mean Brutus—as you know, was Cæsar's angel.

Judge, oh, ye gods, how dearly Cæsar loved him!"

"Louder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This was the most unkindest cut of all!
For when the mighty Cæsar saw him jab—I mean stab—
Ingratitude, more strong than traitor's arms,
Quite vanquished him—"

"Louder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker—Mark Antony—swung round furiously towards his tormentor.

"Shut up!" he roared.

The audience yelled.

"Louder!" called out Mr. Slimfax.

"Shut up! I'll smash you! I'll—I'll—"

"Louder!"

It was too much!

Mark Antony jumped down from the rostrum and made a wild rush at Mr. Slimfax in the wings. Mr. Slimfax ran to meet him, and they met in the middle of the stage, and closed in deadly strife. The audience were on their feet now, shouting, yelling, cheering, laughing. The rest of the

actors, whether on in the scene or off, crowded on the stage, trying to separate the combatants.

But it was in vain! Coker was furious, and he meant to hammer Mr. Slimfax thoroughly for spoiling his oration, whatever the result. The two juniors rolled on the stage, fighting like wild cats, and the place was in an uproar.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Coker's Fault.

"GO it, Brutus!"

"Punch him, Mark Antony!"

"Sock it to him!"

"Lather him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dear me! This is utterly ridiculous!" exclaimed Dr. Locke. "I cannot remain here! Mr. Quelch, I think the play had better be stopped, and I certainly shall not remain."

"Very well, sir," said the Remove-master, who was of the same opinion.

And the Head retired from the lecture-hall with great dignity.

Mr. Quelch called to Wingate. The captain of Greyfriars was almost doubled up with laughter.

"Wingate!"

"Yes, sir! Ha, ha, ha! Yes! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop the performance, Wingate. Let the prefects clear the hall," said Mr. Quelch.

And he followed the Head of Greyfriars. The moment the masters were gone the audience lost the last vestige of restraint. They jumped on the seats, and stamped, and roared, and yelled. Wingate and the prefects hurried towards the stage, roaring with laughter themselves. Mark Antony and Brutus were rolling over and over in deadly strife. Their mantles and togas were torn to rags, their hair was wildly unkempt, and they were hammering one another furiously. The other members of the cast dragged at them, and shouted at them in vain. There was no separating them.

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

"Go it!"

"Give him one in the eye, Brutus!"

"Dot him on the boko, Mark Antony!"

"You other chaps keep off!" yelled Temple. "Let 'em have it out! This is an improvement on Shakespeare!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The prefects invaded the stage. All was in the wildest confusion. In the struggle the scenes were knocked over, the rostrum was sent flying, and the body of Cæsar was knocked to and fro. Togas were torn to ribbons, and the stage was strewn with wreaths and bent swords.

"Stop that row!" roared Wingate.

"Let 'em alone, Wingate!"

"Let 'em have it out!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Brutus!"

Brutus was getting the worst of it. Coker was much bigger and more powerful, and he was hammering the supposed Mr. Slimfax in fine style. But Mr. Slimfax got in some doughty blows, and Mark Antony's right eye was closed, and a stream of red was issuing from his nose. Potter and Greene and Blundell, realising that the game was up, and that the play could certainly not proceed any further, and justly attributing it to Mr. Slimfax, lent their aid to Coker, and began to bump Mr. Slimfax unmercifully. There was a roar from the Remove. So long as the fight was man to man, they had not interfered. But they were not going to see Harry Wharton bumped by the Fifth.

"Rescue! Remove!" yelled Brutus.

Wingate gasped.

"Why, I know that voice!" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Wharton!" yelled Courtney.

"What the—"

"How the—"

"It's Slimfax!" gasped Potter.

"It isn't—it's Wharton of the Remove!"

"Great Scott!"

"Rescue, Remove!"

"Come on!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Rescue!"

"Back up!" shrieked the Removites.

And they came upon the littered stage with a rush, and hurled themselves upon the Fifth-Formers who were ragging the supposed Mr. Slimfax. Nugent dragged Harry Wharton to his feet.

There was a wild scuffle on the stage, and the prefects shouted to the juniors to stop, in vain.

