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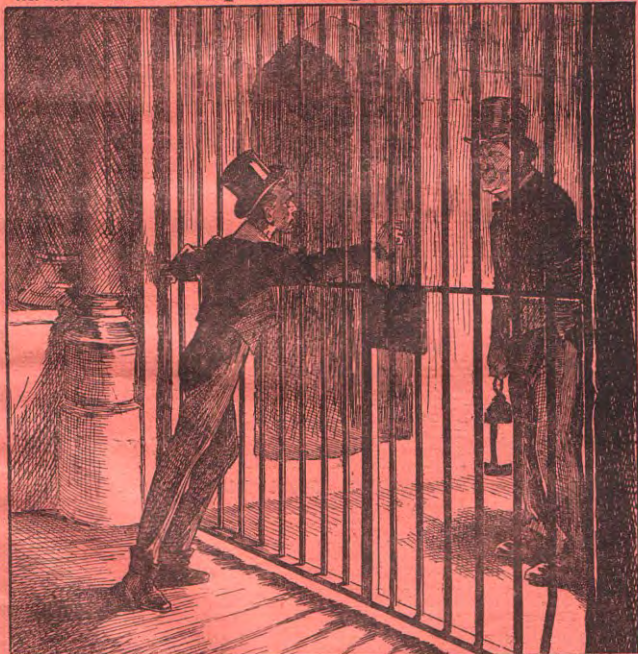
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(See page 14.)

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School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Fed Up.

"HOW'S it gone?"

A dozen voices asked that question as the Remove football team clambered down from their brake at the gates of Greyfriars.

It was hardly necessary to ask, as a matter of fact.

The looks of the fellows in the brake were enough. Bulstrode, the captain of the Remove and skipper of the footer team, wore an expression on his features like unto a thunder-cloud; Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, the two best forwards in the team, looked very gloomy; and even the sunny countenance of Bob Cherry was overcast.

It was pretty evident, from the looks of the footballers, not only that the match at Rodcliffe had gone against them, but that there had been differences of opinion in the team, and that the players were as dissatisfied with one another as with the result of the game.

"How's it gone?"
"Can't you talk?"
"Did you lick them?"
"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode, and marched in at the gates, with the same forbidding frown upon his face.
"I say, Cherry, how did it go?"
"Rotten!" said Bob Cherry, as he followed Bulstrode in.
"Did you lick them, Wharton?"
"No!" growled Harry.
"Did they lick you?"
"Yes!"
"Oh!"

The gloomy footballers marched in in grim silence, and the crowd of fellows who had been waiting at the gate to greet them with cheers for a victory, followed them in, glumly, too. As a rule, the Greyfriars Remove fared very well in their matches. At Greyfriars they had beaten the Upper Fourth many a time, and they were quite confident of being able to beat the Fifth, if the Fifth would have consented to play them. In their matches with other schools they won at least twice in three times. But it had to be acknowledged that since Bulstrode had been captain the footer eleven's luck

had not held so steadily good. Bulstrode knew it well enough himself, for that matter.

"Sure, it's rotten!" said Micky Desmond, voicing the opinions of the other fellows, as they followed the footballers in. "Redcliffe isn't a strong team. We've beaten bigger teams than Redcliffe. If I'd been in the eleven this time—"

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode.

"We could all have done wonders if we'd been there, of course," said Hazeldene, with a grin. "How did you come to let them beat you, Bulstrode?"

"Rotten team!" said Bulstrode.

"Oh!"

"How did they come to beat you, Wharton?" asked Leigh.

"Rotten captain!" said Bob Cherry, before Harry could reply. And there was a chuckle from the crowd of Removites.

Bulstrode flushed red.

"Never mind," said Lord Maulverer, the dandy of the Remove, condescendingly—"never mind, my dear fellows. Better luck next time!"

"Oh, rot!"

"My dear Nugent—"

"Piffle!" said Nugent.

"We shan't have any better luck till we've got a skipper who can keep his temper on the footer-fiddi," said Johnny Bull.

"Oh!" said the Removites, all together. They understood.

Bulstrode went into his study and slammed the door. The footballers were surrounded by little groups of juniors, curious to hear the details of the match. Redcliffe School was a good distance from Greyfriars, and only a few fellows had accompanied the team to see the play.

"Give us the whole yarn, Cherry," said Hazeldene.

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Ask Bulstrode."

"No fear! I don't want my head punched!"

"Bulstrode doesn't look pleased," said Lord Maulverer. "Was there trouble in the match?"

Wharton made a restless gesture.

"Well, yes," he said. "Bulstrode lost his temper. That's all."

"Not for the first time, either!" said Ogilvy angrily. "We lost a match against Courtfield from Bulstrode's temper. We were nearly licked at Highcliffe from the same cause. I'm fed up with Bulstrode's temper, for one! I'm going to resign from the eleven!"

"I've a jolly good mind, too!" said Nugent.

"Same here!"

"I'm sick of it!"

"It's rotten!"

There was a great deal of unanimity among the footballers on that subject. Johnny Bull tapped Wharton on the shoulder.

"There's only one thing to be done," he said.

Wharton looked uneasy.

"What's that?" he asked.

"We want a new skipper."

"Hear, hear!" said all the footballers together, very heartily.

Wharton shook his head decidedly.

"I'm standing by Bulstrode," he said.

"Oh, rot!"

"Rates!"

"Boosh!"

"Look here, I suppose we're going to win some matches some time!" bawled Tom Brown. "We shall never win with a skipper who flies into a temper, and rags his men before the enemy, and puts the whole team off their form!"

"Bulstrode's no good!"

"Rotten!"

"It was all right when Wharton was captain," said Nugent. "I think Wharton ought to be skipper again."

"Well, I don't!" said Harry. "The Remove gave me the order of the boot, and took on Bulstrode, and I won't have a hand in shifting him. I said all along that I was backing up Bulstrode, and I stick to it. And it's not the business of a team to criticise their skipper, either. 'Nuff said!"

And Wharton walked away.

A growl from the Removites followed him. They were all in an exasperated mood. In the common-room talk ran high, and if Bulstrode had been there he would have heard some very unpleasant truths about himself.

Bulstrode undoubtedly meant well, but he was far too autocratic, and he frequently allowed his temper to run away with his judgment. And a skipper who lost his temper and ragged his men on the very field, was not the kind of skipper to inspire confidence. And a team without confidence—

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dence in their leader, and feeling sore and irritated with him, was not likely to effect great things at footer. The inevitable result had followed—the Greyfriars Remove had been licked by a much inferior team, and with a wide margin of goals against them—four to two. And but for Harry's Wharton's influence, the footballers would probably have bumped their skipper after the match.

Bulstrode remained in his study for some time. When he came out he did not speak to any of the Remove, but walked to the notice-board in the hall and pinned up a paper on it. His action was seen, and there was soon a crowd of fellows round the board reading the notice. And there was a buzz as its contents became known.

For this was what was written in Bulstrode's large and heavy hand:

"NOTICE!—The undersigned resigns the position of captain of the Remove and football skipper, and will not stand for re-election.

"GEORGE BULSTRODE."

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Not a Walk-over.

"RESIGNED!"

"Bulstrode's resigned!" The news ran through the Remove like wildfire. It was received with undiluted satisfaction by the juniors.

Even the fellows who had been keenest to elect Bulstrode, on a previous occasion, over the head of Harry Wharton, had become quite "fed up," as they expressed it, with the Bulstrode regime.

All the football members of the Form wanted to have Wharton for captain again; but Wharton had always stood in the steadiest way against any suggestion of undermining Bulstrode's position.

Now, however, that Bulstrode had resigned, there was no reason why Harry should not stand for election.

"It will be a walk-over for Wharton," said Ogilvy.

"If he puts up," said Morgan.

"He's got to put up for it," said Bob Cherry warmly.

"Why, we'll make him! Let's go and see him now, and put it to him!"

"Good egg!"

A crowd of eager juniors hurried off at once to Harry Wharton's study. Wharton was doing his preparation in Study No. 1, and he looked surprised as Bob Cherry, and Nugent, and Johnny Bull, and Mark Linley, and a crowd more came streaming in.

"Have you heard?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Heard what?"

"Bulstrode's resigned!"

"Oh!"

"There will have to be a new election for Form captain," said Bob Cherry. "You are our candidate, Harry."

"Three cheers for Wharton!" roared John Bull.

"Hurrah!"

Wharton rose to his feet.

"This is rather sudden!" he remarked.

"Better late than never!" said Frank Nugent. "Bulstrode's resigned, all of his own accord. Nobody knew what he was going to do. Now, look here, you are going to stand for election! We want you!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Hear, hear!"

Wharton hesitated.

"I shall have to speak to Bulstrode first," he said.

"What for?" demanded Bob Cherry wrathfully. "Bulstrode's resigned, and he's got nothing to do with it now!"

"All the same, I'd rather speak to him first."

"Oh, rats!"

Wharton laid down his pen.

"If you fellows will wait, I'll give you my answer in a few minutes," he said.

"Oh, go ahead!" grunted Nugent. "I know it's no good arguing with you, you obstinate ass!"

Wharton laughed, and left the study. Bulstrode's study was next door, and Wharton gave a tap and entered. Bulstrode, no longer captain of the Remove, was seated in his armchair, with his legs stretched out, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and a gloomy frown upon his face. He looked up at Harry with a far from pleasant expression.

"I know all about it," he said, before Harry could speak. "I heard them yelling in your study. They want you for captain."

"Some of them do," said Harry. "I want to speak to you first."

"What for?" said Bulstrode brusquely. "It's nothing to do with me. I've known for a long time that the Remove



Too intent upon business to notice that Bob Cherry and two or three other Juniors had taken firm grip on the table, Billy Bunter raised his fat fist, intending to smack it into the palm of the other hand, to intimate that the sale of his vote was over. "Going," he shouted, "going, go—" "Gone!" yelled Bob Cherry; and at the word, the table was heaved up under Billy Bunter and he yelled and rolled wildly off it. (See Chapter 9.)

wanted you back again, and I've resigned. That's all. I'm not going to vote in the election, either. I'm done with all that."

"I promised to back you up when you became skipper," said Wharton quietly. "I think that promise holds good. Have you thought this over, old chap?"

Bulstrode's face softened a little.

"Yes," he replied. "As a matter of fact, I've been thinking it over from the beginning of the term. To-day finishes it. I suppose I was wrong to break out at Brown and Ogilvy to-day; but they irritated me. Anyway, I'm fed up with being captain, and the job doesn't suit me. You're welcome to it."

"If you choose to withdraw your resignation, I stand by you."

Bulstrode shook his head.

"It's very decent of you to say so, Wharton; but I'm done with it. And I think you'd do well to put up as captain. If you don't, Vernon-Smith will, and the Boulder won't make a good Form captain, I imagine."

"If you're really done with it, I shall stand for election," said Harry; "but I wanted to have that quite clear."

"It's settled."

"Very well, then."

"I sha'n't vote in the election," said Bulstrode. "I think it would be better for me to keep out of it entirely. But if you're elected I'll back you up. I'll stand by you, as you've stood by me. That's fair."

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NEXT
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"THE RIVALS' TEST!"

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"Thanks, old man! I think I shall get in. I don't know who there is to oppose me, unless the Boulder does."

"He will," said Bulstrode. "And if he does, I shall give you my vote if you need it. Otherwise, I shall keep clear of the election."

"Right ho!"

Wharton left the study. A buzz of eager voices greeted him as he entered No. 1.

"Well?"

"It's all right," said Harry cheerfully. "Bulstrode's quite made up his mind about it, and he's going to support me if I need it. I'll put up my name for election."

"Hurrah!"

The study rang with the cheering.

As the juniors, highly elated, crowded out into the passage again, Vernon-Smith came out of his study. Vernon-Smith, the Boulder of Greyfriars, evidently knew what was going forward. There was a very intent and keen look upon his face, and a peculiar gleam in his eyes. It had long been Vernon-Smith's ambition to attain the position of Form captain in the Remove, and it seemed to him that his chance had come at last.

"What's the row about?" he asked.

"Bulstrode's resigned," said Mark Linley.

"Yes, I know that. But—"

"Wharton's our candidate!" explained Bob Cherry. And the juniors gave a yell.

"Hurrah for Wharton!"

Vernon-Smith's lip curled.

"The only candidate!" he asked.

"Yes, rather! I don't think anybody in the Remove will have cheek enough to put up against Wharton," said Johnny Bull. "He would not have much chance, if he did. This will be a giddy surprise for Hurree Singh when he comes back. It will be a walk-over for Wharton, and I'll be in time to vote in the election."

"Oh, it's going to be a walk-over, is it?" said Vernon-Smith, with a glitter in his eyes.

"Oh, yes! Wharton won't be opposed."

"Won't he?"

"I think not."

"I rather think you're wrong," said the Bounder. "I think somebody else will put up as the rival candidate."

"Oh! Who, then?"

"Myself!"

Bob Cherry laughed scornfully.

"You! You wouldn't have a dog's chance!"

"We shall see!" said the Bounder.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter's Right Place.

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Oh, dry up, Bunter!"

"But ain't you coming to the meeting?"

The group of juniors in the common-room, discussing the coming election, stared at Billy Bunter in surprise. The Owl of the Remove blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"Form meeting at seven sharp," he said. "About the election."

"I didn't know there was a meeting already," said Bob Cherry.

"Who called it?" asked Nugent.

"The chief candidate."

"Oh, we'd better roll in, then!" said Johnny Bull. "It's close on seven. Come on!"

"Right you are!"

And the juniors walked out of the common-room. They called to two or three others as they went, and quite a crowd of them arrived at the door of the Remove Form-room as the hour of seven rang out from the clock-tower.

The light was on in the Form-room, but it was empty. Bob Cherry and his companions were evidently the first to arrive. Bob looked round him.

"Wharton isn't here," he remarked.

"Begad, and nobody else is, either!" said Lord Maulverer.

"I suppose they're coming in."

Micky Desmond and Ogilvy and Hazeldene came in at the door. They seemed surprised at seeing so few fellows present.

"Sure, and where are the others?" asked Desmond.

"Bunter told us there was a Form meeting on to discuss the giddy election. We've turned in to back up Wharton."

Harry Wharton entered.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yes, here I am," said Wharton. "What's it about?"

"Eh?"

"What's the meeting about?" asked Harry.

The juniors stared at him.

"Well, you ought to know, as you called it," said Bob Cherry, in astonishment.

Wharton stared at him in turn.

"I—I didn't call any old meeting," he said.

"Haven't you called a Form meeting to discuss the election?"

"Of course not."

"Why, that as Bunter said the chief candidate had called a meeting," explained Nugent. "I suppose the fathead was referring to Vernon-Smith, then."

"Faith, and I'm not going to attend Vernon-Smith's rotten meetings, at all," said Micky Desmond decidedly.

"Same here!"

"Begad, no!"

"Oh, stay and see it through!" said Harry Wharton. "If the Bounder's got anything to say, it's only fair to hear it."

"Yaas, that's cricket," said Lord Maulverer.

Vernon-Smith and Bolsover and Snoop walked in. Bolsover, the bull of the Remove, and Snoop, who was generally regarded as a sneak, were known to be backers of the Bounder. They were worthy companions for the black sheep of Greyfriars.

"Well, we're ready for you, Smithy," exclaimed Nugent.

"Ready for what?" asked the Bounder.

"You're going to make a speech, I suppose?"

"Why on earth should I make a speech?"

"Well, I suppose you're going to do something or other, after calling a giddy meeting?" Bob Cherry exclaimed.

"I haven't called any meeting."

"It's a jape of Bunter's, then," exclaimed John Bull.

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"He distinctly told us that the candidate had called a meeting."

"He told me so," said Vernon-Smith. "That's why I've come in. If there isn't a meeting—"

"Where's Bunter?"

"Where's the fat bounder?"

"Here he is!"

More and more fellows were pouring into the Form-room. More than half the Remove had come in by this time, and Billy Bunter had come in with them. The fat junior stopped towards the Form-master's desk, and there was a rush of angry Removites towards him at once.

"What did you mean by telling us that a candidate had called a Form meeting, you fat Ananias?" bawled Bob Cherry.

Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You fat fibber!"

"But it's true!"

"True! Here's Wharton and Smithy, and neither of them has called a meeting, you porpoise!" said Bob Cherry wrathfully.

"I wasn't talking about Wharton or Vernon-Smith. I said the chief candidate."

"Eh? There isn't a third candidate," said Russell.

"There jolly well is!" Billy Bunter mounted to the master's desk, set his big spectacles straight upon his fat little nose, and blinked at the juniors. "I say, you fellows, I've called this meeting."

"You!" roared the Remove.

"Yes, certainly!"

"Why, you are—"

"You said a candidate."

"I'm a candidate."

The juniors simply gasped. Billy Bunter had many little peculiarities, but nobody had ever supposed that he would have the astounding effrontery to offer himself as a candidate for election as Form captain. The Removites stared at him blankly.

"Well, of all the cheek!" ejaculated Bob Cherry at last.

"Ha, ha, ha! Captain Bunter! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! You've tried Wharton as captain, and he didn't amount to much; you've tried Bulstrode, and he was no good. My idea is that we ought to have real talent at the head of the Form. I have been kept out of the footer and other things by personal jealousy, and have never really had a chance of showing the Form what I can do."

"Excepting in the Falstaff line," grinned Trevor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm standing up as a candidate," said Bunter. "I'm the Reform candidate. We've had enough of old methods. Vote for Bunter and Reform! That's my programme."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've called this meeting," went on the Owl of the Remove, blinking wrathfully at the grinning juniors—"I've called this meeting to discuss the matter with some sense. What we want is a captain who can play footer—that's me! We want a captain who's got sense enough to manage things—that's me! We want a chap who can manage the finances of the footer and cricket clubs—that's me! We want a good all-round man—"

"Well, you're round enough," admitted Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What we don't want," pursued Bunter, unheeding—"what we don't want is a captain like we've had before. We don't want—"

"Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! I've called this meeting—"

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"We've heard that before."

"To urge the Remove to take the chance of putting the right man in the right place. I think some of the fellows here realize what a chance this is. Put me in the right place, and you'll see that I shall make things hum."

"Gentlemen," said Bob Cherry, jumping on a form. "I beg to endorse Bunter's statement."

"What!" howled the Remove.

"I beg to endorse Bunter's statement. We ought to give him his deserts. Every fellow is entitled to his deserts, and if Bunter asks for his deserts, he ought to have them."

"That's just what I say," said Bunter.

"Hear, hear!"

"Bunter asks to be put in his right place," said Bob Cherry. "Every fellow has a right to be put in his right place. And Bunter asks for it."

"Hear, hear!"

"Gentlemen, I suggest that Bunter be given his deserts and put in his right place," said Bob Cherry. "Hands up for the suggestion."

"Hear, hear!"

Every hand went up.

"Then, come on!" said Bob Cherry, and he jumped down off the form. There was a rush of juniors, yelling with laughter, towards the Owl of the Remove.

"I say, you fellows, Bob Cherry has put it splendidly! That's just—here, I say, hold on! I mean, leggo! Oh! Ow! Yoo-hoo!"

Rump!

Billy Bunter was jerked down from the Form-master's desk, and bumped heavily on the floor. Then he was dragged bodily across the Form-room, and deposited in the waste-paper basket. The waste-paper basket in the Remove Form-room was a large one, but it was not calculated to hold a youth of Bunter's dimensions. It cracked and creaked as he was seated in it, and as the juniors jammed him down, the rim of the basket held him as in a vice.

"Ow, ow, ow! I say, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There you are!" gasped Bob Cherry. "You asked for it. You're in your right place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've got your deserts, and you're in your right place," chuckled Nugent. "Are you satisfied?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow, ow! Great! Help!"