"Go it, Fifth!"

"Back up, Remove!"

"Stop it!" yelled Wingate. "My hat! They'll smash the place up! Coker—Blundell—Wharton—Nugent—stop it at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Separate them!" shouted Courtney.

The prefects threw themselves into the struggle. The rest

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of the Sixth backed up authority, and the fighting juniors were swept right and left, and separated at last. They drew apart, breathing hard, or gasping for breath, and regarding one another with fierce glares. Brutus was a wreck. His toga was in ribbons, and he had a black eye, and his mouth streamed red. But he was laughing breathlessly.

"Ha, ha, ha! We've done the Fifth!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites. "We've done the Fifth! Hear us grin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wingate strode towards the pretended Mr. Slimfax.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

Mr. Slimfax grinned.

"I'm Wharton, of the Remove!"

"Where's the real Slimfax, then?" demanded Wingate. Wharton chuckled.

"He's gone back to London, and I've taken his place! It's a jape, you see. The Fifth mucked up our play, and we've mucked up theirs. That's all."

"My hat!" gasped Wingate. "And you had the nerve—"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?"

"You—you cheeky young rascal!" said the captain of Greyfriars. "You—you— Ha, ha, ha! My only hat!"

"I'll smash him!" roared Coker.

And Coker, regardless of the captain of the school and the prefects, made a wild rush at the disguised Removite.

"Stop it! Hold him!"

"I'll—I'll—I'll smash him!" shrieked Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In a moment Coker's grasp was upon Harry Wharton again. Wharton returned grip for grip, and they reeled to and fro on the stage. Wingate rushed to seize them, and they bumped into him, and he sat down heavily.

"Oh!" he gasped.

To and fro reeled Coker and Harry Wharton. Coker was so enraged that he hardly knew what he was doing. But though he was much stronger than the hero of the Remove, he did not know so much about wrestling. A foot twined behind his leg, and he went down with a crash, and Wharton rolled over him. Wharton leaped up, still grasping Coker, and gave his enemy a whirl, and Coker rolled off the stage with a bump! There was a yell of delight from the Remove.

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "I'll—I'll smash—ow!—him—Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Clear off!" shouted Wingate. "Get out of the hall, all of you! Here comes the Head!"

That was enough!

The Removites crowded out of the doorway, bearing Harry Wharton, in his tattered Roman costume, in triumph in their midst.

Coker staggered to his feet.

"M-m-my hat!" he gasped.

"Now, keep order, all of you," said Wingate sternly. "Mind, if there is any more rowing to-night I'll have you before the Head!"

And he followed the Remove out of the hall. The Fifth-Form Dramatic Society remained alone in the hall. The audience were gone, and their laughter could still be heard from the passages. The amateur dramatists stood amid the wreckage of their scenery, in tattered and torn togas, and looked at one another in dismay.

"Well," said Blundell, at last, "this is a go!"

"M-m-m-my word!" murmured Potter.

Coker gasped.

"I'll—I'll—I'll—I'll—"

"Oh, rats!" said Potter crossly. "You've made a muck of it as it is. It's all your fault."

"My fault!" yelled Coker.

"Yes. It was your idea to borrow Wharton's play—and it was your idea to have Slimfax down from London—it's all your fault all through!" howled Potter. "We've been done brown by those blessed fags, and it's all your fault!"

"All Coker's fault!" said the Fifth, in chorus.

Coker gasped for breath. Words failed him.

The Fifth had made up their minds that it was all Coker's fault. Whether it was Coker's fault or not, there was no doubt that the Fifth had got decidedly the worst of the conflict they had provoked with the Remove. In the Remove studies that evening there were roars of laughter over the Downfall of the Fifth.

THE END.

("WINGATE'S FOLLY," by Frank Richards, and "THE STARS OF THE CIRCUS," by Martin Clifford, are the titles of the two grand, long complete tales which will be contained in next week's Grand Christmas Double Number of "The Magnet" Library. ORDER WELL IN ADVANCE. Price Twopence.)

Our Grand Serial Story.**"Beyond the Eternal Ice!"**

A Thrilling Story of the Amazing Adventures of Ferrers Lord, Millionaire, Ching-Lung, and Rupert Thurston.