The juniors streamed out of the Form-room, roaring with laughter. Bunter made wild but ineffectual efforts to escape from the waste-paper basket. No one offered him a helping hand, and in a couple of minutes he was left alone in the Form-room.

"Ow, ow! Help!"

Bump! Billy Bunter rolled over in his efforts to extract himself from his imprudent, and came down heavily on the floor. But even then the waste-paper basket would not come off. Bunter was too tightly jammed in it.

"Ow, ow! Help! Ow! Beasts! Yow! Help!"

"What on earth's all that now?" exclaimed a sharp voice, as Wingate, of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, looked into the room. "Great Scott! What's the matter with you, Bunter? What idiotic game are you playing with that basket?"

"Ow! Yow! I can't get out! Yow! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wingate.

"You are!" roared Bunter. "I—I mean, please lend a hand."

Wingate seized the fat junior by the shoulders and swung him against a desk. The basket was knocked off, and Wingate dropped Bunter gasping on the floor.

"There you are!" he said cheerfully.

"Ow! Yow! I'm hurt."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Greyfriars captain walked away laughing. Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet, gasping for breath.

"Ow!" he murmured. "Beasts! Ow! They don't deserve to have a really good Form-captain! Ow! Beasts! I won't stand for election again! Yow!"

And he didn't!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Straight from the Shoulder.

GREYFRIARS was going cheerfully on the even tenour of its way, but in the Remove, during the next day or two, there was excitement. The election of a new Form-captain was a matter of very serious moment to the Removites.

At a time of somewhat unreasonable dissatisfaction with their Form-captain, they had turned against Harry Wharton. The election of Bulstrode had been the result. Bulstrode had certainly not given satisfaction. He had doubtless done his best, but he had not the grip on the Form that the position of captain required. Some of his old faults of character, reminiscent of the time when he was known as The Magnet Library.—No. 211.

The Bully of the Remove, still clung to him. He was too sleek in some things, and too hard in others. And a factor captain who ragged his men on the field of battle was not to be tolerated patiently by the Removites. Wharton had never lost his temper in a game, and Wharton had led the Remove team to many victories. Most of the sporting fellows in the Remove had learned to be sorry for turning Harry Wharton out, but Wharton had steadily resisted any attempt to set him up against Bulstrode.

At the time of Bulstrode's election Wharton had declared that he would back up the new captain, and he had done so loyally. Indeed, everybody knew that Bulstrode would have had no success at all in the captaincy but for Wharton's backing.

Now that Bulstrode had chosen to resign, and Wharton that he backed up Wharton as the new candidate, there was no reason why Harry should not stand. And there was all the more reason, because if Wharton did not get in Vernon-Smith was certain to do so.

There were only the two candidates. Billy Bunter's brief candidature had not survived the meeting in the Form-room. The struggle was left to be fought out between Harry Wharton and the Bouncer.

To Harry Wharton's friends it had at first appeared as if his election would be a great deal of the nature of a walk-over, but in the course of a day or two it was seen very clearly that it would prove to be nothing of the sort.

Vernon-Smith meant business.

The Bouncer was a curious fellow in many respects. Few liked him, or could like him, and yet there were many qualities in his nature, in spite of his reckless blackguardism, that took the fancy of some of the Remove. He had unbounded nerve and courage, qualities always prized by boys. He was cleverer than almost any fellow in the Remove—he was popularly believed to know things the Sixth did not know. Certain it was that if he entered for a prize any other fellow had very little chance against him, and if he lost, he was sure to be second on the list.

Added to that, he was rich—the richest fellow at Greyfriars with the exception of Lord Mauleverer. His father was a millionaire, and allowed him unlimited pocket-money, Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith's aim being to give his son every chance of distinguishing himself, and showing Greyfriars and the world generally what an expensive son Mr. Vernon-Smith could afford to have.

Money always has an influence, and there were fellows in the Remove as everywhere, who found it very convenient to know a fellow who seldom refused a borrower. And Vernon-Smith spent his money lavishly enough, and even fellows who did not like him, and would not have descended to borrow of him, came to his study feeds.

And the more reckless fellows in the Form, who smoked cigarettes in their studies, and occasionally broke bounds to visit the betting "gents," at the Cross Keys public-house, and had wonderful knowledge on the subject of "bookies" and "dead cards," looked up to the Bouncer as their leader.

Even the footballers of the Form respected him. For the Bouncer, though a slacker, as a rule, had shown that he was as fine a footballer as any fellow in the Form when he chose to exert himself. He had captained a Remove team once with great success. There was no doubt that he could make a good skipper if he liked.

But would he like?

Wharton and his chums knew that he would not. They could foresee the team going to the dogs, and general rottenness falling upon the Form, if the reins fell into the hands of the Bouncer.

His position of Form-captain would give him a great deal of influence, and the fellows who had always stood for order and decency would have to stand aside, and let him go on his way.

"We've got to save the Form from Vernon-Smith," Harry Wharton said, as the chums talked the matter over in Study No. 1. "The Form will go to rot if he gets in. If I weren't a candidate I should say the same."

"Yes, rather!" said Frank Nugent. "And we shall have to fight for it, too. I thought at first that the fellows would plump for you, but I can see now that the Bouncer has a jolly good chance. He's not leaving a stone unturned. A lot of fellows who owe him money are going to vote for him. Vernon-Smith's given them a hint that if they vote against him he will want to be paid. I had it from a chap who borrowed five bob of me to get clear with him."

"The cad!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, he's a howling cad, but he's a clever cad," said Nugent; "and he's going to get in as captain unless we stop him."

"Some of the seniors are working for him, too," said

John Bull—"Leder, and Carne, and Walker, and that set. They've told some of our fellows that there will be lines and kickings for them if Wharton is elected. Vernon-Smith is hand in glove with Leder, and with every real rotter in the school, for that matter."

"We've got to stop him," said Harry Wharton. "If you fellows think that any other chap has a better chance of beating him I'm ready to stand down."

Nugent shook his head.

"You're the only chap who's got a chance," he said.

"If you don't beat him nobody can, I think—"

Nugent paused as a tap came at the door.

"Come in!" called out Wharton.

The fellow under discussion walked into the study.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Talk of angels, and you hear the rustle of their giddy wings."

Vernon-Smith sneered.

"So you were talking about me?" he exclaimed.

"Exactly!" said Bob Cherry coolly. "We were saying that we've got to make every effort to keep such a howling cad from getting in as captain of the Remove. If you mean to hint that we were talking against you behind your back, there it is to your face, and I hope you like it."

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"I didn't come here for a row," he exclaimed. "I want to have a talk with Wharton. I hear that Hurree Singh is coming back."

"Yes," said Wharton.

"When does he get here?"

"He lands at Southampton on Monday," said Harry Wharton.

"That's according to his last letter. He comes on here on Tuesday."

Vernon-Smith's eyes glinted for a moment.

"Thanks!" he said. "I shall be glad to see him back."

By the way, Wharton, I want to have a talk with you. I didn't think these fellows were with you—"

"You can talk before them," said Harry quietly. "I've got no secrets from my friends."

The Bouncer laughed.

"I have myself," he said. "But different fellows have different tastes. But I'd rather have a talk to you alone, if you don't mind—I want to discuss the election—so I'll look in another time."

"Oh, well, get out," said Bob Cherry. "Come on, Franky! You'll find us in the common-room, Harry, when you come down."

"Right—b," said Wharton.

The juniors left the study, and Bob Cherry closed the door after he went out. Harry Wharton looked rather impatiently at the Bouncer. He did not mean to have any secrets between himself and the backguard of the Remove.

"Well, what is it?" he asked rather sharply.

"I want to talk to you," said the Bouncer quietly. "I know what you are like, Wharton. You are going to stick against me not so much because you want to be captain of the Form, as because you think I shall make a rotten bad skipper, and you want to keep me out."

"Well, that's putting it plainly," said Wharton. "If you want it straight from the shoulder, that's just how the case stands. I think I shall make a pretty good captain, but I don't care twopenny whether I win or not, excepting that I don't want to see the Remove led by a—a—well, a rotter. Excuse me."

Vernon-Smith smiled grimly.

"Oh, pho to it on!" he said coolly. "Hard words break no bones. Besides, I'm no fool, and I admit there's a certain amount of reason in what you say."

Wharton stared at him.

"Well, I never expected you to admit that," he said, after a pause.

"What's the odds? It's true. But you remember that Bulstrode was rather on the same lines, don't you, and when he got in as Form captain it staidied him, and he turned out quite a model."

"He is a decent chap now, at all events," said Harry.

"Exactly! And if I get in as captain, Wharton, and you don't oppose me, I'm willing to give you my word to do as Bulstrode did—chuck up rotting of every sort, and put my shoulder to the wheel."

"If I withdraw, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"But I'm not going to withdraw," said Wharton, in astonishment. "Even if I believed you—"

"You don't believe me, then?"

Wharton hesitated.

"Well, I hardly know what to say," he replied. "I know you could make a jolly good captain if you liked. I believe you could get ahead of me on a good many points. But I can't help thinking that even if you turned over a new leaf, and played the game, you'd grow sick and tired of it in time, and would drop into the old ways. Bulstrode had a

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good many relapses. I think your first relapse would be permanent, and you'd be a bigger bouncer than ever if you were Form captain. Excuse me—we're speaking plainly, you know."

"Quite so," said the Bouncer, unmoved. "But I'm willing to give you every possible assurance that I'll do well for the Remove if you withdraw. I want you to withdraw, and—"

"And what?"

"I'll make it worth your while," said Vernon-Smith, sinking his voice.

Wharton stared at him blankly.

"I don't understand you," he said slowly.

"I'll explain. You know my father's a millionaire?"

"I've heard so."

"He sends me all the money I ask for. If I were to ask him for twenty-five pounds to-day he'd send it."

Wharton breathed hard.

"What's that go to do with me?" he asked.

"Don't you see?" muttered the Bouncer. "Of course, it is in confidence—I'm relying on you to keep it dark, whether you accept the offer or not. I particularly want to be captain of the Remove. There may be nothing in it, but I want it, and I'm accustomed to having what I want, and I'm willing to pay for it. Stand out of the election, and give me a free field, and it means twenty-five quid in your pocket."

"What?"

"Twenty-five quid, and not a soul would know it. Twenty-five pounds aren't picked up every day. What do you say?"

"You say you can!" shouted Wharton.

"Look here—"

"You want an answer, I suppose," Harry Wharton's eyes were blazing. "You want an answer, you unspeakable cad! There it is!"

Crash!

Wharton's fist crashed into the Bouncer's face, and Vernon-Smith, with a yell, fell heavily to the floor of the study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bitter Foes.

THE study door opened, and two or three of the Remove looked in. Wharton's angry voice, and the yell and the fall of the Bouncer, had been heard along the passage.

Nugent and Bob Cherry and Russell, and some others stood in at the starting scene.

Vernon-Smith had risen on his elbow, gasping for breath, and he was regarding Harry Wharton with a deadly look.

"My hat!" ejaculated Nugent. "What the—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the trouble?"

Wharton pointed to the Bouncer, his eyes flashing.

"Ask that cad!" he said, between his teeth.

"Oh!" muttered the Bouncer. "I'll make you pay for this!"

"I say, this is rather rotten!" said Russell uneasily. "We ought to get the election through without the candidates pommeling one another like a set of fags."

"Fairly, and ye're right!" said Micky Desmond, looking in from the passage. "Sure, and I'm surprised at ye, Wharton!"

"Ask him what he said to me!" said Harry angrily.

The Bouncer rose slowly to his feet.

"I came here to have a friendly talk with you about the election," he muttered thickly. "If you say there was anything more than that in it, you're a liar! You've knocked me down. You'll answer for it!"

Wharton's lip curled disdainfully.

"I'm ready to answer for it any time you like," he replied.

"Then you'll meet me in the gym. in half an hour?"

"I'm quite willing."

"That's settled, then."

Vernon-Smith walked out of the study. The flush of anger died out of Harry Wharton's face. The fellows who had come into the study were all his friends and backers, but they were looking very uneasy. It was a bad beginning to the election.

In Form elections the Removeites liked to keep outward appearance, at least, of concord. They did not like the Fourth and the Fifth to be able to say that they carried them out like a set of quarrelsome fags.

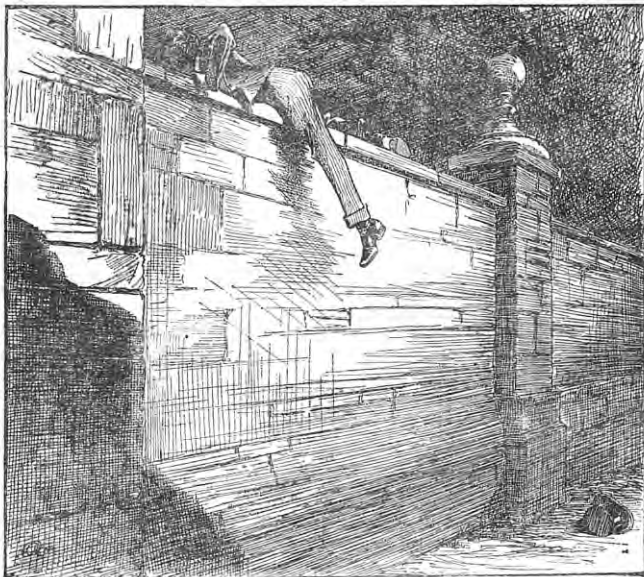
But the new election for the captain of the Remove had started on the worst possible terms. A fight between the two candidates on the eve of the election was really too "thick."

"I say, this is rotten!" Nugent exclaimed abruptly. "What did he do to make you hit him, Harry?"

Wharton gritted his teeth.

"He's a rotten cad! I'd rather not repeat what he said."

He told me that he was speaking in confidence, though I did



Slowly, but surely, the Nabob of Bhanipur dragged himself higher, and put a leg over the top of the wall. His silk hat had fallen off into the road, but he did not even notice it. He drew one deep breath, and slid down inside the wall. (See Chapter 15.)

not agree to keep it dark as he wanted. But the less said about it the better. He would deny having made me the offer. That's why the cad wanted to speak to me alone—to have no witnesses. He'd think nothing of denying his own words, and then it would be my word against his."

"But—but he made you an offer!"

"Yes."

"Do you mean he wanted you to withdraw?"

"Well, yes, and— But I'd rather not speak about it. I've given him his answer, anyway."

"It's rotten, though," Nugent said thoughtfully. "Vernon-Smith will work it that he came here for a friendly talk, and that you pitched into him for nothing!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Let the cad say what he likes."

"It may make a difference at the election," said Frank, rather sharply. "But, look here, this fight must not come off. It would be too bad for the two candidates to be fighting just before the election, as if we were settling Form matters by fistfights. You can't turn up at the election with black eyes and swollen noses. The Fourth would never leave off chipping us. It will have to be arranged somehow."

"You can arrange it if you like, Frank. I'm willing to leave the fight till after the election, if Smith is. It would certainly be better."

"Good! Then I'll see him about it."

And Nugent left the study.

The story of the encounter was known to all the Remove in a very short time. As Frank had anticipated, it did Wharton THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 211.

no good. Vernon-Smith had said that he went to No. 1 Study for a friendly talk, and that Wharton had quarrelled with him, and hit out. His friends repeated the story, and Wharton's failure to give the exact cause of the quarrel made the Bounder's story look plausible. And many of the fellows knew only too well that Wharton had a temper that was sometimes touchy, and he had often been accused of being high-handed before.

"The blessed bounder wants taking down a peg or two, that's what it is," Trevor said, in the common-room. Trevor was a supporter of neither side. He was quite indifferent on the subject of the election. But he had had one or two rubs with Wharton at various times. "I think Wharton ought to be shown that he can't hit out whenever he feels inclined."

"Sure, Smithy must have ragged him some way," said Micky Desmond.

"Wharton doesn't say how he did it."

"No, but—"

"He's cocky!" said Snoop. "That's what it is. He's cocky. And I think the Remove ought to show Mr. Cocky Wharton that he can't have everything his own way. That's my opinion."

And some of the other fellows echoed Snoop's opinion. Nugent heard the talk when he came into the common-room to look for the Bounder, and it made his face cloud. He could easily see that the row in No. 1 Study had damaged Harry Wharton's chance of success at the election.

Vernon-Smith was not in the common-room, and Nugent had looked into his study and found it empty. He inquired

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TUESDAY:

"THE RIVALS' TEST!"

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for the Bouncer, and obtained information from Billy Bunter. Bunter was the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars, and he generally knew everybody's business. The number of things that he "happened" to see and hear was amazing.

"I say, Nugent, I happened to see Smithy go into Bolsover's study—"

"Oh, good!" said Frank.

"Bolsover's going to be his second in fighting Wharton," Bunter explained.

"How do you know?"

"Well, you see, I happened to hear—"

"Your car happened to be at the keyhole, I suppose?" said Penfold.

"Oh, really, Penfold—"

Nugent hurried up to the Remove passage again. He knocked at the door of Bolsover major's study, and entered. The bully of the Remove was there, and the Bouncer was with him. Vernon-Smith was rubbing a mark upon his face as he talked to Bolsover. There was a savage glitter in his eyes. Both the juniors turned round, and stared at Nugent as he entered.

"Well, what do you want?" asked Bolsover.

"Just a word with Vernon-Smith," said Nugent quietly. "I was told that he was here. It's about the meeting in the gym."

"That's arranged," said Vernon-Smith.

"Some of us think that it would look better to all the school if the candidates could keep their hands off one another until after the election, at least," said Nugent dryly. "It will look rotten, to say the least of it, for you and Wharton to fight."

"That's not my fault. I went to his study to discuss things in a friendly way, and he hit out at me after a few words. He may have misunderstood something I said. But you don't expect me to take that sort of thing lying down, do you?"

"Are you willing to leave the fight till after the election?" Vernon-Smith sneered.

"And go to the election with the mark of Wharton's fist on my face, and all the fellows saying that I'm afraid to hit back?" he exclaimed. "A good chance I should have of election, then. They would think I was a funk."

"It could be explained."

"I don't want to be unreasonable," said Vernon-Smith. "If Wharton's willing to apologise for what he did, I'll leave the fight till after the election, or chuck it altogether. But if not, now!"

"Wharton will not do that."

"Very well. The fight will have to go on, then."

"That's your answer?"

"Certainly!"

Nugent compressed his lips, and left the study. He returned to No. 1, and Wharton gave him an inquiring look. "Vernon-Smith will put it off, if you'll apologise for having struck him," said Frank reluctantly.

"I certainly shan't do that!"

"Then we'd better get down to the gym."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Fight to a Finish.

QUITE a crowd of fellows streamed into the gymnasium. Nearly all the Remove had turned up, and quite a number of the Upper Fourth came with Temple, Dabney & Co. to look on. Coker, of the Fifth, too, was there, with some of his friends. The fight was likely to be an interesting one. Harry Wharton was the best fighting man in the Remove with the exception of Bob Cherry, though he was not quite big enough for Bolsover. Vernon-Smith was known to be a good boxer, and to have plenty of pluck and an iron determination. Whether he could stand up to Wharton was a question that remained to be answered, but at all events he was certain to put up an obstinate fight.

The Bouncer came into the gym with his friends, looking perfectly cool and collected. The task before him was a hard one, doubtless, but it did not seem to worry him.

Wharton, on the other hand, had a clouded brow. He realised that he was playing into his enemy's hands, but he did not see how it was to be avoided.

Vernon-Smith was extensively gifted with the wisdom of the serpent, though the innocence of the dove had been quite left out of his composition.

Having set up as candidate for election as Form captain, the Bouncer had laid his plans with coolness and care, and nothing in the nature of scrupulosity was likely to stand in his way.

There were some weaknesses in Wharton's position. He had a reputation for a touchy, hasty temper, which he really did not deserve. Faults of temper he certainly had had, but he had lived them down. But a bad reputation clings long after the cause of it has departed. It is a case of giving a

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dog a bad name. Wharton's weak point was perfectly well-known to the Bouncer, and he had taken unscrupulous advantage of it. His visit to No. 1 Study had had a double object. If Wharton accepted his offer, well and good. The election would then be a walk-over for the Bouncer. If Wharton refused it, the Bouncer had intended to force a quarrel with him. Wharton had, in knocking him down, in fact, played into his hands. It was now easy for the plotter to declare that he had gone to No. 1 Study with friendly intentions, and had been met by Wharton in a quarrelsome and high-handed temper. And he was quite prepared to deny every word he had uttered in the study, and to accuse Wharton of slandering him, if Harry gave a full account of what had led to the trouble. Against a nature as cunning and unscrupulous as this, Wharton felt that he was almost powerless. He could only console himself by giving the Bouncer a good licking. But even that would tell in his enemy's favour. The Bouncer would put up a good fight, and win admiration for his pluck. And then, if he were defeated, he would have the sympathy due to one who had stood up courageously against an overbearing fellow who was too strong for him.

These thoughts were in Harry Wharton's mind as he stripped off his jacket in the midst of the ring of juniors. Temple, Dabney & Co. were grinning and talking at the Remove.

"This is the way these fags settle an election," Temple grinned. "The chap who punches the other chap's nose hardest gets in. Simple, ain't it?"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"We don't do that in the Upper Fourth," remarked Fry.

"Oh, shut up, you fatheads!" growled Bob Cherry. "There will be some more head-punching here, if you jaw too much!"

"Faith, and ye're right!"

"Wharton doesn't seem to be enjoying himself, either," said Temple, with a chuckle. "I'll bet two to one in jan-jan-jan that the Bouncer pulls it off!"

"Oh, rather!"

"I'll bet two to one in thick ears that you had better shut up!" growled John Bull.

And Temple did for a little while.

Bolsover was Vernon-Smith's second, and Nugent acted for Wharton. Coker of the Fifth, who professed himself a great authority on the subject of boxing, appointed himself referee.

The big First-Former swaggered into the ring with his watch in his hand.

"Now, then, we're going to do this thing in order!" he said. "Two-minute rounds, and one minute rests. Get the gloves on."

"I'm ready!" said Wharton quietly.

"Same here!" said Vernon Smith.

"Time!"

The adversaries did not shake hands. They faced each other, and the combat commenced at the call of time. Harry Wharton's face was sterner set. There was no doubt of his intention to give the Bouncer as good a licking as he could give him. Whatever happened afterwards, that would be a source of satisfaction to him.

The Bouncer stood up well. He was cool, alert, and wiry, and a good boxer, and a worthy foe for Wharton in any case. The first two rounds were very cautious, but the Bouncer had the worst of what punishment was handed out.

In the third round matters were a little more lively. Vernon-Smith succeeded in getting through Wharton's guard, and driving home his right upon Wharton's mouth, following it up with a jab from the left in the ribs.

Wharton staggered and fell, and there was a roar from the ring of juniors.

"Bravo, the Bouncer!"

Vernon-Smith's eyes glittered. That shout came from more than half the Remove, and it showed him the extent of the sympathy that was upon his side.

Wharton retired when time was called, and Nugent sponged his face. Nugent was feeling a little anxious now, though he did not allow his looks to betray him.

"Keep your temper, old chap," he whispered. "You can simply play with him if you keep cool. Don't give the cad a chance to score."

Harry Wharton nodded without speaking.

"Time!" called out Coker, of the Fifth.

Wharton stepped up with alacrity. He had been hav-

ANSWERS

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hit, but it did not seem to have affected him very much. And he was more careful in the fourth round. The Bounder did not get a chance. Wharton was attacking all the time, and Vernon-Smith was driven round the ring, Wharton's fists coming home upon his face and chest every few seconds. It was hard and incessant punishment, and every moment the onlookers expected to see the Bounder go down; but he stood it out gallantly. There was a murmur of admiration for his pluck and his iron endurance, as he stood up to the pain of blows.

"Bravo!"
"Go it, Smithy!"
"Stand up to him!"

Wharton stood bitterly. It seemed as if his own popularity was passing over to his antagonist. He pressed the fighting harder, more grimly, and just on the call of time he caught Vernon-Smith's chin with a terrific uppercut, that sent the Bounder fairly flying into the arms of his second.

"Time!" rapped out Coker.
The fourth round was over. So was the fight, to all practical purposes, as the spectators now knew. Vernon-Smith could never win after that terrific hammering; but he had no intention of giving in. It was to be a fight to a finish, win or lose.

And the juniors could not help admiring the way the Bounder stood up to his punishment. Another round, and another, and another, the Bounder getting the worst of it all the time, but never faltering, never showing a sign of lank. When time was called for the ninth round, Vernon-Smith staggered into the ring. In spite of the gloves, damage had been done to both combatants. Vernon-Smith's eyes were nearly closed, and his nose was terribly swollen, and his mouth had a curious sideways look. But his grit was unmistakable.

Coker gave him a sharp look.
"You're done!" he said. "You'd better chuck it."
"I'm going on as long as I can stand," said Vernon-Smith quietly.

"Bravo!" shouted a dozen juniors. "Stick to it!"
And the ninth round commenced. Vernon-Smith was knocked right and left, and the round finished with the Bounder on his back, unable to rise.

Bolover picked him up. Vernon-Smith rested on the knee of the Remove bully, his head swimming, and the faces and the lights seeming to dance round him.

"You can't go on!" muttered Bolover.

"I'm going on!"

"But—"

"I'm going on!" repeated the Bounder.

Bolover shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, all right!"

And Vernon-Smith toed the line for the tenth round, and breathless excitement. Harry Wharton, with a grim look, began on him. With a crashing right-hander he sent the Bounder to the floor; and, in spite of all his efforts, Vernon-Smith could not rise. Harry stepped back; he had no intention of taking advantage of his strict rights. If the Bounder could go on, he should have every chance. But the Bounder could not.

Coker counted steadily:

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—"

Vernon-Smith made a desperate attempt to rise; but his brain was reeling, and he sank back again with a gasping groan. The counting went on.

"Eight, nine—Licked!"

Vernon-Smith was licked!

"Wharton wins!" said Coker, putting away his watch. "It's been a jolly good fight. Bolover, you'd better pick your man up and put him to bed."

And Coker walked away. The crowd broke up. Bolover and Snoop and Stott and several more fellows helped Vernon-Smith to get his jacket on, and walked round him as he left, to keep his injuries from the sight of masters and prefects as he returned to the School House.

Frank Nugent helped Wharton on with his jacket. Wharton was showing very plain signs of the fight, though not nearly to such an extent as the Bounder. Harry was good for two or three more rounds yet, if they had been needed.

"Well, you've licked him," said Nugent; "that's some satisfaction."

Wharton nodded.

"He will make capital out of it, even out of the licking," he said. "This won't do one any good for the election."

Nugent was silent. He felt that Wharton was right.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. Electioneering.

WHARTON was indeed right. The fight in the gym, as was very soon seen, had increased the Bounder's chances very much. His pluck and endurance were worthy of admiration, there was no denying that, and he had scored by the opportunity of showing the stuff he was made of. And as the original cause of the quarrel was not generally known, many of the fellows were only too willing to put it down to Wharton's overbearing temper. And Harry was not in a conciliatory mood, either. He was not prepared to go any lengths to secure his election, as the Bounder was.

If the fellows wanted him for captain, they could elect him. That was his view, and he stood by it. Like Coriolanus of old, he disdained to court and coax to obtain the "sweet voices" of the electors. But the Bounder left no art untried. That the best fellows in the Form would vote for Wharton was certain. But the black sheep, and the fellows who were jealous, or thoughtless, or indifferent, were likely to be gathered into the Vernon-Smith fold.

At first, Wharton's friends had believed that the contest would be little more than a walk-over for their champion, as we have said. But it was soon very clear that the election would be very close indeed, and that, if Harry succeeded, it would be by a very narrow majority.

The next day was Sunday, a day of rest to the Greyfriars fellows, and after church a great deal of thought was given to the subject of the election. The Famous Four had done some electioneering, and Frank Nugent had made a list of the "certs," as he called them—the fellows who were certain to vote for Wharton. Of the "certs," there were not more than a dozen, but there were a dozen more who could almost be counted upon, and many of them had practically promised. Fellows like Nugent, Cherry, Bull, Linley, Penfold, Lord Maulverer, Brown, Ogilvy, Morgan, Desmond, Russell, Bulstrode, could be depended upon to stand by their old leader to the finish. Others were more doubtful, though the electioneers hoped to "rope them in."

But there were fifteen or sixteen who had already declared for Vernon-Smith. The Bounder had a paper in his study, pinned on the wall, upon which his supporters signed their names, and the list grew longer.

Vernon-Smith used every means. To Snoop, and fellows like him, he lent money lavishly; and having written their names on his list in public, it was hardly possible for them to back out afterwards, if they wanted to.

Bolover, and Bolover's friends, backed up Vernon-Smith simply from dislike of Harry Wharton & Co. They signed their names with great willingness. Stott, and other fellows of the "black sheep" variety, were against Wharton because he was down upon smoking in the studies, and breaking bounds after lights out, and they knew they would not have a pleasant time under his captivity.

In the Remove there were forty-four boys all told. Two of them being candidates, there remained forty-two electors. Twenty-eight had already written their names down on one list or the other, leaving fourteen doubtful. And these fourteen doubting Thomases were the object of the attacks of the electioneers on both sides.

If Wharton would not exert himself to secure votes, his backers worked hard enough.

Nugent cornered Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, in his study, and presented the paper to him to sign. Fish shook his head doubtfully.

"I guess I'm not wholly satisfied," he said. "I reckon what Greyfriars wants in the Remove is a skipper to take things up. You're too sleepy here. I guess I should make a better captain than Wharton, myself."

"Oh, rats!" said Nugent, which was really not a tactful reply for an election agent to make.

Fisher T. Fish sniffed.

"Well, if you put it like that—" he began.

"Now, look here," said Nugent, "if you put up as candidate, you'd get only one vote—your own. You know that."

"I guess so; but—"

"You've got to choose between Wharton and Vernon-Smith. Now, which do you think will make the Form a better captain?"

"I guess it's Wharton."

"Then put your name down."

"I guess—"

"Oh, leave off guessing, and come to facts!" said Nugent.

"Put your name down."

"I guess—"

"Don't be an ass! Put your name down."

"I guess—"

"Put your name down, and don't waste time," raged Nugent.

"I guess—"

"Now, look here, Fishy—"

"Do let a chap finish!" said Fish. "I guess—"

"But I say—"

"I was going to say that I guess I'm backing Wharton."

"Oh!" said Nugent. "Sorry I interrupted, then. Here's the paper."

And Fisher T. Fish grinned and signed his name. Bob Cherry meanwhile had been talking like a Dutch uncle, as he described it, to Leigh and Vane. Vane was his cousin, and he agreed to vote for Wharton to please Bob, expressly.

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TEST!

THE RIVALS

TUESDAY:

stating at the same time that he had his doubts about it. Leigh remembered some old sneers of the Bounder's, on the subject of his father's profession. Leigh's father was an inn-keeper, a fact he had concealed at Greyfriars as long as he could; but when it was known, the Bounder had been heard to allude to Leigh as the son of a chap who kept a "pub." That was enough for Leigh. With that thought in his mind, Leigh wrote his name down for Wharton.

The number of Nugent's "cots" was now increased to fifteen. Hazeldene had long wavered; he was of a wavering nature. But, probably decided by his sister Marjorie, he came into No. 1 Study, after going over to Cliff House to tea, and put his name down.

"Sixteen cots," said Nugent, when Hazeldene left the study. "We're getting on."

"What about Bunter?" asked Bob Cherry thoughtfully.

Wharton's lip curled.

"Bunter will vote for anybody who stands him a feed," he said.

"Oh, really, Wharton?"

It was Bunter's voice at the door.

"Listening, as usual," said Wharton contemptuously.

Billy Bunter blinked into the study through his big spectacles, with an injured expression on his fat face.

"Oh, really, Wharton! That's not the way to talk to a chap whose vote you're jolly anxious to get."

"I'm not anxious for your rotten vote," said Harry. "Get out of my study."

"Oh, really?"

"Oh, rats!"

"I say, you fellows, Smithy's offered me—"

"Well, I'm not going to offer you anything, unless it's a thick ear," said Wharton. "You'd better travel."

"I'll vote for Smith, you beast!" yelled back the Owl of the Remove from the passage, as he retired.

"Vote for him and he's hanged!" retorted Wharton.

Nugent made a grimace.

"That's another vote gone to the enemy," he said.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"The end would vote for Smith in any case if Smith made it worth his while," he said.

"Well, yes, I suppose so."

"It's a pity old Todd's gone," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully. "Alonso Todd would have voted for you like a shot. He used to be disgusted with Vernon-Smith. But he's gone now. But Inky will be here on Tuesday in time to vote. I suppose it's settled that we have the election on the first half-holiday—that's usual."

"Yes; it will have to be Wednesday."

"We can put down Inky as a cert, then," said Bob Cherry. "That makes seventeen. I looked at Smithy's list a while ago, and he had twenty names down."

"Twenty out of forty-two, without counting Inky," said Nugent. "That leaves only twenty-two for us, if we get them all. It will be a close thing."

"And Bunter will make twenty-one for Smith."

"Pshaw!"

The chums of the Remove looked serious.

"Then, unless some of the chaps change their minds, it will be a dead heat," said Johnny Ball, with a whistle.

"Twenty-one for Smith, and twenty-one for us."

"They can't change their minds," said Nugent uneasily.

"That's where Vernon-Smith is so jolly deep. After signing their names on a paper in public, and having it shown to everybody, they can't back out. I dare say some of them would like to, but it can't be done."

"Well, we'll do our best," said Nugent. "We've got the other votes to get yet. Let's get at the boundaries now."

And the chums of the Remove, tea being finished, "got" at the wavering electors. They were successful. Before bedtime that night there were twenty-one names on Harry Wharton's list, and Vernon-Smith's list remained at twenty.

All the Remove had put their names down with one exception—and that one was Billy Bunter.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. The Head of the Bounder.

D R. LOCKE, the Head of Greyfriars, was seated in his study, when Vernon-Smith tapped at the door. The Head was alone, and he was busy writing, but he laid down his pen as the tap came at his study door.

"Come in!" he said, in his deep voice.

The door opened, and the Bounder of Greyfriars came in, with a very unusual air of respect and quietness. The reckless manners the Bounder assumed, and which had won him his nickname, were not conspicuous now. Even to the masters Vernon-Smith had often shown a veiled impertinence, which won the admiration of some thoughtless fellows; but when it suited his purpose, Vernon-Smith could assume a quiet respect of manner which outdid the "goodest" of good things.

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little Georgies in the story-books. And it suited Vernon-Smith just now to make the best possible impression upon the Head of Greyfriars.

Dr. Locke looked at him keenly.

There had been a time when Vernon-Smith had come near being expelled from the school, and the Head had not forgotten it. But the Bounder had been much more careful since then. Outwardly, at least, his conduct had left little to be desired. If he had not been better, he had at least been more cautious.

At the present moment the traces of his late conflict with Wharton were very apparent in his face. One of his eyes was very much discoloured, and his nose was swollen. The doctor's brow grew a little stern as he looked at him.

"Well, Vernon-Smith, what do you want?" he asked.

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

"Go on!"

"I dare say you know, sir, that Bultrode has resigned the captaincy of our Form," said Vernon-Smith diffidently.

"We are going to elect a new Form captain."

"Yes, I think I have heard so," said the Head. "As you know, Vernon-Smith, I never interfere in matters of this kind, not even in the election of a captain of the school."

"No, sir; I am aware of that. But—"

"Well!" said the Head, as the Bounder hesitated.

"We can't agree as to the date to be fixed for the election, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "As a matter of fact, feeling is running very high in the Remove on the subject. I—I have had a row with Wharton, who is the other candidate—"

"Hence those disagreeable marks upon your face, I presume," said the Head dryly.

"Yes, sir. It wasn't my fault, and I don't want to say it was Wharton's," said the Bounder, with an appearance of great frankness. "I dare say the truth was that we both lost our tempers. We were a bit excited about the election, sir."

"Very probable," said the Head.

"I wasn't going to speak about that, though, sir. I want to Wharton's study to talk over the best time to fix for the election, and—and we had a row instead. Under the circumstances, I don't want to see him again about it. It wouldn't do any good, and I think a thing of this kind should be carried through quietly, if possible."

"Undoubtedly."

It looks rotten for the candidates to be fighting and rowing," said Vernon-Smith. "I don't say I want to mind blame at Wharton, but it's better to keep off anything of the kind, I think. Some of the other fellows are beginning to quarrel about it, too. The election looks like being a very close one, and the fellows are losing their tempers. There have been two fights in the Form-room already, and another one is coming off to-morrow. I thought, sir, that under these circumstances, the sooner the election is settled off the better. It will put an end to the strain."

Dr. Locke nodded.

"That is quite true, Vernon-Smith. If you have come here to ask my advice, I certainly think that the sooner the election takes place the better. I should suggest the earliest possible date."

"Yes, we've really agreed upon that, sir," said the Bounder. "though nothing's been said about the date yet on either side, but all the fellows think it ought to come off soon. I was going to suggest, sir, if you will allow me, that you should fix the date, so that there won't be any rowing about it. We don't seem to be able to meet together peaceably and talk it over, and we don't want a lot of rowing—and the date, of course, is quite unimportant to either side. If you would be kind enough to fix a date for the election to take place, sir, everyone would agree at once, and there wouldn't be any more trouble about that."

"That is very thoughtful of you, Vernon-Smith."

"Well, I was thinking that the sooner the strain is over the sooner the Remove will settle down, sir," said the Bounder. "I'm afraid I haven't much chance of getting in myself, but it's a worry on my mind while it lasts. And it's causing a lot of bitter feeling, which will get worse if the things hang out."

"Quite so. The sooner it is over the better," said Dr. Locke. "I will put a notice on the board, fixing the date of the election, and the hour, and the boys will be expected to abide by it."

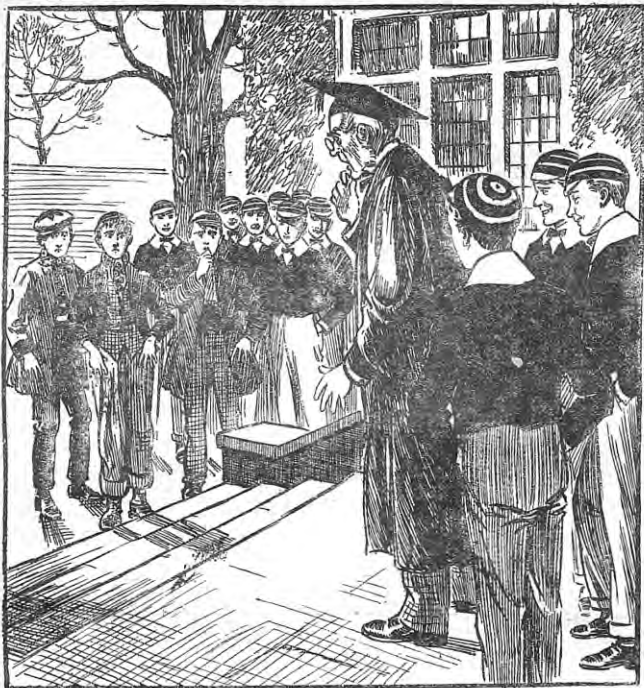
"Thank you, sir."

"Not at all. I am very glad you have brought this to my notice, Vernon-Smith. I am glad to see such thoughtfulness in you."

"Oh, sir! Thank you very much."

And Vernon-Smith retired from the study.