BY

SIDNEY DREW.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

When Professor Hugley, the renowned American scientist, startles the world by announcing that he is off to find the North Pole in his wonderful air-craft, the Cloud King, there is only one man who dares to enter the lists against him on behalf of Great Britain, and that man is Ferrers Lord, the famous millionaire and inventor. Lord pits his wonderful submarine, the Lord of the Deep, against the Cloud King in the most amazing race the world has ever seen; the goal is the North Pole, and the prize a million pounds!

The preliminaries are soon settled, a judge is appointed to accompany each of the competitors, and the great race commences.

With Ferrers Lord are Ching-Lung, Rupert Thurston, and Gan Waga, an Eskimo, while Hugley is accompanied by Paraira, a Cuban, and Estebian Gacchio, a huge negro. These latter soon show themselves in their true colours, and the Cloud King no sooner reaches the region of ice than Hugley, and such of the crew as are loyal to him, are murdered, and Paraira and Gacchio assume control of the airship.

Ferrers Lord reaches the Pole through an underground tunnel which he discovers, and finds there a beautiful city called Shazana. They are welcomed by Vathmoor, the king, and visit the Palace. During this visit, Ching-Lung is thrown into a muddy ditch by a princess. The scene is witnessed by Joe, the carpenter, who determines to "get his own back" by revealing the secret to some of the crew. He does so, and only gives Ching-Lung the names of those who know after being soundly thrashed. The names he gives are Prout, Maddock, and Gan Waga, the Eskimo.

(Now go on with the yarn.)

The Arrival of the Cloud King at Shazana.

"Now, Joe," Ching-Lung said, "we're good friends, and I want to talk to you about the lady. I heard someone singing, and I went, like an idiot, to have a peep. You saw the rest. I don't want Mr. Thurston or Mr. Van Witter to know, or they'll chaff the life out of me. I'll speak to Gan Waga myself. You quietly inform Prout and Maddock that it has got to stop."

"Certainly, sir!" answered Joe. "But supposing, sir, they won't stop?"

Ching-Lung smiled sweetly.

"I think they will, Joe, when you show them your pretty face. If they don't they will both have to spar with me. I'll start a boxing tournament in the fore-castle, and I'll let the worst boxer there—that's Perrin—beat me. But I'll give those two such a trouncing that everybody will laugh at them. I must go now, Joseph. You'll break the news gently?"

"I will, sir."

He went to find a piece of frozen beefsteak for his eye, thoughtfully shaking his head as he went.

"Ho's a pocket-edition of Corbett, Slavin, Peter Jackson, and Sayers knocked into one," he murmured, "with fists like knuckle-dusters. I think the boys'll keep quiet after this, by Jupiter! I thought there was ten of him!"

Still smiling sweetly, Ching-Lung turned the nose of the launch shorewards. Bugle calls and shouts sounded faintly among the peaks. Ching-Lung was highly pleased with himself. The idea of trouncing Prout and Maddock before the assembled crew was a brilliant one, and the threat was quite enough to keep them quiet concerning the lady.

He tethered the boat, and, taking his rifle, made his way back to the comrades. The bugle-calls and shouts were stronger and nearer. Suddenly, the running figure of Prout dashed into sight.

"You'll miss your train, Tom," called Ching-Lung.

"I was coming after you, sir," panted the steersman.

"What for? I don't owe you any money, do I?"

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READ the splendid tale of Tom **"HELD TO RANSOM,"** in this week's "GEM" Library. Merry & Co., entitled: Price One Penny.

"It's the bears, sir. They're breaking through in hundreds. You'll miss it if you ain't quick."

"Right you are, Tom!" said Ching-Lung, breaking into a trot. "I'll sprint you for half-a-crown."

Ching-Lung sprang upon the ledge. Ferrers Lord smoked lazily, but Thurston's excitement showed itself in his face. The din of bugles and voices broke into a wild clamour. Bear after bear broke into the basin, and went sliding and stumbling into the groove. Many of them had arrows sticking in their bodies.