He preserved the gravity of his features until he was in the passage, and the door was safely closed. Then a cynical



"Bless my soul!" gasped the astounded master. "Who—who are these boys? Why have they come to the school in those ridiculous clothes?" "If you please, sir," said Redfern, the leader of the new Co., "we—we're the new boys, and—and it's only a little joke, sir!" (See this week a number of "THE GEM," 1d.)

grin came over his face, and he indulged in a soft, almost silent chuckle.

"Done!" he murmured.

The Bouncer walked quickly away. At the end of the passage Bolcover and Snoop were waiting for him. They fixed eager looks of inquiry upon him.

"Well!" exclaimed both together.

"It's all serene."

"The Head's going to fix a date!"

"Yes."

"Monday!"

"Most likely. He agrees with me that the sooner the election is over the better, to stop the rows and back-felling in the Form."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hush!" said Vernon-Smith. "Not a word! It mustn't get out that I've been to see the Head, of course. Not a word!"

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NEXT
TUESDAY:

"THE RIVALS' TEST!"

"No fear!"

And the three rascals of the Remove strolled away, still chuckling.

Vernon-Smith & Co. kept their own counsel. When a notice appeared on the board, in the Head's handwriting, they appeared to be as much surprised as anyone. Frank Nugent was the first to see it, and his exclamation drew a crowd of juniors to the spot.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he looked at the notice. "That's rather a new departure, I think!"

"Begad, yass!" said Lord Mauleverer.

Wharton emitted his brows.

"Very new—and very unwelcome," he said.

"What is it!" exclaimed Ogilvy, from the rear of the crowd.

Nugent read out the notice:

"The election for the Form captain of the Lower Fourth

By FRANK RICHARDS.
Order Early.

Form will take place on Monday evening, at seven o'clock in the Form-room. By order.—H. LOCKE, headmaster.

It was the familiar writing of the Head, and there could be no doubt about it.

"Well, that's settled," said Morgan. "The date had to be fixed, and Monday's as good a date as any other."

"Bogus, that's so!" said Mauleverer, with a nod.

"And Wharton and Smithy would never have agreed about it intirely," Micky Demand remarked.

"I guess that's correct," said Morgan.

Wharton's brow was still clouded. He walked away with his chum.

"The Bouncer's had a hand in this somehow," he said.

"Nugent whistled softly.

"I say, Wharton, that's rather thick. The Bouncer couldn't influence the Head, you know. Besides, why—"

Wharton smiled bitterly.

"Don't you see? As a rule Form elections take place on the same day that we have a half holiday, to give us plenty of time—Wednesdays or Saturdays. It was taken for granted that this election would be on Wednesday, and I never troubled my head about it."

"But I don't see—" began Bob Cherry.

"It's fixed for Monday evening now."

"All the better, surely!" said Mark Linley, looking curiously at Wharton. "There's a lot of bitter feeling in the Form about it, and the sooner it's over the better. Don't you think so? It's pretty clear that's what the Head thinks, and that's why he's interfered to fix the date."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Oh, yes! I know the Head's reasons would be good enough. But this lets us down."

"How do you mean?"

"Have you forgotten Inky?"

Bob Cherry gave a whistle.

"My hat, I never thought of that!"

"Inky arrives here on Tuesday. He would be in ample time for the election on Wednesday. But if the election takes place on Monday evening, that bars him out."

"My word!"

Vernon-Smith asked me yesterday when Inky was coming, and I told him," said Wharton bitterly. "I told him that Inky landed at Southampton on Monday, and was coming on here the next day. Now that the election is running so close Vernon-Smith realizes how much one vote more or less may mean. He's got twenty, and I've got twenty-one. He will beat Bunter, and that will make the voting level. Very likely he's got some scheme for getting at one of my backers, and so getting in. But anyway, his last chance would vanish if Inky came in time for the election. Don't you see? We shall have twenty-two each, and Inky will make twenty-three for me, and I should get in by a majority of one."

"I see it now," said Bob Cherry slowly. "But—"

"This suits Vernon-Smith down to the ground. If the votes tie in number, at all events I don't get in, and that's what he wants to prevent. So long as he bars me out, he's always got a chance of wriggling in somehow himself, but, of course, if Inky were here and voted for me, that would settle the matter for good and all. The election's fixed now for the day before Inky arrives—"

"I can see how Vernon-Smith benefits by it, of course," said Nugent thoughtfully. "But it must be chance. The Bouncer is cunning enough, but he couldn't get at the Head, and make Dr. Locke play his game for him."

"I believe he has done it, somehow."

"It sounds rather thick," said Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton gave a shrug.

"Well, it's done now," he said. "Whether Vernon-Smith did it or not, doesn't make much difference. The election's fixed for Monday—and we can only look forward to a tie in the voting—and I'm very much mistaken if Vernon-Smith hasn't a scheme in his head for getting at one of our backers, if we give him time."

And the chums of the Remove looked very thoughtful. They had counted upon carrying the election with the aid of Hurree Singh—the forty-fifth boy. But that had to be counted out in the air; and the result of the coming election was still "in the air."

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter's Auction.

BILLY BUNTER wore a most wise and important look on Monday morning.

The unexpected announcement of the Head had put quite a different complexion upon matters. Bunter suddenly found himself a personage of the greatest importance.

It having been fixed that the election was to take place before the arrival of the Indian Junior, the fellows who

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were at present in the Remove would have to settle the matter without his aid. Twenty-one were for Wharton, and twenty for Vernon Smith. Bunter was the only fellow still in doubt.

If he voted for Wharton, or if he even refrained from voting at all, Vernon-Smith would have no chance.

That was certain.

A majority of one would return Wharton to the captivity of Greyfriars Remove, and his position would be as secure as if a two-thirds majority had placed him there.

Bunter was exposed to the blandishments of the Vernon-Smith party without limit. Harry Wharton left him severely alone. He did not like the fat junior, and he would not ask him for his vote. Nugent and the rest expected to see the name of William George Bunter appear upon Vernon-Smith's list. But the Owl of the Remove was in no hurry to place it there. As a matter of fact, Billy Bunter was enjoying his sudden and unexpected importance, and he was quite willing to prolong it as long as possible. And he had a peculiar scheme in his mind, too, for turning it to profit, which was quite worthy of the Owl of the Remove.

Vernon-Smith was more than suspected of being willing to offer financial inducements to fellows to vote for him; but he had offered Bunter nothing yet. Bunter was too much of a character for that. At the last moment, the Bouncer knew that he could secure Bunter's vote, and that satisfied him. But Billy Bunter was not aware of what was in the Bouncer's mind, and he was too stupid to grasp the necessity of keeping such transactions a dead secret. Only one vote was wanted to defeat the Bouncer, and that vote was Bunter's, and the Owl of the Remove did not see why he should not make a good thing out of it.

And a good thing he intended to make out of it, if he could work it. After dinner, he found a crowd of the juniors in the common-room, and he came to business at once.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Don't," said Bob Cherry. "Shut up! Clear out!"

"Oh, really, I've got something rather important to say—"

"You always have," said Nugent. "Have you decided to vote for Wharton?"

"I have not finally decided to vote for anybody. Look here, a fellow's vote is his own personal property, isn't it?"

"Certainly!"

And a fellow can do as he likes with it."

"Of course."

"Well, I'm going to sell mine," said Bunter.

"That?"

"I'm going to put my vote up to auction," explained Billy Bunter. "I'm going to hold the auction here, and I invite all you chaps to attend it. The vote will go to the highest bidder."

"My only hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to chuckle at. The matter's simple enough. I put the vote up to auction, and knock it down to the highest bidder, same as if it was a chair or a carpet," said Billy Bunter. "It's simply business."

"I guess that beats even Yankee business," said Fisher T. Fish admiringly. "Bunter prances off with the whole of the ziddy cake, I reckon—"

"The fat bouncer—"

"You blessed lump of bribery and corruption—"

"Oh, really, you fellows, I don't think you ought to call me names, just because I've thought of this thing! It only shows that I've got more brains than the rest of you," said Billy Bunter. "Some chaps are born clever, and I can't help being one of them. I'm going to put my property up to auction. Wharton and Vernon-Smith can bid for it—or any of you chaps who want to do your candidate a good turn. Now, what offers?"

"Ha, ha, ha! You are—"

"You fathead—"

"Shut up!"

"I say, you fellows, the auction's open now," said Billy Bunter, unheeding. "A single vote will turn the tide at the election to-night, and this is a chance that's too good to be missed."

Vernon-Smith laughed aloud. He intended to have Bunter's vote, later, for a consideration, but he was not likely to pay for it before all the fellows. Wharton could not help laughing, too. Bunter's audacity was really greater than his reason. The Owl of the Remove evidently thought that he was proposing a quite justifiable business transaction.

"Gentlemen," bawled Bunter, "vote for sale! Highest bid taken! Now, gentlemen, walk up! What bids for the casting vote in the Form election?"

"A dot on the nose," said Bob Cherry.

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"Oh, really, Cherry! My vote's worth having, you know"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"One vote will turn the scale, anyway," said Billy Bunter.

"If the vote was like its owner, I dare say it would turn the scale, Bunter," said Nugent, with a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you want for it, you fat porpoise?" grinned Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter blinked at Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry!" he exclaimed. "That depends. As much as I can get, of course."

"Two thick ears!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm putting my vote up to auction, anyhow."

"Get on with the washing, then, you giddy ass!" said Frank Nugent.

"Would you like me to make an auction of it, really, you fellows?" said Billy Bunter.

"Rather! Get up on the table. You'll never have another chance like this!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And roars of laughter rang out in the common-room as Billy Bunter climbed on to the table. Grinning faces were turned up to him as he commenced his auction.

"Any reactive, Bunter?"

"Really, Cherry, I can see that you intend to interrupt me!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I say, Wharton, you might see that order is kept, or else we can't get through with this, you know. We all know what Cherry is—"

"Ring off, Bob!" said Nugent, as he restrained Bob Cherry. "Don't spoil the auction."

"No, indeed, you're unreasonable, Cherry, really," said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, what do you say if we mention a sovereign as a start?"

"I'll give you a postal-order, that isn't coming and never will, for it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! Well, suppose we say a sovereign to start with?" said Billy Bunter, with an anxious look at Vernon-Smith. "Have I a pound offered, you fellows?"

"No, you haven't, Bunter," said Vernon-Smith. "Unless anyone else wants to have a go."

Harry Wharton & Co. grinned at Billy Bunter.

"How much do you think your silly vote is worth, my son?" grinned Harry Wharton.

"You ought to know that better than me, Wharton," responded Billy Bunter. "But look here, chaps, we're wasting time. Have I a sovereign offered?"

"My offer of two thick ears is still good, Bunter," said Bob Cherry. "Anyone go better than two thick ears?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked rather helplessly at his chums. He saw that his vote was not "going" as he thought it would. He resolved to make sacrifices.

"Well, you know, seeing that it's you fellows," he said magnanimously, "I'll take ten shillings. Who says ten shillings?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You won't laugh when you lose the election, Harry Wharton. There's only one vote wanted to get you in, and I've got the vote; I want to impress upon you the importance of this!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Who'll buy the gentleman's vote for ten bob. Roll up in your thousands!"

Billy Bunter beamed on Bob Cherry.

"Now, gentlemen!" said Billy Bunter encouragingly. "A sovereign! A sovereign!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, you fellows, this is a good thing for you, if you only knew it!" shouted the Owl of the Remove. "A sovereign! Well, suppose we say half-a-sovereign? Who says half-a-sovereign?"

"You do old son," grinned Ogilvy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall withdraw my offer, if you don't bid, you fellows!"

"Go on, Bunter! We bid you, go on," grinned Nugent; "or, rather, go off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do as you're bid, you fat ass!" roared Bob Cherry. "Go on, go off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter came to a dead stop. The auction was not a success. The juniors roared as he blinked down at them helplessly. No one wanted Billy Bunter's vote, apparently.

But the Owl of the Remove was determined to sell.

"Look here, you fellows," he burst out again, as if he had received an inspiration, "if it's any convenience to you chaps, I'd take the price in instalments."

"That'll be two thick ears every week, kids!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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NEXT

TUESDAY:

"THE RIVALS' TEST!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.
Order Early.

finish his schooldays at Greyfriars. And the many letters he had written to his old abnms—letters full of amazing accounts of Coronation festivities and elephant-riding and tiger-hunting—had always breathed affection for the old school, and a heartfelt wish to find himself in his old study in the Remove passage again.

And now he was coming!
The juniors' faces lighted up as Wharton read the telegram. It reminded them very much of the nabob—they almost thought they could hear his soft, purring voice lisping out the weird and wonderful English which he had learned in his early days at Blamptar, and which he had never been able to unlearn at Greyfriars.

"The honourable compliments of my worthy self to my venerable chums at Greyfriars. The landing has happened at the esteemed Southampton, and the joy of myself is terrific. On the honourable morrow morning I start in the esteemed express for Greyfriars."—HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH.

"All at a ha'penny a word!" grinned Frank Nugent. "Inky has brought home extravagant habits with him. My word!"

Harry Wharton laughed. "It's just like old Inky," he said. "I shall be jolly glad to see him again, whether he comes in time for the election or not."

"Yes, rather!"
"It will be like old times to have Inky ambling about the study," said Nugent. "Of course, we shall have him in our study again."

"Oh, rats!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "That was all very well when I was in your study too. Under present circumstances, I think Inky had better come into No. 13 with Marky and me."

"Look here, Bob Cherry—"

"Rats! I think—"
"Hold on! Inky isn't here yet, and perhaps he'll be able to decide for himself," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"We must get up a bit of a reception for him."

"My hat!"
It was Johnny Bull who uttered the sudden exclamation. The chums of the Remove stared at him in surprise.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Bob Cherry. "Something bitten you?"

"No," gasped Johnny Bull. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass! What the—"

"It's an idea! Ha, ha, ha! When was that telegram handed in at Southampton, Wharton?" John Bull exclaimed breathlessly.

Wharton glanced at the telegram.

"Twelve o'clock," he said.

"Good! Inky's fairly landed, then?"

"Of course he is! He sent this wire the moment he got off. I think—he told me he would in his last letter."

"Ripping!"

"Blessed if I can see what you're getting at!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "We know that Inky's in Southampton. But what—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You ass! Explain what you're cackling at!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"The joke on the Bounder."

"Eh? What joke?"

"Don't you see?" gasped John Bull, with another explosion of merriment.

"No; I don't see anything but a cackling fathead!"

"Don't you see? Inky is going to rest to-day, and stay the night in Southampton, and come on to Greyfriars in the morning train."

"I know he is."

"But suppose you sent him a wire—"

"I'm going to," said Wharton. "We're bound to send him a wire to welcome him to England. But what are you driving at? I can see you've got some where in your silly napper. What is it? Come to the point!"

"Suppose Inky knew how affairs were going here—"

"But he doesn't."

"You could tell him in a telegram."

"It would have to be a jolly long one. But what then?"

"Why, don't you see? I dare say Inky is a bit tired, but he'd make a special effort if he knew how much he was wanted here."

"Oh!"

"If he could get a wire from you in time, there's a train he could catch to bring him to Courtfield Junction by six this evening—or a quarter-past, I forget."

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"And he could be here in time for the election!" chorled John Bull.

"Pshaw!"

The juniors stared at one another. They had not thought of that. It had been doubtful if Hurree Singh's steamer would get into Southampton Docks early or late on Monday, and it had been settled that he would stay the night in Southampton. Inky was travelling under the charge of a stand and sedate gentleman belonging to the India Office, who was responsible for him, and if he wanted to tear off to Greyfriars the moment he landed that responsible gentleman would have been hardly likely to permit it. But on a special occasion like this, it was quite in Inky's line to give the slip—the esteemed slip, as he would have called it—to his official guardian, and rush off to the school to save the situation.

If the news could be got through to Inky, Inky would do it, there was no doubt about that. The odd vote that was wanted so much would come.

"My hat!" said Wharton at last. "It seems a bit rough to ask a chap to buzz off on a long railway journey the instant he's landed from a long voyage. But—"

"But it's a special occasion," said John Bull.

"Inky would do it like a shot if he knew," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent emphatically.

Wharton's face had brightened up considerably. John Bull's suggestion was the right thing at the right moment. He slipped the sturdy junior on the back.

"Good for you!" he exclaimed. "Perhaps Inky can't get away, and perhaps he's tired. But we can tell him, and leave it to him."

"That's the idea."

"If he comes in time, it will frustrate the Bounder's knavish tricks," grinned Nugent. "He has got in votes by every blessed mean dodge possible, and it's pretty well

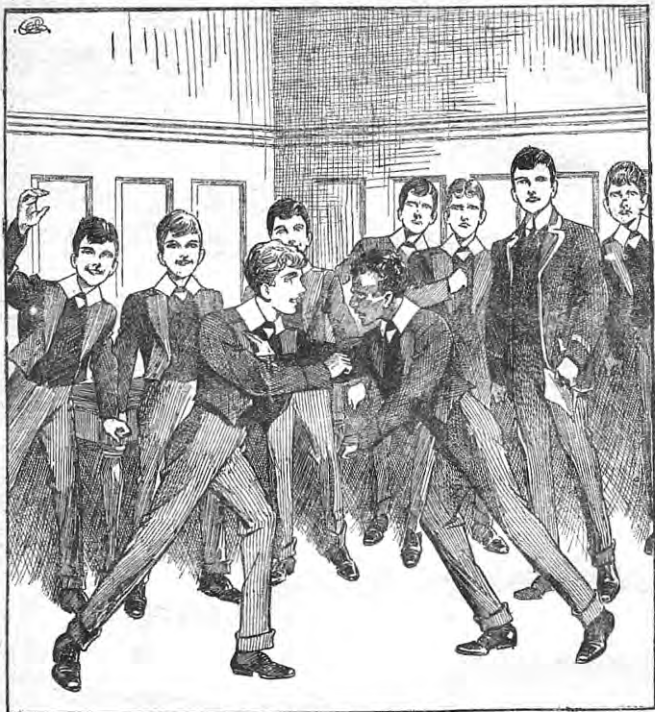
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Into the room staggered a dusky youth, hatless, covered with dust, his dark face streaming with perspiration, and his dark eyes gleaming. He reeled forward, and Frank Nugent caught him by the arm and steadied him. "Am I in the esteemed time?" gasped the nabob, huskily. (See Chap. 16.)

known that he's going to buy Hunter's vote, though he wouldn't bid at the auction. Inky will come like a bolt from the blue."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The sooner the wire goes the better!" said John Bull.

"Yes, rather! Let's get into the study and write it out, and I'll buzz off on my bike and send it!" Wharton exclaimed.

"Good egg!"

The juniors hurried up to No. 1 Study in great glee. Wharton took a telegraph-form from his desk, and dipped a pen in the ink. He wrinkled his brow thoughtfully.

"We shall have to blow a little money on it," he remarked.

"No good trying to save twopenny or so at a time like this. We must make it clear to Inky."

"We'll pool funds to pay for it," said Nugent.

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"Good!"

Wharton wrote out the telegram, his chums looking over his shoulders as he did so, and giving him advice. The telegram was a decidedly long one by the time the Removites had finished concocting it.

"Prince Hurree Singh, Hotel Imperial, Southampton."

"Welcome home. Remove election on. Vote tie. One vote wanted to win. Come at once if you can, and Wharton's captain. Otherwise, the Bounder may get in. We rely on you to manage it if you can. Buck up for the Remove. Reply Wharton."

"How's that?" asked Wharton.

"Ripping!"

"Fifty words," said John Bull. "It will cost two-and-a-penny."

"It's worth it, if Inky gets here in time."

"Yes, rather!"

"Buzz off, Harry, old man! If Inky doesn't get it pretty soon, he won't have time to catch the express. He mayn't even have time to wire back as it is."

"I'll scorch!"

Harry Wharton ran downstairs with the telegram in his hand. Vernon-Smith met him in the lower hall, with a surprised look as he noted the telegram and Wharton's excited face.

"What have you got there?" he asked.

"Find out!"

And with that courteous reply, Wharton ran on, leaving the Bouncer staring in surprise. Wharton dashed down to the bicycle-shed, and dragged his machine out. One minute more, and he was scorching down the road to Friardale as if he were riding for his life.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Bouncer Knows.

THE bell rang for afternoon classes, and the Remove poured into their Form-room.

Harry Wharton's place was empty.

He had hardly reached the village by that time. In the keen excitement of the moment he had forgotten all about lessons; but if he had remembered them, it would have made no difference. He would have been willing to accept any number of lines for being late for class, for the triumph of getting Hurree Jamset Ram Singh to Greyfriars in time to vote.

Harry Wharton was quite convinced in his own mind that the Bouncer, in some unknown way, had influenced the Head to fix the election for Monday, and it would be simply enjoyable to get the nabob to Greyfriars in time to vote, after all. Harry could imagine the look on the Bouncer's face when Inky came in to the election. He laughed aloud as he scorching away on his bike at the thought of it. It was worth getting a hundred lines, or a thousand, to bring that about.

Mr. Quelch came in to take the Remove, and he glanced over the class.

"Where is Wharton?" he asked sharply.

"I think he's gone to send a telegram, sir," said Bob Cherry.

"Very well."

The first lesson proceeded. It was just finished when Harry Wharton came in, tired and dusty, and breathing hard, his face very ruddy.

Mr. Quelch glanced at him severely.

"You are half an hour late, Wharton!" he rapped out.

"I am sorry, sir."

"Where have you been?"

"Friardale, sir. Hurree Singh wired me that he landed to-day, and I wired to him—"

"Oh, very well, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, with unusual graciousness, "if you were wiring to your old friend, I will excuse you; but you should have asked permission. Is Hurree Singh well?"

"Yes, sir, ripping—I—I mean, very well!"

"Very good! You may take your place, Wharton!"

"Thank you, sir."

And Wharton sat down. Vernon-Smith gave him a sharp, suspicious glance. He did not know what Wharton's telegram had contained, but his keen mind was suspicious of some move against himself. Certainly, a telegram of welcome to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh could not hurt him in any way, but the Bouncer was of a suspicious nature.

But he was not likely to learn anything from the chums of the Remove. They knew how deep and cunning the Bouncer was, and although it seemed impossible that he would be able, if he knew, to stop Inky on the road, they did not mean to leave anything to chance. It was safer to say nothing.

When classes were dismissed, Vernon-Smith paused in the passage, after the other fellows were gone, and touched Bob Cherry's arm.

"You noticed about Wharton sending that telegram?" he said, in a low voice.

"Yes—to a chap who used to be here," said Bolsover. "I don't know him—he left before I came."

"They've been depending on his vote to pull them through," said the Bouncer; "if the election had been on Wednesday, as the fellows expected, that blessed nigger would have worked it for Wharton."

"But you've put the stopper on that," said Snoop, who had stopped to hear what the Bouncer had to say. The worried look upon Vernon-Smith's face had not escaped the keen eyes of the sneak of the Remove.

"But what does that wire mean?" said the Bouncer slowly.

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"Just a wire of welcome to the nigger."

"It might mean more than that."

"I don't see—," began Bolsover.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

"Look here," he said, in a low voice, "if the nigger's landed—and he must have from what Wharton said in the Form-room—he might get on here to-day. Wharton wouldn't have risked a hundred lines or a licking just to send him a telegram of welcome."

"I don't know," said Snoop. "They used to be very thick."

"But he could have sent Trotter with an ordinary telegram, and got it off just as well, without being half an hour late for classes."

"Yes; I wonder he didn't," said Bolsover.

Vernon-Smith's look was very bitter.

"He didn't, because there was a secret in the telegram," he said. "If he had sent Trotter with it, Trotter would have known what was in it, and I could have got it out of him for a tip, if I'd tried. Wharton took the wire himself, to keep it dark."

"But—but what—"

"Because he's wired to Inky to come on here at once, if he can," said the Bouncer. "I'll bet a hat that that's the explanation of the mystery."

Snoop gave a whistle of dismay.

"That knocks us out, if it's true," he said.

"I believe that's the explanation."

"But I know it's been arranged for Inky to stay the night he arrives in Southampton," said Snoop thoughtfully, "and he's travelling with some big pandjandrum of the India Office, who wouldn't be likely to stir himself to bust off here because a school election was going on, and Inky wouldn't be allowed to leave Southampton alone."

The Bouncer nodded.

"I know, I know; but he might give him the slip. He would stick at nothing to help those rotters out of a scrape, if he knew the fix they were in. I know that."

"That's true," said Snoop.

"We've got to keep our eyes open," said Vernon-Smith. "If Inky has dodged away from Southampton, and caught an express here, he's got to be prevented from turning up in time for the election, somehow."

Bolsover and Snoop stared. They were prepared for any amount of trickery to keep Harry Wharton out of the captaincy of the Remove, but they had never dreamed of the lengths that the Bouncer was prepared to go to.

"Blessed if I see how you'll work that!" said Bolsover.

"It's got to be worked. But we must find out first if Inky is coming. That's important. We might be able to advance the time of the election—Hullo, there's Trotter. Who's that wire for, Trotter?"

Vernon-Smith stopped as the house page passed with a telegram in his hand.

"Master Wharton, sir," said Trotter. "It came in the afternoon, and I'm going to take it to his study now classes are over, sir."

"It's all right, Trotter; I'll take it."

The page closed one eye slightly.

"I'm afraid I must take it myself, sir."

Vernon-Smith scowled.

"What do you mean, you young cad?" he exclaimed, in his most bullying tone. "Do you think I shouldn't take it safely to Wharton?"

"I must take it, Master Smith."

Vernon-Smith made a sign to Bolsover and Snoop. They placed themselves so that the page could not pass, and Trotter retreated in alarm. There was no one else just at hand, as the Removites had streamed out into the Close to make the most of what was left of the daylight, and Harry Wharton & Co. had gone up to their study. Fortune seemed to be favouring the Bouncer of Greyfriars.

"I'll take that telegram to Wharton, Trotter," he said savagely, in a low, concentrated voice. "I want to—"

"B-b-but, Master Smith—"

"I'll give you five bob to hold your tongue," said Vernon-Smith, snatching the telegram from the page's hand. "Look here, wait here a few minutes, and I'll give you the wire back unopened. That will be all right."

Trotter hesitated. He knew that Vernon-Smith meant to open the envelope by means of steam, and read the message within. But Trotter did not see how he was to prevent him. His fingers closed on the five shillings the Bouncer handed him, but he hesitated. But he really had no choice in the matter. Bolsover and Snoop were standing ready to pounce him on the instant if he made any attempt to regain the telegram or to raise an alarm.

"Really, Master Smith—," protested Trotter feebly.

"Keep an eye on him, you chaps," muttered the Bouncer. "I'll be back in two or three minutes."

He thrust the telegram out of sight in his pocket, and ran upstairs. Bolsover and Snoop kept a very careful eye upon Trotter. The page waited, feeling that he was in for it now. After all, he reflected, it was merely idle curiosity upon Vernon-Smith's part; no really important or private communication could be sent by telegram, as it was open to the post-office people. Trotter knew, in fact, that it was a reply from Hurree Janmet Ram Singh, at Southampton, and he could not see that it mattered if the Bounder read it.

Vernon-Smith was back in less than five minutes. His brows were knitted, and his eyes gleamed like steel under them. He handed the envelope back to the page. If he had opened it, he had done so very skillfully, and there was no sign to be seen of the process now that it was refastened. "There you are," he said; "buzz off, and mum's the word! There's no damage done—it's only a jape against Wharton, and all fun."

"Very well, Master Smith."

And Trotter, somewhat comforted, took the telegram upstairs. Vernon-Smith drew his two associates into the deserted Form-room. Snoop was looking somewhat soiled, and Bolsover a little grim. The Bounder's tactics were not exactly to their taste, though they had raised no objection, and had, in fact, helped him.

"Well?" said Bolsover shortly.

"It's just as I supposed."

"You've read the wire?"

"Yes, I—"

"Blessed if I half like this!" muttered Bolsover. "Reading a chap's letters or telegrams is a bit too thick."

Vernon-Smith made an impatient gesture.

"No time for that now," he said. "Anyway, it's done."

"Well, yes. What was in it?"

"I opened it over the kettle spout, and sealed it up again quite safely," said the Bounder. "It's all serious—they can't smell a rat, and Trotter will hold his tongue, for his own sake."

"I wasn't thinking of that," growled Bolsover. "But never mind; go on. What was in the giddy telegram? May as well know that now."

Vernon-Smith drew a pencilled scrap of paper from his pocket. He held it up for the cads of the Remove to read. It was a copy of the telegram.

"Honourable telegram received. Leaving Southampton by express, and despatchfully transmitting this message from the esteemed railway-carriage before startfully departing. Arrive Courtfield Junction six twenty. Shall be timely on hand—LXV."

Bolsover chuckled.

"Beautiful English!" he remarked.

"Just like Inky," said Snoop. "Well, that settles it. He'll be at Courtfield Junction at twenty-past six, and he can hire a cab there to get here in half an hour, if there isn't a train ready for Friarade. That would be a bit quicker."

"I don't see how he can get here before a quarter to seven, at the earliest," said Vernon-Smith, compressing his lips. "We must hurry on the election, and see that it's not a second late, at all events. And if the confounded nigger does come, we shall have to keep him off the grass till the election's over."

"How?" asked Bolsover.

"I've got to think that out."

And the Bounder of Greyfriars went into his study to think it out.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Cashes a Postal-Order in Advance.

BILLY BUNTER came along the Remove passage with his heavy tread. He stopped at the door of Vernon-Smith's study, and went in without knocking. Bunter could be civil, in fact shiny and soapy, when it suited his purpose, but when he felt himself to be in a strong position, Billy Bunter's manners were not the manners of a Chesterfield. If Bunter were given an inch he would take an ell, to follow the old saying, and he felt that at the present juncture of events Vernon-Smith could not afford to be uncivil to him.

He was right. The Bounder was seated in his study, a half-smoked cigarette between his lips, and a deep wrinkle in his brow. He was thinking—thinking hard. He had a problem to solve, and he had very little time to solve it in. The interruption of the fat junior made him snap his teeth with anger, but he concealed it the next moment, and his manner was very bland as he turned towards the fellow whom he would gladly have kicked out of the study, but whose vote was essential to him in the election that evening.

"Hallo, Bunter!" he said, most cordially. "Come in, old chap."

"Yes, certainly," said Billy Bunter, closing the door. "I thought I'd give you a look in, Smithy, old man, to have a bit of a jaw about the election."

If Billy Bunter had called Vernon-Smith "Smithy, old man" at any other time, "Smithy, old man" would have been The Magnet Library—No. 211.

pitched him neck and crop out of the study. But on the present occasion the Bounder bore the fat junior's offensive familiarity without wincing.

"Thanks!" he said.

"Wharton hasn't treated me well," said Bunter.

"I'm sure he hasn't," agreed the Bounder.

"But upon the whole," continued Bunter, narrowly watching the Bounder's face through his big glasses—"upon the whole, Smithy, old man, I regard this as a time for setting aside any little personal feelings, and acting for the good of the Remove. A fellow has to get from a sense of duty."

"Naturally," said the Bounder, his lip curling. He did not need to be very keen to know that this was Bunter's way of putting his price up.

"I suppose I shall really have to vote for Wharton," said Bunter. "I gave you a chance when I offered my vote at auction to-day. You didn't take it."

"I'm ready to make an offer now."

"I'm afraid it's too late, Smithy, old man. Of course, with the merits of the two candidates about equally balanced, if I received a personal favour from one of them I should most likely vote for that chap."

"It would be only decent, Bunter."

"Only Wharton's not likely to do a chap a favour," said Bunter, with a shake of the head. "He's personally jealous of me, you see, partly on account of Marjorie Hazeldene—as if a chap can help being good looking!"

Vernon-Smith did not laugh.

"Quite so," he agreed. "Look here, Bunter; I believe you are expecting a postal-order to-morrow?"

Bunter looked astonished.

"Yes, I am," he said. "How did you know?"

Vernon-Smith coughed.

"Ahem! You generally are. I—I mean, I think you said you were expecting a postal-order for, say, a pound, from a friend of yours."

"Yes, one of my titled friends," said Bunter, with some emphasis.

"Exactly: one of your titled friends," assented the Bounder calmly. "I believe the postal-order has been delayed in the post."

"Yes; that frequently happens. I've thought of complaining to the Postmaster-General about it," said Bunter. "It's all the fault of this Government, of course."

"Well, I don't mind advancing you the cash for the postal-order," said Vernon-Smith casually. "You—you can let me have the postal-order when it comes."

"It may not be here for a few days."

"Oh, that's all right."

"And if—if by any chance—of course, it's not likely to happen, but it might—if by any chance it should get lost in the post—"

"Then I would stand the loss. I shouldn't mind."

"I must say you're jolly decent, Smithy, old man," said Bunter. "This is very different from the way Wharton treats me."

"One good turn deserves another," the Bounder remarked.

"Of course, you'd put your name down on my list?"

"Oh, certainly."

Vernon-Smith rose from his chair, and took the paper down from the wall, and handed Bunter a pen, which he dipped in the ink ready for use. Bunter took the pen, and began to gnaw the handle, but he did not seem in a hurry to write.

Vernon-Smith laid a sovereign on the table.

Bunter's eyes glinted, but still he did not write his name.

"I want it in your own hand-writing," Vernon-Smith said quietly. "A chap who has signed in his own hand can't change his mind afterwards. Put it there."

"I don't want to change my mind, Smithy, old man. I like you too much to think of voting for that rotter Wharton," said Bunter, apparently oblivious already of his earlier statements upon that subject. "But—but—"

"There's the place for your name, next to Trevor's."

"Yes, but, really, you know, Smithy, old man, you—you've made a little mistake."

The Bounder looked at him very sharply.

"Mistake! What do you mean?"

"About the amount of the postal-order."

"Oh!" said the Bounder.

"It isn't for a pound," Bunter explained. "It's for two pounds. Of course, that won't make any difference to you, will it, as you're going to have the postal-order when it comes?"

Vernon-Smith looked long and hard at the Owl of the Remove. Billy Bunter never knew how near he was at that moment to being picked up by the collar and flung into the passage. Vernon-Smith would willingly have given a sovereign to be able to do it. But Bunter's vote was too valuable; it meant everything to the ambitious black sheep

of the Remove. And Vernon-Smith never allowed his temper to interfere in any way with his interests.

"Two pounds!" he repeated slowly.

Bunter nodded calmly.

"That's the amount," he said. "Of course, you needn't hand it out, if you don't want to, Smithy. I'd really rather think it over a little longer about whether I ought to vote for you. I haven't been able to give the matter much thought yet, and—"

Vernon-Smith silently took out another sovereign and laid it beside the first. The money was little enough to the millionaire's son, but Vernon-Smith did not like being "done." But he had no choice in the matter now. William George Bunter was master of the situation, and William George Bunter was on the make.

Bunter's eyes gleamed greedily. He slipped the two sovereigns into his waistcoat pocket, and wrote down his name in the place Vernon-Smith indicated to him—"W. G. Bunter"—with a flourish. Then he backed quickly to the door. He did not trust the Bounder, and he would not have been surprised by an attempt of Vernon-Smith's part to take back the two pounds now that Bunter had committed himself in writing. Not that there was any danger of it; the Bounder was far too astute to think of so exasperating a voter upon whose vote so much depended.

"Of course, there's no need to say anything about this transaction," Billy Bunter remarked, from the doorway.

"Not a word!" said Vernon-Smith cheerfully. "The fellows would rag you if they knew. They wouldn't understand about the postal-order. It's all right."

"Ahem! But, I say, Smithy, old man, this only makes the voting equal," said Bunter curiously. "I know it keeps Wharton out, but Inky will be here to-morrow."

"Much water will pass under the bridges before to-morrow," said Vernon-Smith, quoting the old proverb.

Bunter looked puzzled.

"I don't see what water and bridges have got to do with the Remove election," he said.

The Bounder laughed.

"Mind your own business, my son, and I'll mind mine!" he said. "You can feel satisfied that I shall be captain of the Remove, if you're anxious about that. Buzz off!"

And Vernon-Smith closed the study door upon the Owl of the Remove.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER. The Bounder's Trump Card.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. read the telegram from Hurree Jamset Ram Singh in No. 1 Study, as they sat at the tea-table, and they rejoiced. The last doubt was removed now; Inky was coming. That Bunter's vote would be given to Vernon-Smith, they were quite certain, but the arrival of the forty-fifth boy would turn the scale in favour of Harry Wharton. The election at seven o'clock in the Remove Form-room could have only one result now—the return of Harry Wharton to his old place as captain of the Remove.

"Inky gets to Courtfield at six-twenty," Wharton remarked, as he laid the telegram down. "I wish some of us could go and meet him. But—"

Nugent shook his head decidedly.

"It wouldn't do," he said. "There might be something unexpected. We might get shut out from the election. If Vernon-Smith saw us go out, he would begin to scheme at once to keep us out. And you never can tell what that deep bounder will do next. He could get help from some of the Sixth, if he liked. Loder and Carne and that set are backing him up. They'd give anything to see you beaten at the election."

"Yes, I suppose it won't do to risk anything," Wharton said thoughtfully. "I don't see what Smith could do; but, as you say, you never can tell with the Bounder. And he seems keen on having the election at seven sharp, and we can't very well raise any objection to that, as the Head fixed the time."

"The Form-room door will be closed at seven," said Bob Cherry. "Everybody's got to be in there before then. Inky can get a cab to bring him here from Courtfield in half an hour at the outside; and as he's rolling in money, he could hire a motor-car at Courtfield garage if he liked. Inky will manage it. We mustn't leave anything to chance so far as we're concerned. We might ask some of the Fourth to go and meet him."

"Better not," said Johnny Bull. "They might think it a good opportunity for one of their idiotic japes, by keeping Inky away from the election. Better keep it quite dark that he's coming at all."

"Yes, that's best."

"If Vernon-Smith knew he would be on the track at once," said Mark Linley, in blissful ignorance of the fact that the

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Bounder knew everything already. "As it is, I don't see how anything can happen to stop Inky."

"Eat, drink, and be merry!" grinned Bob Cherry. "We're going to win all along the line. Hurrah!"

The hurrah rang out of the study, and reached the ears of Vernon-Smith as he came down the Remove passage. The Bounder smiled in a cynical way. He knew that that hurrah was the outcome of the telegram from the Nabob of Bhamipur. He fancied that the chums of the Remove would not have cheered if they had known what was in his mind. Vernon-Smith went down to the floor below and turned into the Sixth Form passage, and walked quietly along to Loder's study.

Loder, the prefect, was in his room, and he gave the Bounder a cordial nod as he came in. The Bounder was on the best of terms with the black sheep of the Sixth. They were very useful to one another sometimes. Loder's powers as a prefect had saved the Bounder on more than one occasion from the penalties of wrong-doing, and Loder found it very convenient at times to extract a little loan from the millionaire's son.

"Going strong?" asked Loder.

Vernon-Smith closed the study door before he replied. "Yes, fixed it up with Bunter," he said. "I've got twenty-one voters behind me, and Wharton has the same. He expected about thirty-five, I think; but I've worked it to be with him, so far."

"Then, as the Indian isn't coming, it will be a dead-heat," said Loder. "I suppose you have some plan for getting a man away from the other side, in that case?"