In vain they tried to climb the glassy sides. The ice, hard as glass, defied their claws. Roaring, snarling, bellowing, they were forced forward, for every instant more and more of the brutes were driven through the passages. Arrows whizzed through the bars, hurled by tough six-foot bows.

At such a close range they penetrated until their shafts were hidden in the quivering flesh.

The noise was deafening. The groove was absolutely seething with shaggy bodies. Then came a rattle, and heavy metal doors closed every opening. The next instant the beaters were scrambling up the edge of the basin, and the imprisoned brutes were surrounded by a circle of bowmen.

Showers of arrows hissed down. Some of the maddened brutes, feeling the sting of arrows, turned upon each other, and fought madly.

"This is butchery!" said Rupert, in disgust.

"Needful butchery, Rupert!" drawled Ferrers Lord. "They must kill the bears, or the bears will kill them."

"It's sickening," said Ching-Lung. "Look at that big brute there. He has fifty arrows in his body, and he's still alive. Poor brute! That will put you out of your misery."

He fired, and the bear fell dead. Then he turned, and ran like a hare.

"Back again, sir?" said Maddock, as Ching-Lung sprang on deck.

"Four men on the Maxim!" shouted the prince. "Tumble up there! Now, Ben, stir yourself! If these poor bears have to be killed we'll kill them mercifully. Get the gun into the launch. Quick—quick!"

They wasted no time. In three minutes they were racing the gun along, in four it was in position.

"Well done, Ching!" said Ferrers Lord. "That was a good idea, and a kind one."

Prout trained the gun to sweep the groove from end to end.

Fr-r-r! Fr-r-r! Fr-r-r! came the snarling rattle as the cartridges raced through the breech. A tongue of flame spluttered from the muzzle, flinging six hundred shots per minute into the doomed mob of beasts.

Ferrers Lord laughed. At the first shot the terrified hunters had dropped their bows and fled.

"Well," grunted Prout, "I never thought I'd become a butcher."

"All dead," said Ching-Lung, "and I don't want to see them skinned. I'm fond of hunting, but not this kind. Those beggars are coming back. They've not got the pluck of those dwarfs."

"By Jove, no!" said Thurston. "Those little brutes were made of pluck."

They turned away as the hunters, uttering shouts of delight, climbed down the groove. Waving their bows and knives, they danced and sang and laughed as if demented. And then came a calm, sudden and prolonged.

"What's up?" said Ching-Lung, looking back. "They're mighty quiet all at once!"

"By hokey!" roared Prout. "The Cloud King!"

They gazed at the sky. A black cloud hung between two of the glistening peaks. It was advancing swiftly. A strange smile curled the millionaire's lips.

"A good race!" he drawled. "But the Union Jack was twenty-four hours ahead. Get aboard quickly!"

The hunters were staring with blanched faces at the flying monster.

Too Late—The Umpires Sign that the Race has been Fairly Won—The Arrest.

"What do you make the reckoning, senor?"

Paraira's voice was hoarse with excitement. His hang-dog crew had gathered round with expectant faces. Pale and nervous, Sir Clement Morwith could hardly hold the pencil.

"Death of my life!" growled Estebian Gacchio. "Hasten senor! A child could work out figures faster!"

Sir Clement flung down the pencil.

"Senor Gacchio!" he said quietly. "I am neither your slave nor your servant. Kindly permit me to take my own time!"

"Patience, Estebian, patience!" said the Cuban warningly.

"Do not hurry, senor. We are excited, that is all!"

The baronet bent over the paper again.

"We are twelve miles from the Pole," he said. The evil-faced crew broke into a volley of cheering. "Twelve miles!" laughed Paraira. "Only twelve miles! Caramba, we shall win!"

The vessel was soaring between the peaks. There was no breeze, and she was making excellent headway. With a bow Sir Clement rose, and went back to his cabin. Paraira and the negro paced the deck together.

"Fortune has favoured us, amigo," said Gomez Paraira. "That southerly gale helped us wonderfully. They cannot be ahead."

"May they be choked and stifled in the pit they entered!" snarled the negro. "That is the kindest wish I have for them. And that accursed Englishman? Must we take him back? My fingers itch to strangle him!"