"I hope so; I am not sure, but I think I can work it," said the Bounder, in a low voice. "But the chief thing is to make sure that Wharton doesn't get it, of course. Those rotters in No. 1 Study have worked a surprise on me. They've got a wire through to the nigger at Southampton, and persuaded him to dodge the man who's got him in charge and come on to Greyfriars by the first express. He gets to Courtfield Junction at six-twenty."

Loder whistled.

"That settles your chance, then," he said. "What axes to tell you?"

The Bounder smiled sourly.

"They didn't tell me," he said. "They don't know I know anything about it. Look here, Loder, the nigger's got to be kept away!"

"A few fellows at the station to keep him there—"

"I can't let any of my voters out; there might be accidents or some dodge on the other side to keep them out," said Vernon-Smith. "I want you to go to the station and meet Inky, Loder, if you'll do it."

Loder looked grave.

"I say, that's asking a great deal, Smith. It would make a row if it came out that a prefect interfered in a junior election, especially by keeping a voter out of it."

"But it needn't come out," said the Bounder eagerly. "You can get down to Courtfield, not thinking anything about Remove elections, you know, and happen on the nigger quite by chance at the railway-station. You have a right to fag him, as a prefect, and you can make him go somewhere—"

Loder shook his head.

"Fagging the Remove has been abolished, you know. That wouldn't work. Besides, the nigger wouldn't obey me. He'd come right on here, and chance it."

The Bounder compressed his lips.

"I'm going to arrange with Gosling to keep the gates closed, as a last resource," he said. "But you could manage to keep him in Courtfield somehow, Loder. If you can't fag him, you might buzz him into a train, or—or shift him somewhere. Look here, it's worth your while to try. If he gets here, Wharton will be captain of the Remove again, and you know what that means. It was Wharton and his gang that got the fagging abolished in the Form, and they're always up against you. It's worth something to you to down him."

"I'd do a great deal to disappoint him, certainly," said the Sixth Form bully. "Look here, I'll get down to Courtfield, and see what I can do, Smith. That's the most I can say."

"Good enough!" said Vernon-Smith, with a glint in his eyes. "If you manage to keep him away, Loder, there won't be any difficulty about that little loan of ten pounds you were speaking about this morning. That's a deal."

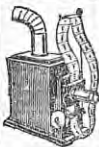
"Done!" said Loder.

And the Bounder left the study, quite satisfied in his mind that Loder would do his best. He knew very nearly as much of Loder's affairs as Loder himself knew, and he was quite aware that the prefect was in debt to the betting "gents" at the Cross Keys and extremely hard up. If Loder could keep Hurree Singh away from the election, Loder would do

(Continued on page 20.)

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A RACE AGAINST TIME.

(Continued from page 18.)

it. The Bounder was assured upon that point. If he could only delay him in Courtfield a bare half-hour, the game would be won. And the Bounder had another card yet to play.

After leaving the prefect's study, he walked out quickly into the Close, and made his way through the falling dusk to the school porter's lodge. Gosling, the porter, was there. Vernon-Smith found him in his little parlour, sipping a glass of gin-and-water, in which there was very much more gin than water. The porter was very civil to Vernon-Smith. Gosling's opinion of boys in general, and Greyfriars boys in particular, was that they all ought to be "drowned," as he called it; but he made an exception in favour of the millionaire's son, perhaps because Vernon-Smith had found it judicious to tip him liberally.

"I want you to do me a little favour, Gossy," said the Bounder.

"Sottingly!" said Gosling, scenting a half-crown at least. "Anything I can do to oblige you, Master Smith. Was I says is this 'ere, that if a gentleman hants like a gentleman, it's a men's duty to treat him hants like a gentleman. So I says—"

Gin-and-water, especially gin, had the effect of making Gosling loquacious. But Vernon-Smith interrupted him.

"There's a Form election on, Gosling—"

"I know that, Master Smith, and I'm sure I 'ope you will get in," said Gosling. "Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"The other side are playing a rotten trick on me," pursued the Bounder. "You know the nigger is coming back to Greyfriars. They've got up a dodge to get him here just before the election so as to turn the scale against me."

"Just like them boys," said Gosling, with a wise shake of the head. "I always says that boys oughter be drowned, and specially them young rips in No. 1 Study."

"Of course, it's a rotten trick," said Vernon-Smith. "I think I'm justified in keeping the nigger out, if I can." Vernon-Smith did not think anything of the kind, as a matter of fact, but he preferred to put it that way. "I want you to help me. If the nigger gets here before seven o'clock, Gosling, could you manage not to hear the bell?"

"Oh—"

"The gates will be locked, and Ikey can't get in unless you open them," said the Bounder, in a low voice. "You can manage not to hear the bell at first, anyway."

"But if he keeps on ringing, the 'ole school will 'ear it," said Gosling dubiously. "I could 'ang it out for five minutes, 'per'aps."

"Well, then you could go down to the gate and—lose the key?" said the Bounder. "Keep him in talk, you know, and pretend to be looking for the key, but don't let him in till seven o'clock has struck, or, rather, till ten minutes past seven, if you can manage it. I'm going to get the voting through as quickly as possible, but it will take some time for the counting. Keep the cad out, Gossy, and I shan't forget you."

"You're verry good, Master Smith."

Vernon-Smith laid a half-sovereign on the table.

"That's to go on with," he said. "There will be a quid for you if I become captain of the Remove, Gosling. Is it a 'un?"

The half-sovereign disappeared into the porter's horny hand.

"Wot I says is this 'ere, Master Smith. You can rely on me treating a gentleman like a gentleman. I'll do hevery thing I can, and if it comes to losin' a key—why, any man might lose a key and not be able to find it."

The Bounder grinned.

"Good for you, Gossy! Mind, I rely on you."

"It's orright, Master Smith."

The Bounder quitted the lodge, feeling that it was indeed all right. Gosling would have kept his own grandmother out for a sovereign.

The Bounder re-entered the School House with compressed lips. Leder had his hat and coat on, and was just going out. He nodded to Vernon-Smith in passing; and the Bounder watched him go. Then he went up to his study. Bolsover and Snoop were waiting for him there.

"All serene?" asked Bolsover.

"I think so. Get the fellows together now, and mind nobody is missing. We must all be in the Form-room on time."

"Right you are!"

And Vernon-Smith and his faithful retainers were soon at work herding the voters into the Remove Form-room.

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THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Brought up to the Scratch.

EXCITEMENT was growing in the Remove as the hour of the election came nearer.

Harry Wharton & Co. were confident now. They were sure of Hurrell Singh, and the one vote more made the election a settled thing in advance. If they had known that the Bounder was up to every move in the game their confidence would have been shaken. But Vernon-Smith kept his secret better than they had been able to keep theirs.

At six o'clock the whole Form was busy with preparations for the election. Electioneers on both sides were very anxious to make sure that their voters would appear at the poll. Bolsover routed Billy Bunker out of the tuckshop and marched him into the Form-room with an iron grip on his collar, in spite of the fat junior's protests. And Snoop watched him there, to see that he did not bolt again.

Nugent hunted for Lord Maulover, and found him asleep in his study, and woke him up by the simple process of digging the toe of a boot into his ribs. Lord Maulover gasped and rolled off his sofa.

"Begad!" he ejaculated.

"Time!" said Nugent severely.

"My dear fellow—"

"Time's getting on! Come to the Form-room—"

"I'm tired, don't you know!" said the noble slacker.

"I'll rest a bit, I think, and come along presently—"

"You jolly well won't!" said Nugent, seizing him by the arm.

"You'll come along now, my son. You can go to sleep in the Form-room if you like, and I'll wake you up when the voting begins."

"Begad, you know—"

"Oh, come along!"

And Lord Maulover came along.

Bob Cherry and John Bull and Mark Linley were gathering other careless fellows into the fold. Leigh and Micky Desmond were playing chess in the common-room, and they insisted upon finishing their game. Bob Cherry finished it for them by upsetting the table and sending pieces and pawns in a shower about the floor. The players jumped up furiously.

"You are!" yelled Leigh.

"Ye spalpeen!" roared Micky Desmond.

"All serene!" said Bob cheerfully. "You're both late now, and the game's finished, anyway. Roll up to the Form-room."

"Look here—"

"Faith, and I—"

"Come on, my sons! You can jaw afterwards."

"Anybody seen Hazeldene?" inquired Mark Linley, looking round the common-room.

Nobody had. Hazeldene had put his name down on Wharton's paper; but he was known to be a waverer, and generally under the influence of the last fellow who talked to him, and the Famous Four were anxious. They looked up and down and round about for Hazeldene. They did not think at first of looking into Vernon-Smith's study.

Hazeldene was there, looking very pale and worried, in conversation with the Bounder.

"I can't, Smithy!" he was saying. "I can't! I—I'd vote for you if I could; but I've promised Wharton, you know."

"You've put your name on his list, you mean?"

"Yes, that's it. I told Marjorie I would."

"But that isn't a promise. You're a right to change your mind if you like," the Bounder advised.

"But—just I don't want to change my mind," said Hazeldene. "Besides, I—I can't vote for you. I promised Marjorie that I wouldn't vote for you, whatever I did. I'm sticking to that."

And, for once in his life, Hazeldene looked firm. His sister's influence had often kept Hazeldene to the straight path, and it was never more needed than now.

The Bounder looked at him, with a sombre light in his eyes.

"You owe me three pounds and more," he said.

Hazeldene shifted uneasily in his seat.

"I know I do, Smithy."

"You can't settle up?"

"Well, no, not just now; but—"

"I'm not asking you for the money," said Vernon-Smith.

"You can have it—and more. I don't care. But I think it's rather thick, asking favours of me, and refusing to do me a little favour in return. Don't it strike you like that?"

You owe me money, and you're going to borrow more, and yet you're going to vote against me in this election."

Hazeldene flushed.

"I dare say you're right," he said. "I—I— Perhaps I oughtn't to vote against you, under the circumstances. But I can't vote for you, Smithy. I won't break my promise to Marjorie—I won't do that."

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"I don't ask you to," said the Bounder, who knew when he had gone far enough. "I only ask you not to act as an enemy. Don't vote for me, and don't vote for Wharton. Stand out of the election, and don't vote for anybody."

Hazelene drew a deep breath.

"But that will be the same as voting for you," he said. "The votes tie now, as the election is fixed to take place before Inky comes back—you've got twenty-one, and Wharton's got twenty-one. We know that beforehand. If I stand out of the election, that leaves you with a majority of one. It's just the same as if I voted for you."

"If you vote against me I can't expect me to stand your friend any longer," said the Bounder. "I'm only asking you to be neutral—that's all."

"But I—I—"

Hazelene hesitated. He was evidently yielding; and the Bounder could see that he had only to press his advantage.

"The fellows would say you'd got round me, and—and—"

"That's all right," said the Bounder. "Suppose you go out and forget all about the election? That might happen to anybody—"

"They'll see me going out, and—"

"You can drop out of my window if you like. I'll lend you a cap. You can hang out in the Cloisters till after seven o'clock."

"But—but—"

There was a sharp knock at the door, and it was opened before Vernon-Smith had time to speak.

Mark Linley and Bob Cherry and John Bull looked into the study. Vernon-Smith sprang to his feet, his teeth coming together hard.

"Here he is!" shouted Bob Cherry. "We might have guessed before that the Bounder was trying to get at our votes."

"Come on, Hazel!"

"This way, my son!"

Hazelene hesitated. Between the two parties his uncertain mind wavered like a leaf in the wind.

"Get out of my study, you cads!" shouted the Bounder.

"We'd chuck you out of it yourself for ten nine!" said Bob Cherry. "If you want a row, say so, and I'll give you all you want. Take Hazel out, you chaps!"

Nugent linked his arm in Hazelene's. Hazel gave the Bounder a helpless look as he was walked towards the door. He had not made up his mind yet, and it looked as if it would be made up for him by Bob Cherry & Co.

Vernon-Smith rushed to stop him.

"Stay here, Hazel!"

"Come on, old man!" said Nugent. "Don't listen to the cad!"

"Stick to the old firm!" said Bob Cherry. "Keep back, Smithy!"

"I won't! I—"

"You jolly well will!"

Bob Cherry put his hands up and faced the Bounder. Vernon-Smith rushed furiously on, and they were hotly engaged in a moment. But the Bounder, furious as he was, was not likely to be able to pass the champion fighting-man of the Remove.

Nugent and Mark Linley, with their arms linked in Hazelene's on either side, walked him out of the study and down the passage. There was a heavy bump on the floor of the study, and Vernon-Smith found himself lying on his back.

"Now, you let our giddy voters alone, you cad!" said Bob Cherry truculently. "None of your blessed bribery and corruption, you worm! Sent!"

And Bob Cherry followed his friends, slamming the door after him.

Vernon-Smith staggered to his feet, rubbing his mouth savagely, and with almost demoniac rage in his gleaming eyes. It was useless to pursue the Co.—he knew that. Hazelene was in the Form-room by that time, with Wharton's friends round him. And the kind of persuasion the Bounder had been applying could hardly be applied when there were other cars to hear.

"Hang them!" muttered the Bounder. "Hang them! But—but the nigger won't get here; so the voting will tie, after all, and the election will be put off till to-morrow—and by that time I shall get at Hazelene. He shall vote for THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 211.

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me instead of standing out, and that will give me the odd vote. I'll make him do it, or he shall suffer!"

And the Bounder was somewhat comforted by that reflection. All depended, for him, upon Hurree Singh being kept away; and he felt pretty certain that the precautions he had taken would be effective. The voting would tie, after all, and the Bounder would have time to work.

Bob Cherry and his friends marched Hazelene into the Form-room in triumph. They did not open to part company with him again till after the election. They knew only too well the insidious cunning of the Bounder.

"Here he is!" said Bob Cherry. "Large as life, and all ready to vote for the right man! Ain't you, Hazel?"

"Yes!" said Hazel, with a feeble grin.

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "We're all here now—excepting Inky!"

"Yes—excepting Inky!" said Nugent, with a grin.

And the chums laughed cheerfully. They were expecting the arrival of the Nabob of Bhampru in good time—before seven rang out from the clock-tower of Greyfriars.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Race Against Time.

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH, the noble Nabob of Bhampru, descended from the express as it stopped in the station at Courtfield. The station clock indicated twenty minutes past six—the express was just to time.

The dusky face of the Indian junior was somewhat excited. He jammed the silk hat backwards on his head as he jumped out of the carriage, and he left an umbrella and a bag on the seat. But little things like that could not be expiated at such a moment. The nabob was wanted at Greyfriars to help his chums in the hour of need, and he was thinking of that—and of that alone.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh did not expect anybody at the station to meet him. He knew that Harry Wharton & Co. would be very busy in the Remove Form-room, with the election fixed for seven o'clock; and he knew, too, that they were very likely busy in watching the Bounder, to frustrate his knavish tricks.

There was forty-five minutes to eleven before the election commenced, and Hurree Singh did not mean to waste one of them. He rushed from the platform, and tossed his ticket to an attendant porter, and dashed to the exit from the station. He cast a hurried glance out, in the faint hope that taxicabs might have been instituted at Courtfield since his departure. But there were no taxicabs to be seen. There were several of the horse variety, however, and Inky made up his mind to select the best.

A familiar form loomed up in the dusk before him as he was crossing in the cab-rank, and leader of the Sixth tapped him cordially on the shoulder.

"Hullo, Ed!"

"Ah! The veteran Leader?"

"I heard you were coming back, but I thought you were expected on Wednesday," said the prefect. "I never dreamed of seeing you here."

"The surprisefulness is great," said the nabob, in his usual and mysterious English. "I have come more quickly than was my venerable intention previously. But pray excuse me now, Leader, as I am in a hurry, and the last is the best."

"Hold on a minute! I'm going back to Greyfriars, and I'll walk with you," said Leader.

"The walkfulness is out of the honourable question," replied Hurree Singh. "I am selecting the quickest of these esteemed cabs. You are very welcome to a lift in the cab, my esteemed and respected friend."

"Good! I'll come with you."

Hurree Singh stood back politely for Leader to enter the cab first. He also wanted to give very explicit instructions to the driver.

"Greyfriars School, and drive like the honourable dickens!" he exclaimed. "The hurry is terrific!"

"Yes, sir," said the cabby, as he gathered up his reins.
 "A sovereign if you do it in twenty-five minutes!" said the nabob.

"My 'at! I'll do it, sir, and thank you kindly!"
 "And a five-pound note if you do it in an honourable quarter of an hour!"

"My heye! Jump in!"

The cab rattled off at a rate that threatened instant destruction to the horse. The cabby narrowly escaped knocking the next cab over, brushed by a waggon by a hair's breadth, and grazed a pillar-box with his off-wheel. Then the hansom dashed out of the lighted High Street of Courtfield into the lane leading to Greyfriars.

There was no doubt that the cabman meant to earn that five if he could. Hurree Singh had been away some time, but his dusky face was well known in Courtfield, and the fact that he was a wealthy nabob in his own country was well known, too. The cabby had no doubts about the five, and he meant to have it if it was within his powers. He imagined that somebody was on the point of death at Greyfriars, to account for the extraordinary hurry of the dusky junior.

Loder sat back in the hansom as it rattled and bumped away into the darkness. The prefect was thinking hard. If the cab-drive was not interrupted somehow, the nabob would certainly arrive at Greyfriars in ample time for the election. He would be so early that, however long Gooling delayed him at the gate, he would find some means of getting in before seven. Something had to be done. But Loder took his time. It was safest to get clear of Courtfield before acting. He did not want to give Juky a chance of getting another cab, or hiring a motor-car at Courtfield Garage. He knew that the nabob would spend money like water, if necessary, to get to Greyfriars in time.

Loder thought it over as the dark trees and hedges flew past. Hurree Singh did not speak. He was watching the darkness ahead with eager, shining dark eyes, utterly oblivious of the thoughts in his companion's mind.

Ten minutes passed like a flash as the cab dashed on. Cabby was doing his best. More than half the distance to the school had been covered. There was no traffic on the dark, lonely road, lighted at long intervals by a solitary glimmering lamp.

Loder pushed the trap up suddenly.

"Hold on, cabby!" he exclaimed.

"My esteemed Loder—"

The cab halted.

"Yes, sir?" came the driver's voice from the roof.

"Drive more slowly. This isn't safe."

"Quickly—quickly!" exclaimed the nabob, in great distress. "My esteemed Loder, I am willing to take any risk—"

"But I am not," said Loder coolly. "I'm not going to have my neck broken to please you!"

"Loder—my esteemed friend—"

"Oh, shut up! I'm a prefect, and you'll catch it if I get any of your cheek!" said Loder. "I'm not standing any lip from you!"

"May I respectfully remind you, if you compel me to do so, that this is my cab," said the nabob firmly. "If you do not like the speed, you may step out."

"I don't choose to."

"Driver, go on—"

Loder shut the trap above, and grasped the dusky junior as he strove to raise it. The slim Indian was as an infant in the iron grasp of the Sixth Form bully.

"No, you don't!" said Loder grimly.

"My worthy Loder—"

"Drive on slowly, cabby!"

The nabob's eyes flashed.

"You are doing this on purpose!" he exclaimed. "You are trying to make me late at Greyfriars! You were always the enemy of the esteemed Wharton, and you are trying to make him lose the election!"

"Rats!" said Loder. "You'll go slowly and safely. As a prefect, I'm responsible for keeping the juniors from risking their silly necks."

"I shall be late—"

"That can't be helped."

Hurree Jemai Ram Singh began to struggle fiercely. He comprehended now the scheme of the prefect, and he knew that Loder was deliberately attempting to make him late for the Remove election. That was enough for him to know. Complaints afterwards would not be of much use. Loder would have a good pretext, in describing the reckless speed of the cab, and anyway, Wharton would have lost the election. But the blood of all the nabobs of Bhanipur was boiling in the veins of the dusky junior. He struggled fiercely in the cab, and although he was nothing like a match for the prefect, they were in great danger of falling out together.