"And mine, my Estebian. But we must be polite, and I think it would be best to spare him. Whatever he thinks, he has no proofs. Awkward questions might be asked if we happened to lose him. No, amigo, keep your fingers away from his throat."

They sat down in the shelter of the aluminium screen.

"And about the shot we fired," asked Gacchio. "Can you explain that away?"

"We can if there is any need; but there must be no need. The channel Ferrers Lord found may lead to the Pole, or it may not. I would give my right hand to know that he was dead! We must sink the Lord of the Deep, Estebian, or all our plans will collapse. If we fail, we can swear the shot was fired accidentally. Twelve miles. It is wonderful. Twelve miles, and we win!"

A shout rang across the deck:

"The sea—the sea!"

The two men rushed forward as the vessel glided between two glistening peaks. They saw the flashing blue water in the distance, the white city of Shazana, and the green palms of its gardens.

"A new land!" said Paraira.

Gacchio was dumb with astonishment. And then came the faint but unmistakable rattle of a Maxim gun. The negro snatched a telescope and scanned the far-away city. His eyes sparkled.

"A new land, or an old land, amigo!" he snarled. "It is well-built and handsome. There is wealth there!"

Paraira laughed, for he understood Gacchio's meaning.

"They have guns, senor. Hark! Someone has found the place before us!"

"A Maxim!" said the negro. "Caramba! How would these people have Maxims?"

Their eyes met, and the Cuban cursed aloud.

"We have lost!" gasped Gomez Paraira—"lost—lost!"

Ferrers Lord had gained the Pole before them. That could be the only explanation of the sound. It was the rattle of one of his guns. Paraira's face was distorted with rage and disappointment. He paced the deck like a madman.

"Lost—lost!" he hissed. "Caramba! We are beaten—we are beaten!"

"Not yet!" snarled the negro. "Rifles—bring rifles! They are fighting, and our chance has come!"

He ran to the gun and rammed a shell into the breach. They could not see what was happening below, behind the peaks.

"You fool!" shouted Paraira. "You forget the Englishman!"

"Hang the Englishman! What do we care? The stake is lost, but there are treasures in that city. It is our chance, I tell you. These people have attacked Lord. Let the million go, but sink his vessel. Rifles, you fools!"

He knelt beside the gun. Rifles were served out and loaded. The firing had stopped. Breathlessly excited, they waited as the vessel headed through the peaks. She soared over the hollow basin.

They saw the hunters staring up at them with awestruck faces, the galleys beached, and a few others on the blue waters. But there was no sign of any gun or of the Lord of the Deep.

"Death of my life!" snarled the negro. "Bows, arrows, and spears!—Caramba! But I would swear to the Maxim. I know its bark of old. What does it mean? The gaping fools! Shall I drop a shell into them?"

"No, you madman!"

Paraira caught his arm. The sting of defeat rankled in him, but he had a clear head.

"Let them alone," he went on quickly. "Let us wait."

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We have lost, Estebian, but the prize has got to be taken. Ferrers Lord is here, but we are not finished with him. Put those rifles away. We will meet them as if nothing had happened."

They had left the amazed bear-hunters behind them, and were flying towards the city.

"Death of my life!" growled the negro wildly. "You talk well, Gomez. Meet him as if nothing had happened! It is easy to talk. I am only flesh and blood. Do you think I can keep my knife sheathed when I see his ugly face?"

"You must, amigo. I will tell you why."

"Then tell me."

"I have an idea, Estebian. No doubt he has made friends with these strange people. We must do our utmost to be friendly also. And we will find him, watchful as he is of his guard, if we wait patiently. There are a thousand ways, amigo. Patience—patience! I have a plan."

"You have so many plans!" growled the negro.

His faith in Gomez Paraira was beginning to be shaken. Hitherto things had not gone well with them. They had battled hard against a northerly wind and failing machinery. It was galling, after all their craft and cunning, to lose the great race by such a narrow margin. The crew looked ugly and sullen, for they had been promised a good share of the prize.

"Look!" snarled the Cuban, with an oath.

They were well over the city, and the vessel began to descend in the square. Side by side fluttered the British and American flags. Paraira spat at them.

Shouting, the white-robed citizens ran into the square. The vessel sank lower and lower, until it lightly touched the ground and rested there. Paraira and Gacchio sprang down.

Then the crowd parted, and Paraira's teeth snapped together as Ferrers Lord, followed by Rupert Thurston and Ching-Lung, stepped forward and halted beneath the flags. The millionaire lazily raised his yachting cap.

"You are too late, senor," he drawled mockingly. "The race is won!"

They bowed.

"I congratulate you!" said Paraira bitterly.

"That is good of you!" said the millionaire ironically.

"You are welcome to Shazana. I took the liberty of informing his Majesty King Vathmoor of your arrival. He has been gracious enough to ask me to present you. As you do not know the language I may be of use to you, little as I know of it."

"A thousand thanks, senor!"

There was a smile on his face, and burning hatred in his heart.

"It will be a pleasure, I assure you. With some difficulty I have succeeded in telling his Majesty of our little wager. He was interested. We have a few formalities to attend to. The papers must be signed and attested. I have beaten you by exactly twenty-four hours and twenty-eight minutes."

He hurried forward. Sir Clement Morwith, pale and thin, was descending the ladder. Their hands met.

"I am glad to see you again, Sir Clement."

The blood had come back into the baronet's wan cheeks at the sight of the millionaire. He crushed back a cry of joy and relief.

"Thank Heaven!" he muttered hoarsely. "And the old Union Jack has won! Bravo!"

"Did you expect us to lose?" asked Thurston, laughing.

"No, no; not for an instant. But where are we? What place is this?"

He seemed dazed, and little wonder. The horrors he had passed through were enough to turn a stronger brain, and to shatter stronger nerves than his. Gacchio noticed that all the men of Shazana carried bows or spears. It looked ominous.

"May I ask, senor, how these strange people have treated you?"

"With every kindness and courtesy."

"And you consider there is no risk of treachery?"

"Not the least," drawled Ferrers Lord. "I came here by invitation."

"I hardly understand, senor. By invitation?"

"As I said," drawled the millionaire.

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Next Tuesday: **GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER OF THE "MAGNET."** Order Early.

Ching-Lung was looking away. He dared not meet the negro's glance; he could hardly keep control of himself. There was a blare of trumpets, and the crowd divided. Vathmoor, King of Shazana, walked slowly towards the Cloud King, surrounded by the bodyguard of spearmen. He smiled and bowed. He did not speak. In his glistening chain armour, he looked every inch a king.

A seat was placed for him beneath the flags, and an attendant brought forward a table. The crowd parted again to make way for Van Witter, Prout, and Maddock. Van Witter greeted his fellow umpire heartily.

"You don't look fit, though," he drawled. "The cold doesn't agree with you, I reckon."

Sir Clement shivered. Even the fierce cold of the Land of the Eternal Ice was less cold than Paraira and his comrade.

"I have not been well," he answered. "Do you expect me to sympathise with you over America's defeat?"

"I don't!" said Van Witter bluntly, as he eyed the smiling Cuban and the scowling negro. "I'm glad we're licked. It was a boat built for America, but America wouldn't own those hangdog blackguards there. Well, Lord, shall we get to work?"

"If you please."

Two papers were placed on the table, with pen and ink.

"Gentlemen," said Ferrers Lord, "the papers are here, waiting your signatures. You have read them before, but perhaps Mr. Van Witter will be kind enough to let us hear the contents again."

The papers only contained a few lines, with the space for the name of the winning vessel to be inserted. They stated, as the umpires filled them in, that the Lord of the Deep had fairly and truly fulfilled all the conditions of the race, and had fairly and truly won it.

Sir Clement and Van Witter signed their names.

"I suppose, senior," drawled Ferrers Lord, "you have no objections to make?"

"None," said Paraira, bowing low.

"And you, Senior Gacchio?"

"None!" snarled the negro.

Van Witter rubbed his hands cheerfully.