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"Stop it, you young madman!" yelled Loder, as the cab doors flew open, and they rolled off the seat to the floor of the cab. "Do you want to break both our necks!"

"Release me, then, you terrific rotter!"

"Stop it!"

"Not till you let me go!"

The cabman, in fear for the lives of his fares, brought the cab to a halt. Hurree Singh tore himself away from the gasping prefect, and leapt into the road.

"Come to Greyfriars to-morrow for your fare, cabby!" he called out.

Then he vanished into the darkness. The nabob's decision had been quickly taken. He knew that Loder would not let the cab arrive at Greyfriars in time, and the only resource was to run for it. The Indian junior was fleet of foot, and there was a good chance. He jammed his hat on the back of his head, and raced away as if he were on the cinder-path.

Loder gasped for breath, and struggled out of the cab. He did not realise for a moment that the junior had taken to his heels.

"Here is that young fiend!" he gasped.

The cabby had jumped down.

"The young gentleman's gone!" he said, in a truculent voice. How much he would get from the nabob on the morrow the cabby did not know; but evidently Loder had prevented him from the chance of earning the five, and cabby was justly angry.

Loder gritted his teeth.

"By Jove! I'll run him down, and—"

"No, you won't!" said the cabby.

And he planted himself in Loder's path. The prefect stared at him, and halted. The cabby was rather too burly for him to tackle.

"What do you mean?" he roared. "How dare you stop me! Stand aside!"

The cabman did not move.

"I was drivin' the young gent., and a generous young gent. he is!" replied the cabby sturdily. "You ain't no call to interfere. You've spoiled it for 'im and for me!"

"I'm a prefect at the school, and—"

"I don't know what a prefect is, and I don't care, and I don't care tuppence for the school, neither!" said the cabby. "I know that you ain't goin' arter that young gent.—that's what I know!"

"Stand aside, fellow!"

"Fellow yourself!" said the cabby. "You can't come the 'igh and mighty over me, young fellow-me-od! I'm goin' to give that young gent. ten minutes to get clear, and you're goin' to stay 'ere!"

"Stay here!" roared Loder. "Are you mad? I refuse to do anything of the sort!"

"My 'orse can do with a rest prior that run," the cabby remarked. "But I ain't bred, and I'm ready to give you a 'idin', young fellow-me-od!"

"You try to get by, and see," said the cabby stolidly.

Loder did try to get by, and a brawny fist came so near his nose that he started back again, in alarm.

"Look here, cabby," he exclaimed, "I'm in a hurry!"

"If you was in a 'urry you shouldn't have stopped the 'ob," said the cabman, with a satirical grin. "Urry or no 'urry, you stops 'ere ten minutes."

"But I tell you—"

"Nuff said! You stops 'ere!"

And Loder did stop there, for well over ten minutes, arguing in vain. When the obstinate cabby finally permitted him to go, Loder tramped off furiously in the direction of Greyfriars. He knew that there was not the slightest chance of overtaking the fleet Indian now. Probably Hurree Singh would have outdistanced him in any case; but certainly he was too far ahead now for Loder to have a chance.

Hurree Singh was running as if for his life. Without a pause, and without giving a further thought to Loder, the dusky junior sped down the shadowy lane. The ground seemed to fly under his feet. He was fatigued with a long train journey, but he did not think of that now. Every ounce of strength he had in his wiry frame he put into that last burst of speed.

He heard chains ringing through the air as he came nearer to Greyfriars. He knew the Greyfriars chimes, and his heart beat hard. Was it seven? No! Three-quarters chimed on the cool, clear night air.

A quarter to seven! He would be in time yet! Five minutes more of steady sprinting, and he halted, panting and breathless, outside the gates of Greyfriars.

Ting-ling-ting! Jangle-jang!

He tugged at the bell with all his strength, and then leaned against the gate to rest, gasping. His throat was on

Are, his ribs were dilating strangely, his heart thumped like a hammer. But he was in time. The gates were locked, as he expected. Looking-up time at Greyfriars was at dark. But they would be opened in a minute or so, and it wanted yet nearly ten minutes to seven.

But there was no reply to the ringing of the bell. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh realized that the porter had not heard, or was too lazy to hurry himself. He seized the bell-handle again, and rang and rang. He put all his force into it, and the din he made rang from the porter's lodge, and out over the Close, and out into the road.

"Jang-jang! Jangle-jang!"

If Gosling did not hear, somebody else was certain to. Gosling himself knew that, and he came down to the gates with a light.

"Who's there?" he growled, peering through the bars.

Hurree Singh gasped.

"Open the gates, my worthy Gosling! It is I!"

"Who are you?"

"I'm Hurree Singh! Open the gates!"

"You ain't expected till to-morrow!" said Gosling.

"But I am here, my good Gosling, I am here, and the hurry is terrific! Open the gates at once! Please to open the gates!"

"Wait till I get the blessed key, then!" said Gosling. "Wot I says is this 'ere—a man oughtn't to be disturbed like this, I says, by kids turning up at the wrong times, I says!"

"Quick—quick!"

Gosling groped in his pockets, but took care not to get out the key. Hurree Singh, wild with impatience, seized the bars of the gate and rattled them furiously. The minutes were ticking away. Every moment he expected to hear the hour strike out from the clock tower. And there was still the wide Close to cross, and the Form-room to reach. The nabob shouted furiously at the slow and apparently stupid porter.

"Quick—quick!"

"I can't find the key!" growled Gosling. "I must ha' left it in my lodge, I s'pose. Wait a few minutes while I looks for it."

"What—what! I tell you I must get in!" shouted the nabob excitedly. "Open the gates at once! Force the lock! I will paytally reimburse for the damage!"

"That's likely!" growled Gosling. "I don't see the 'arry!"

"Quick—quick!"

Chime from the tower! The quarters were rolling out, and the boom of seven would follow. It was seven o'clock! The nabob's voice rose to a scream.

"The key! Quick—quick!"

"I can't find it!" said Gosling. "I shall 'ave to go back and look in my lodge! I'm sorry, Master 'Urree Singh, but it can't be 'elped! Wot I says it this 'ere—"

"Quick—quick!" yelled the nabob.

"Oh, or right!"

Gosling tramped away towards his lodge with irritating slowness. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh clenched his hands and his teeth with rage.

He knew that Gosling would not be back in time to let him in. The key might take a long time to find, and the porter was slow. Hurree Singh ran along the school wall, and reached a place where the juniors sometimes climbed it. From the outside, it was not supposed to be climbable without a "bunk" up. But Hurree Singh was desperate. He retreated a short distance across the road, and ran forward, and made a terrific spring.

His hands caught on the rough edge of the bricks; only his fingers, but he hung on. He made good his grip, and dragged himself up. Slowly, but surely, he dragged himself higher, and put his leg over the top of the wall. His silk hat had fallen off into the road, but he did not even notice it. He drew one deep breath, and slid down inside the wall, and dropped into the Close of Greyfriars.

Seven had struck—the last stroke had died away as the nabob's feet touched the ground inside the wall.

Far across the shadowy Close, lights gleamed from the windows of the Remove Form-room. Hurree Singh, exhausted, spent, had rolled over as he landed; but he picked himself up as if he had been made of india-rubber, and ran. With thumping heart, and gasping throat, the nabob dashed across the Close towards the School House.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Election.

HARRY WHARTON'S eyes turned to the clock over the bookcase, in the Remove Form-room, very anxiously, as the hand was crawling on towards seven.

Hurree Singh had not arrived.

The whole of the Lower Fourth were in the Form-room now. Members of other Forms were not admitted. Temple, Dalney & Co., and Coker, and Hoskins, of the Shell, had shown some curiosity on the subject, but they had been hoisted and booted away when they came near the Remove-THIS MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 211.

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room. The only outsider present was Courtney, of the Sixth, a good-natured prefect, who had agreed to undertake the task of counting the votes. Both sides were equally keen to have the counting above suspicion, and they had agreed to ask Courtney, and the senior had consented. He came into the room at five minutes to seven, and found all the Removes there.

Courtney glanced round the room.

"All here?" he asked.

"Yes, all here," said Vernon-Smith. "We may as well lock the door, to keep out any rotters who want to interrupt."

"Hold on," said Bob Cherry quickly, "there may be another chap coming; and it's not seven yet."

"Remove's all here," said Bolover, affecting to misunderstand. "Follows in other Forms are not allowed to vote for Remove captain, you know that."

"Hurree Singh may come."

"He doesn't get here till to-morrow," said Snoopy.

"He may come this evening."

"Do you mean to say that you've sent for him specially to come?" demanded Vernon-Smith.

Wharton returned his glance calmly.

"Yes," he said. "You say as well know it now. Hurree Singh is going to get here in time for the election, if he can work it. I didn't let it become known before, because I believed you would think of some caddish trick for trying to keep him away from the voting."

"What sort of a trick do you call it to bring a late voter in at the last moment?" demanded Vernon-Smith angrily.

"Hurree Singh has been away—he doesn't really belong to Greyfriars—he ought not to vote at all."

"Rats!"

"He wasn't expected till Tuesday," said Vernon-Smith. "I appeal to Courtney whether it's fair to rush him on us at the last moment, like this—if he comes."

Courtney hesitated.

"The election was to have taken place on Wednesday," said Harry quietly. "Inky would have been in ample time for it then, if he came to-morrow as he intended."

"The Head fixed it for to-morrow—"

"Can you deny that you, somehow, suggested to the Head to fix it earlier than was intended?" demanded Wharton, fixing his eyes upon the Bounder's.

Vernon-Smith hesitated. He did not know whether the Head might have dropped a word to Courtney, and so he dared not lie.

"That's got nothing to do with it," he replied sullenly.

"It's got a lot to do with it," said Wharton. "You rushed the election to keep Inky out, and we've rushed Inky in to be in time for the election."

"It's a case of diamond cut diamond," grinned Nugent.

Courtney laughed.

"Looks like that to me," he said. "Anyway, if Hurree Singh is here before the election is over, he certainly has a right to vote, as he belongs to the Remove. That's certain. But as he isn't here—"

Seven o'clock began to chime.

"There's seven!" exclaimed Bolover. "Lock the door!"

"No need to lock the door," Bob Cherry retorted. "If Inky gets here before the counting is over, he can vote. Isn't that right, Courtney?"

"Certainly!" said the prefect, with a nod.

"Then I claim to have the counting started at once," said Vernon-Smith. "Wharton has no right to hang it out because he's expecting a backer."

"Quite right. Begin at once. If Hurree Singh should turn up after the counting, no notice can be taken of him," said Courtney. "Now, then—"

"Count Wharton's votes first," said Vernon-Smith. He was very anxious to get Wharton's counting over.

"I object," said Wharton. "Count Vernon-Smith's votes first. What's fair for one is fair for another."

Courtney looked perplexed.

"Better toss up for it!" he said.

"Very well," said the Bounder.

Anything was better than wasting time, from the Bounder's point of view. Bob Cherry took out a coin. The chums of the Remove were looking anxious now.

They had expected Hurree Singh long before this. If the journey from Courtfield had taken the full half-hour, he should have reached Greyfriars by ten minutes to seven. It was now turned seven o'clock. The last stroke of the hour had died away.

Where was Hurree Jamset Ram Singh?

Had the express been delayed? It was quite likely that it had lost ten minutes or more on such a long journey. Had the cab failed in the lane—broken down, perhaps—or—

(Continued on page 22.)

NEXT
TUESDAY:

"THE RIVALS' TEST!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.
Order Early.

CHING-LUNG
IN THE
FORBIDDEN
LAND.A Wonderful Story
of Ferrers Lord,
Millionaire,
Rupert Thurston,
and Gan-Waga.

THE OPENING INSTALLMENTS.

THROUGH
TRACKLESS
TIBET!BY
SIDNEY
DREW.

(READ THIS FIRST.)

Wishing to explore the practically unknown land of Tibet, Ferrers Lord, millionaire, makes up a party, including Prince Ching-Lung, Rupert Thurston, Gan-Waga, the Eskimo, and a number of the crew of the Lord of the Deep, to travel with him across Tibet to Kewi-Hak, the capital of Ching-Lung's province in China.

The party, conducted by an Afghan guide named Argal-Dinjat, have just crossed the Himalayas into The Forbidden Land, when they are attacked by the notorious pirate and outlaw, Storland Sahib, and a band of his ruffianly followers. These are beaten off, and the party, after a period of hard travelling, reach the first Tibetan village. Here they are surprised to find that the head man of Argal-Dinjat, who hears the news that Storland Sahib and his followers are riding towards the village, Ferrers Lord and his party rush out and Prout receive the order to blow up a cottage and make a barricade across the roadway. A minute or two passes, and Prout runs from the cottage shouting "Look out! I've lit the fuse!"

(Now read on from here.)

Tom Prout and Maddock Try to Compose a Poem—Two Kegs and one Bullet—The Attack and Defence—Storland Sahib Shows the White Flag.

At Prout's announcement that he had lighted the fuse, there was a rush for shelter. The cartridge exploded with a roar and a crash. The smoke and dust drifted away, showing the house practically destroyed and the road littered with stones.

"Build a barricade!" said Ferrers Lord. "I think we can keep them back."

"We shall have a warm time, old chap," whispered Ching-Lung. "If they manage to rush both these ridges, they can blaze away at us properly from the third one."

"Then we shall have to fight from house to house. Hallo! What's that move? Let them have it!"

Twenty riders were galloping back up the path. Rifles and elephant-gun were emptied after them, but they seemed unhurt.

Others were firing over the ridge at the men at work. "I hardly think they will rush us in daylight," said the millionaire. "Take your sight by that large white stone."

"That lump of chalk?"

"Yes; shoot at it."

Ching-Lung fired, and through his glasses Ferrers Lord saw the white splinters fly in all directions.

"Eight hundred yards," said Ching-Lung. "Sight for that, and fire low. Who's hurt?"

There was a cry of pain, and Joe was hopping round, with his thumb in his mouth. Anxiety was turned to mirth, when it was discovered—though Joe swore he had been shot—that he had merely crushed his thumb badly between two stones.

"Send for the doctor to extract deadly bullets!" chuckled Maddock. "Oh, Joe, Joe, don't say it's fatal! Oh, doctor, don't amputate his arm! Poor old Joe! What sort of fellows shall I put on your grave? What about a nice sweet-smelling cauliflower, without any caterpillars on it?"

"Did uns hurt uns ickle fumb, don't?" cooed one of the other men. "Turn and let myver kiss uns better, ducky!"

"Shut up!" roared Joe. "Drat you, shut up!"

That only made matters worse, until a sudden movement of the enemy distracted their attention. A flag was fluttering over the ridge. Up and down it fluttered. Evidently it was a signal.

"Can you understand it?" asked Ching-Lung.

"No, Ching. The code is new to me."

"And to me, but it means something."

The rampart rose higher and higher. Half of a wall of a house still stood, and this afforded the workers shelter. And then a shot rang out from behind, and they knew what the signal meant.

"Blocked!" said Ferrers Lord. "They've got round us!" Ferrers Lord bit his lips. He had been strangely careless in leaving that end of the village unguarded.

Figures were skulking round the miserable huts. Unless something was done, and done quickly, they could not hold the position.

Bullets hissed in from both front and rear.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 211.

Read the grand new story of "THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S!"

Ching-Lung glanced round him, and took in the whole situation.

"If we had any bayonets," he said, "we'd soon shift those beggars. It's no use here, Lord. We'll get wiped out if we don't shift. And we must stick to the cattle. We could hold the sheds for weeks if we had guns."

The sheds, as Ching-Lung called them, had thick stone walls and thatched roofs. They stood forty yards from the street, with an open yard all round them.

There were three of them. A large one with the cattle in, and two smaller ones containing straw and ryb.

Ferrers Lord recognised the strength of the position.

"Prout," he cried, "take three men, and remove every scrap of provisions from the house into the streets! Don't expose yourselves, lads. We can keep them back for a long time yet."

Boom! roared O'Rooney's monstrous gun, and a figure sprawled over, and lay stiff in the middle of the street.

"Bodad!" remarked the Irishman, as he forced another enormous cartridge into the breech. "O' call that a daisy, Murther Ching. Consider that he saved your life. He was in the very act of pottin' at ye."

"Awfully obliged, old chap," said the prince; "but what was the point of wasting powder?"

"Why?"

"Didn't you see him fall?"

"Faith, didn't Oi?" answered O'Rooney. "He just dived into the pavement like a ton of bricks. But, truth, why did Oi waste powder?"

"Because the fall would have killed him anyway, you know. It would have cracked his skull."

O'Rooney scratched his head, and again sent a bullet whistling down the street.

"Mr. Ching," he said, drawing his hand across his eyes, "don't—don't dig any more of them jokes up. Let 'em slape in their ould graves. Eve made that same remark to Adam when he shot a monkey off a tree with his bow and arser, and the monkey came down wiv a bump. She axed him what he was spoilin' the fur for wid his nasty arers, makin' holes in ut, when the fall would have killed him nice and clane. Ut took Adam several months to explain why he had shot it at all."

Ching-Lung and O'Rooney were crouching side by side in a narrow ditch. Prout and his men swiftly ransacked the house, and hurried to the sheds loaded with hams, cheese, sacks of meal, and kegs of pickled pork. The wall of the ruined house, and the angle formed by the house next to it, thoroughly screened the rest of the men from bullets. They had been compelled to abandon the barricade, for that was exposed to the fire of the snipers who had gained the village.

Prout was staggering to the shed under the weight of a sack of flour, and fervently wishing that it was a bag of feathers. He cautiously peered round the corner of the house, for he had to cross an open space. So far, the snipers had not noticed what was going on, but Prout had an idea that they were soon likely to find out.

"By hokey!" murmured Prout, jerking his head as violently as if a piece of elastic had been tied to it. "What did I see? Was it a sweet face at the window, or was it not? Let us squint again."

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One eye cautiously rounded the corner. Something that Prout objected to very strongly rose above a heap of stones. It was about nine inches of a rifle-barrel, and Prout argued that the rifle was not there alone. The appearance of a sheep-skin cap to the left of it proved that his argument was sound.

Prout put down the sack, and sat on it. He suddenly felt tired. Then Joe came along with a keg of whisky under each arm.

"Here, Tom, you lubber, what are you skulking for? What are you doing?"

"Don't interrupt me, Joseph. I'm studyin' art and landscape. That's a lovely bit yonder—that bit of cloth-line w' a skirt hanging on it, and the two cockerels scrappin' in the distance."

"What's the matter w' you?"

"I'm restin', Joe," said Prout, "and thinkin' out a poem. I could write a beautiful poem about the scenery. Listen to the first few lines:

"Oh, glorious Tibet,
Where the water's very wet;
And it never rains a trifle when it's dry;
Where the sparrers all grow wings,
And the bees beat the kongs.
And the bumble-bee can actually fly."

Joe dropped both the kegs, and gazed long and earnestly at his comrade. There was a dreamy, far-away expression in Prout's eyes.

"Tom," said Joe, "where does it hurt you? Where do you feel the pain most?"

"I have no pain, dear mother, now; I'm tired—only tired. Joseph, just squat round the corner, but don't get two of your peepers round at once. There's a gentleman waitin' for you with a birthday present. He's lookin' for black-berries on a stone-heap."

There had been no firing for nearly ten minutes. Very gingerly indeed, Joe dropping on his hands and knees, took a swift glimpse at the landscape whose chief ornamental feature was a stone-heap. The rifle was still there.

"Tom," he said, "I think I'll stop here and help you with your poetry."

Joe turned one of the kegs on end, and seated himself. It was too dangerous to attempt to pass that deadly gun.

"Nice weather we're havin'," remarked Joe. "It might thunder later on."

"It's sure to. By hokey, it'll thunder the minute anyone tries to go to the sheds!"