"Waal," he said, "it seems all over bar shouting, and it was a darned good race, and fairly well, squarely lost and won! I wouldn't like to make any unpleasantness on such an occasion, and, being a guest, I don't intend to make trouble. But I have a word to say to you, Senior Paraira. I wouldn't be rude for worlds, but I am an American citizen, and the man—let him be white, black, yellow, or red—who tells me, as you did, that I am capable of selling a race has got to deal with me. In my opinion, you're a mean skunk! Mean skunks ought to be kicked, so look out. I'll keep my hands off you now, but I'll horsewhip you one day!"

The Cuban laughed contemptuously.

"Threatened men live long, senior. Bah! I do not threaten, but look out for yourself. Has anyone else any compliments to make?"

"Perhaps someone has something to say to me?" snarled Gacchio.

Ching-Lung turned swiftly.

"I have!" he answered, his eyes flashing. "You murderer! Hands up!"

He sprang forward, and levelled a revolver at the negro's head.

"Now!" said Ferrers Lord.

For the third time the crowd parted. There was a ringing British cheer, and a gleam of British bayonets.

A dozen rifles covered the startled crew of the Cloud King. They threw up their hands. Prout and Maddock flung themselves upon the giant negro, and pinioned his arms. Van Witter stared aghast.

"In the name of everything, Lord, what does this mean?"

"It means," said the millionaire calmly and clearly, "that if a man stirs, he dies! Be careful, Paraira, for I am in earnest. I arrest Estebian Gacchio for the murder of Lugard, one of my crew, in the name of all that is just and right! I arrest him for murder on the high seas!"

Gacchio flung Prout and Maddock away, and dragged out his knife. Before they could seize him again, his iron arm was round Ferrers Lord's waist, and the knife flashed down.

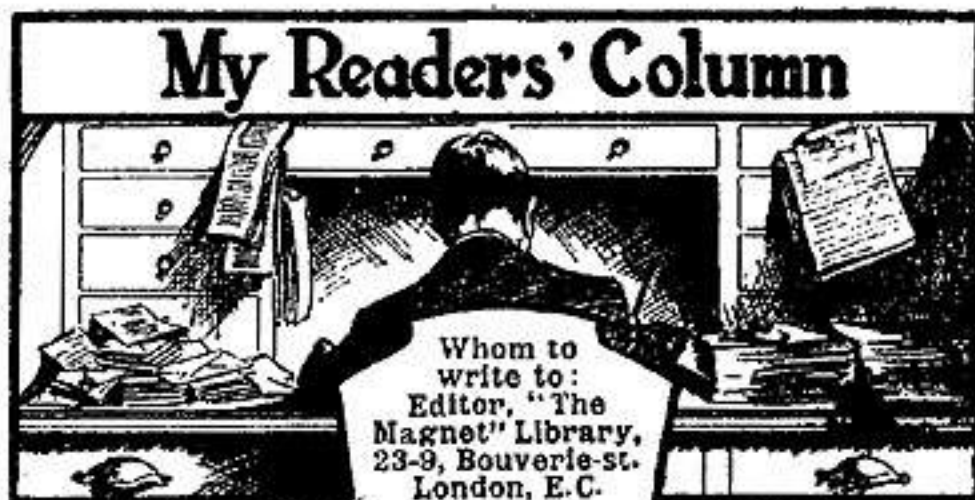
But Ching-Lung was there.

He caught the descending wrist with one quick, unfailing hand, and turned it. Then he dashed the heavy revolver full into the negro's face. Gacchio fell with a thud.

For a moment the men's attention had been distracted. Paraira, left unguarded, leapt on the deck of the Cloud King.

"Board her! Board her!" shouted Ferrers Lord.

(Another grand, long instalment of this thrilling adventure serial will be contained in next week's Splendid Double Number of "THE MAGNET" Library. Order well in advance—Price 2d.)



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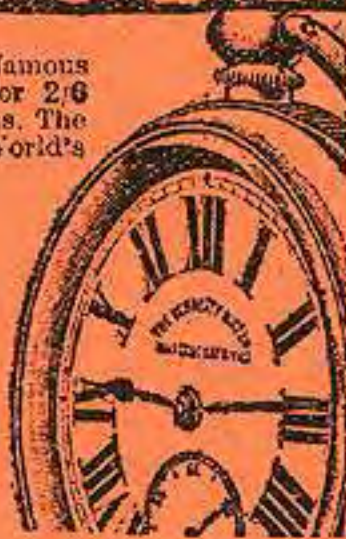
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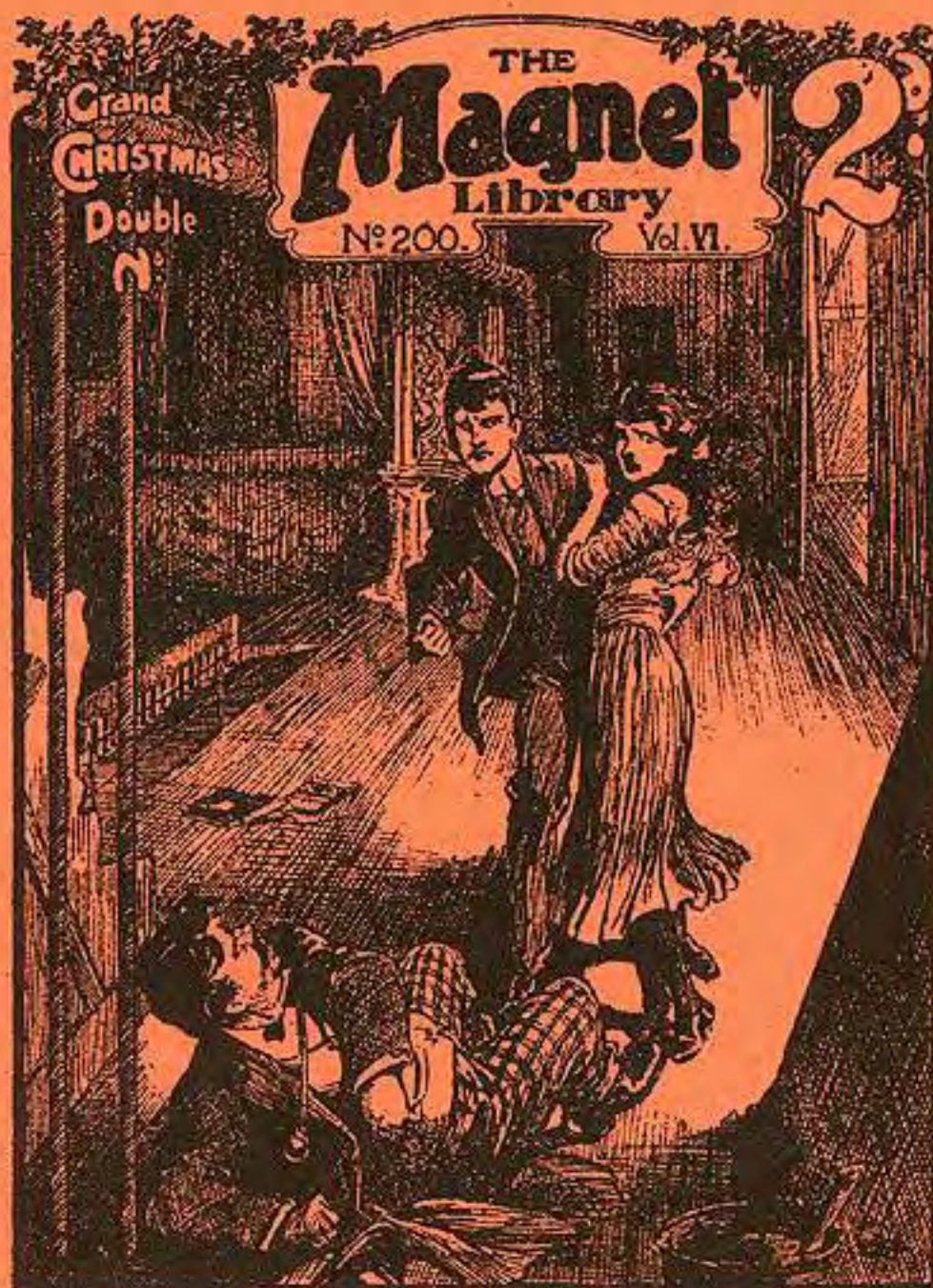
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