"You're a mighty fine judge of the weather, Thomas," grinned the carpenter of the Lord of the Deep.

"I'd sooner judge that than lead, Joseph," answered Prout. "I mean to rest until that gentleman with the gun goes home to tea, or gets thrown out. Would you mind informin' his Imperial 'Ignorance Prince Ching-Lung, of Kwai-Hai, China, Asia, that there's a tramp in the garden, stealin' the gooseberries, and he won't go out?"

Joe shouted the message, and Ching-Lung rose from the ditch, followed by O'Rooney. A few words explained the situation. Five minutes passed, and, lying flat on the ground, Ching-Lung waited in vain for an opportunity to snipe at the sniper. Apparently the Mongol scented danger, for he never showed himself.

"His manners are vulgar and rude," said Joe, "or he wouldn't keep us waitin'."

Be jabbers! remarked Mr. O'Rooney. "Ay rabbits won't bolt, but in the ferret, O'Ve got a ferret, here that would bolt a small village. Now, Mithor Ching-Lung, bowl over the game!"

Barely showing himself, the Irishman levelled his elephant-gun. The bullet exploded in the centre of the heap, hurling up a shower of stones. O'Rooney's bullets were in reality small shells. The effect was prompt, and perfectly successful.

"There he goes, sir!" shouted Prout excitedly.

The sniper was rushing away, almost screened by the smoke. Instead of doubling and taking a zig-zag course, he ran on in a straight line. The distance was not a hundred and twenty yards. Ching-Lung's bullet pierced his leg, and he dropped in a heap. Ching-Lung and O'Rooney shook hands, and mutually congratulated each other.

"We did it," said O'Rooney.

"Be jabbers, me ould Irish boy, we did it!" chuckled the prince.

Joe placed the kegs on top of each other, balanced them on his head, and with his chest inflated, and his hands in his pockets, strutted towards the sheds. Prout shouldered his sack, and kept close behind.

"Mind you don't drop 'em, Joe."

"Don't hinsult," said Joe. "I could carry them on my 'ead from here to Klondike without a wobble."

"Could you?"

"Yes, and back again. I once carried a bucket of water on my top-knot."

Plink-plonk!

A mauler-rifle cracked with its queer double report. It was a random shot from the ridge, but random shots are often startlingly effective.

The bullet crashed against one of the iron hoops of the bottom keg.

The keg burst into a mass of staves, that dropped round Joe's neck like an enormous necklace, and Joe was deluged with whisky.

The second keg, its support gone, fell on Prout's skull, and brought the steersman to the ground.

Joe gazed about him vacantly over his necklace for a second or two, and then, with a yell, he fled for the sheds, with Prout close at his heels.

They burst in, and Joe removed the staves.

"Tom," he said mournfully.

"Yes, Joe."

"How far did I say I could carry those kegs?"

"To Klondike."

"Then I was an intruder."

"You was!" said Prout. "Go away! You smell of drink! It's my opinion you're intoxicated!"

Then the funny side of it struck them, and they screamed with laughter. Prout had a large bump on his head that had not been put there by nature. He rubbed it tenderly, and then, seeing his rifle, he looked out.

The defenders were running towards him across the open. The manœuvre had been seen from the ridge. A man fell, and Ferra's Lord lifted him in his arms. Dark figures rose upon the ridge, with the cracking of rifles.

Then the defenders gained the sheds, Ching-Lung and Gan-Wan triumphantly bringing in the abandoned flour and keg of whisky.

Ten minutes later Storland Sahib's mountain-wolves were entrenched in the houses, firing steadily.

Ferra's Lord and Ching-Lung inspected their fortress. The cattle were in the large shed, and the walls of unheated stone were bullet-proof. Sacks filled with earth dug out of the floor were piled against the narrow windows.

To the south, east, and west the ground was open, and the place could only be rushed at enormous loss of life. But the distance between O'Rooney's house and the sheds was barely forty yards. Luckily its only windows were in front, as Thurston pointed out.

"My dear fellows," said Ferra's Lord, smiling, "they have only to knock out a few bricks and fire at us. They are doing it now. Listen!"

They heard the sound of hammering.

"Anyhow," said Ching-Lung, "we're as well off as they are except in numbers, and I dare say we can shoot a lot straighter. I couldn't miss with my eyes shut. Now, how do we stand? They can't rush us right or left or from the back. In the front, too, we'll take a bit of rushing. We have tons of grub—"

"But little water, Ching."

"Jupiter! I'd forgotten that. How much is there?"

"About forty gallons," said Ferra's Lord. "It won't go far among men and animals."

"A bad outlook, Ching!" put in Thurston gravely.

"What are the blackguards after? It's hard to think that our property can tempt them to risk their lives like this. Just think of the drubbing they got the other day!"

"We've got a good lot of stuff."

"I know that; but I want to know what we are going to do. We might hold out for a couple of days, but what is going to happen then?"

"Leave the mules and trust to our ponies, I suppose!" answered Ching-Lung. "I'd sooner lose my goods and chattels than my life. You can't buy lives by the yard or pound, like cloth and soap. We'll slide away in the dark, and shoot the moon—eh?"

The millionaire smiled strangely.

"Help may come."

"Big! Great Scotland, where's help going to come from? Will the gallant soldiers of Tibet come to our aid? According to O'Rooney they'd run ten thousand miles at the sight of a pea-shooter, or drop dead of heart disease if a penny Chinese cracker went bang! Who is going to help us?"

"Perhaps—well, one never knows!" answered the millionaire, with the same odd smile. "Let us stick up the old rag."

"Now you're talking! Up with the red, white, and blue, and never say die while there's a shot in the locker or a crumb in the corner of your waistcoat-pocket. The ladder will do for a flagstaff."

Ching-Lung opened one of the packs, and nailed a Union Jack to the tall ladder. They raised the ladder at the back

of the shed, and as the flag fluttered out in the breeze a dozen bullets whistled through it.

"Let 'em plug at you!" said Ching-Lung. "You take a jolly lot of knocking over. Say, Gan, do you know what this is? Then take your hat off to it, and go and bow!"

Gan-Waga grinned, and saluted the fluttering bunting, helmet in hand. Ching-Lung snatched the helmet, and, with a clever twist of his wrist, sent it spinning into the air. It fell on top of the ladder, and remained there.

"What you do that for, Ching?" inquired Gan-Waga.

"Oh, I thought you wanted me to hang it up for you! Didn't you?"

"No; me hang it on my head. Fetch him down. Not got other hat. Ow, ow! Look at him! Him jiggered!"

A bullet bored a hole through the helmet, and knocked it from the ladder. Ching-Lung caught it as it fell, and examined the damage. Unseen by the Eskimo, he slipped a bent pin into the puggaree.

"Catch, Gan! Be smart!"

He pretended to toss the helmet, and to Gan-Waga it seemed to vanish into thin air. He turned, gazing round in wonderment, and Ching-Lung pinned the lost headgear on his back. Ching-Lung also vanished, and Gan-Waga went to find him, informing everyone in injured tones that Ching-Lung had stolen his helmet. He could not understand what made the men wink at each other and giggle.

He found out when he sat down, and flattened the helmet into a kind of a khaki pancake.

Loopholes had been made in the walls of the house, and at intervals shots were fired at the sheds, and returned. O'Rooney had laid aside his elephant-gun for a more useful instrument, and was making tea. Ferrers Lord had ordered the men not to expose themselves in any way, and to save their powder. Both parties were too well sheltered to suffer much damage.

As the firing from the sheds dwindled the wolves of Storland Sahib grew bolder. To approach any of the narrow windows was terribly risky, except on hands and knees. Ferrers Lord was dressing the wound of an injured man. Luckily it was a slight one, and they had plenty of bandages.

The men in the small shed were isolated. Maddock, Argal-Dinjab, and two others were there. They could not join their comrades without exposing themselves to the murderous fire until darkness fell.

"Oh, bother it!" growled Ching-Lung. "It's sickening to sit here and be plugged at. Don't I wish I could make 'em sit up. Why, great Jupiter! What have we been doing with our brains? Here's Mr. O'Rooney's elephant-puncher going to rust while he's making tea! What-ho, my little pepper-gun! Where's a cartridge?"

"A cartridge is at? Here's five of them same. Bo jintle with him, Mister Ching, and hold him tight, for he kicks like a team of mules."

They all wondered now how they had possibly overlooked the gun. It was a powerful weapon, and if Ching-Lung could place one of the expiring bullets through a loophole, the result would be deadly in the narrow confines of O'Rooney's little bed-room.

"Maird ye, don't break my lookin'-glass, Mither Ching-Lung," said the Irishman. "And be careful not to knock over me scent-bottle, or pot-dog, or the pianer."

"I'll watch it!" chuckled the prince. "Draw their fire, Tom!"

"Yes, sir. I wish I could draw their teeth instead, sir."

A helmet placed on a stick was raised above the sandbag. It bobbed out of sight, and was gently lifted again. Ching-Lung stood at the second window. Twice the manoeuvre failed, but the third time it appeared flashes darted from both loopholes simultaneously from several rifles.

Room! Crash!

The bellow of O'Rooney's rifle nearly deafened Ching-Lung for life, and the thud of the heel-plate was covered with rubber. The crowd sent the marksmen staggering back. They heard muffled shrieks and cries. Smoke was pouring out of both loopholes. The bullet had exploded in the room.

"I should not care to have been there," said Thurston.

"You're silenced them, Ching!"

"Then I'll waken them up with another pill. Talk about mules kicking. This thing lashes out like a camel!"

He reloaded the gun, and approached the window.

"Mind me eat-glass scent-bottle, blney!" laughed O'Rooney.

"Oh wouldn't have it smashed for tuppence! Ay vez hit the pot-dog or bust the pianer, be the soul of Hector O'll turn the pigtail of vez into a pair of bootlaces!"

As the only furniture Mr. O'Rooney's bed-room could boast of was a camp-stove, a chair without a seat, and a brush, his remark caused general laughter. And Ching-Lung was also requested not to damage the billiard-table, to crack the marble bath, or to knock any powder off the footman's hair.

"And don't—oh, don't wake the baby, please!" added Prout.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 211.

Read the grand new story of

Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "THE NEW FIRM AT ST. JIM'S."

"Oh, cheese it!" cried Ching-Lung. "How can a fellow shoot when you're making him laugh?"

Ferrers Lord watched and listened, smiling. He was proud of them. They were in a tight corner, but they were so accustomed to standing face to face with perils of every kind that they could laugh and joke light-heartedly. With another leader they might have acted differently.

All of them had perfect confidence in the millionaire. They were perfectly certain that he would bring them out of the dilemma, not only safely, but with credit to themselves.

Again the big gun boomed, and again Ching-Lung found the loophole. This time no cries answered the report.

"They're cleared out of there!" answered Prout.

"Ay they've pinched that scent-bottle, O'm a ruined man!" sighed O'Rooney. "O'm not insured agan burglars!"

This silly caused another laugh, and then the genial Irishman handed round the tea. Ferrers Lord was working out some calculation on a leaf torn from his pocket-book with wonderful quickness.

"What's the date, Ching?" he inquired, looking up.

"The thirtieth, old chap! Fancy you forgetting a date or anything else."

"I had not forgotten. I was merely making certainly surer."

He went on figuring, and then, taking out his field-glasses he left the shed. He stood there scanning the mighty peaks. What was he looking for? Once he took out his watch, and once his eye ran over the figures to check their accuracy. He laughed softly, and put the glasses back into their case.

"Hallo!" shouted Ching-Lung. "They're showing the white flag."

"Keep in cover!" cried Ferrers Lord. "It may be a trick!"

A piece of white cloth was fluttering round the corner of the house. Then a man stepped fearlessly into the open. Storland Sahib!

He carried no weapons. He advanced with a firm step.

"Stop!"

The renegade halted, and folded his arms at Ching-Lung's warning cry. He looked a born horseman and a born fighter. Though short and bull-necked, he was all muscle. Except for the absence of ears, which gave his dark face an eerie expression, he would have been handsome. They gazed at the terror of the mountains curiously, and his eyes flashed back defiance.

"What do you want?" asked Thurston.

"To give you my terms. I do not parley with people I cannot see. Come out, and I will tell you."

"Go, Rupert!" said the millionaire. "Maddock—Maddock, stop him!"

Crack! It was a shot that could hardly be made twice in a lifetime, and it saved Storland Sahib's life. It had come from the millionaire's revolver. In the doorway of the other shed Maddock had Argal-Dinjab by the neck. Just in the nick of time Ferrers Lord had seen the Afghan kneeling, with his rifle, his eyes ablaze with hate, his dark face distorted like a demon.

Another second, and Storland Sahib would have led his wolves no more, for he would have been lying dead, shot through the heart.

Ferrers Lord's bullet had struck the gun from the Afghan's hand.

Storland Sahib had come under the protection of the white flag, and his life was secured.

— — —

Terms of Surrender—Ferrers Lord's Strange Promise—Arrows more deadly than Bullets—Waiting for the End.

Storland Sahib had seen all, and though he must have known how close he had been to death, he never winced. He looked laughingly at Thurston, who raised his hat.

"Are you the spokesman?"

"I am," answered Rupert.

"And you have the right to agree to or refuse my terms?"

"I have, sahib," answered Thurston.

Storland Sahib nodded, and then pointed away up the winding path.

"Look! There come my men!" he said. "You are too young to die!"

On the slope of the hill a band of riders had drawn rein. They wore reinforcements, and at least a hundred strong.

"I decline to talk about dying," said Rupert. "Everyone is too young to die. I ask you here, why do you pursue us and fire at us. We are peaceable travellers, and no one has a right to interfere with us except the Government. In the name of the Tibetan Government and the name of the flag that floats there, and which makes that spot British ground, I order you to withdraw. Leave us in peace!"

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Storland Sahib laughed, and raised his hand.

At once the horsemen who were riding towards the village halted.

"Young man," said the renegade, "you speak boldly. The right by which I attack you is by right of might. You know my reputation. I care not a rap for any government or any flag. Those who would catch Storland Sahib must ride hard, and put their affairs in order before they start on the chase. The vultures have fed on most of those who have been mad enough to try!"

"If you brought me here to listen to your boasts I will go back," said Thurston.

The man's eyes gleamed angrily, and, as if by force of habit, his hand went to his hip, where his revolver would have hung.

"Well," he answered, with an ugly smile, "I'll boast no more. I do not want your goods, and I do not want your life."

"Then why do you attack us?"

"You will know presently. You are free to go, and the men with you are free to go. I swear to deal fairly with you, and not to molest you again. More than that, I promise to send you to Lahsa with no more risk than you would experience in travelling to England. I will warn the people that you are under the protection of Storland Sahib, and the boldest of them will cringe like a cat at your feet."

"And what do you want in return?"

"Wait a little longer. Unless you submit to our terms, I will not leave one of you alive. I know you have no water. Brave as you are, you cannot fight one hundred and fifty men. I tell you again, you are too young to die. Your life is only beginning. I offer you life and freedom, or death. And I want something in return."

"Then come to the point, sahib!" cried Rupert impatiently. "I prefer fighting to empty talking."

"You will have enough of that if you refuse," snarled Storland Sahib grimly. "Twelve months ago a man was present at the great dinner of the Royal Military Club at Calcutta. He was a man famous in a dozen countries. It was then that the joint Russian and English movement had failed to capture me. That man, as a guest of the evening, rose to make a speech. He declared before the club had celebrated its second dinner after that he would have killed Storland Sahib, or made him prisoner."

Rupert turned on his heel.

"Good day!" he said. "I am only wasting time."

"Stay!" cried the renegade. "Do not anger me! Give up that man, and you go free. Hand over Ferrers Lord!"

Rupert spun round, his face ablaze with indignation and anger.

"There is my answer, you cur!"

With his clenched fist he struck Storland Sahib a blow that hurled the renegade to the ground.

A wolfish yell rung from the house as the pirates saw their leader fall. They did not fire, for rifles pointed through the loopholes of the shed were pointed at their chief. If Thurston died, Storland Sahib's body would have been riddled with bullets.

Cursing and shaking his clenched fist, Storland Sahib staggered up.

Thurston, his blood boiling, entered the shed.

"I am sorry you lost your temper, Rupert," said the millionaire. "He was under the white flag."

"Hang the flag! Can a bit of rag like that protect a bandit and a murderer. I almost wish I had shot him where he stood. It would have been no crime—unless it is a crime to shoot a poisonous snake."

"Keep its little feathers down, do," said Ching-Lung soothingly. "Did 'uns make 'uns show 'uns ickle temper!"

"Temper!" said Thurston. "Do you know what the dog wanted?"

"I can guess," drawled Ferrers Lord. "He offered to let you all go free if you gave me up."

"He did!" said Thurston, between his teeth. "Here, Prout! Stop him!"

Prout had snatched up his rifle and was rushing towards the door. Ching-Lung seized him.

"Where are you going, you lump of lanency?"

"To kill him!" roared Prout. "Don't stop me! Let me go! I'll tear him to rags!"

"THE MAGNET LIBRARY," No. 211.

EVERY
TUESDAY.

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

"Steady, my brave lad," said Ferrers Lord kindly. "They would kill you; and we can't spare you yet, Tom."

It was the first time the stern millionaire had ever called one of the crew by Christian name.

"Do you order me to stay, sir?"

"I do order you."

Prout sighed, dropped the rifle into the hollow of his arm, and, going to the other end of the shed, sat down disconsolately. The others ground their teeth. Storland Sahib's vile proposition was enough to turn them into demons. They would have fought to death with no other weapons than their nails and teeth.

"They're coming!" cried Ching-Lung.

The reinforcements were thundering down the hill. The men shook hands all round.

"My lads," said the millionaire, "we are in what his Highness would call a hot corner. I need not ask you to show me how you can fight, for I know it of old. You're not only the best, but the pick of the best; for you are the pick of the finest body of men who ever sailed the seas—the pick of the crew of the Lord of the Deep. The odds are great, and Storland Sahib is a fighter. Hold out for one hour, lads, and I promise to bring you out of this with honour."

Ring-bells greeted him as his voice died away. What did his strange promise mean?

"Hold out for one hour, lads, and I promise to bring you out of this with honour!"

Ferrers Lord never made a promise that he did not fulfil to the letter.

Could it be that he was aware of some force advancing to the rescue? Or had he some plan? If it was only a plan, why should he wait for an hour before attempting to carry it out?

They had no time to speculate on his puzzling words.

The enemy had taken possession of the ridges and the barricades they had built, and were firing rapidly.

Clip! Clip! Clip! The bullets struck the stout walls and dashed showers of dust from the sandbags.

And then came a whirring, whizzing sound.

A strange object whizzed over the house, hit the wall under the thatch, and fell back, flaming and smoking. It was an arrow, and a piece of rag twisted above the barb, soaked in petroleum, was blazing fiercely.

Whizz!

Another arrow hissed over the house, and fell into the thatch.

There was a crackling sound, but it swiftly died away.

Ching-Lung looked blankly at Ferrers Lord.

"Old Red Indian methods, Ching," said Ferrers Lord.

"They mean to burn us out. Is the thatch dry, O'Roonney?"

"Dry as a bone, sir!" growled the Irishman.

"Then the water must go! Give me a bucket!"

"You won't go!" said Ching-Lung. "This is where a poor savage with a pigtail can beat even the great Ferrers Lord. You would have to crawl up the back of the thatch; but I can make water obey me at the word of command. Gan, my son, to the pumps! I can water the flowers on the roofs like winking. Thomas, join the bathing-party!"

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

Three of the blazing arrows thudded down in succession.

Prout and Gan-Wang had the buckets from the tub and passed them to Ching-Lung. He had not boasted when he had said he could make the water obey him. Every drop of it fell on the burning side of the thatch, spreading out as if it had been poured from the rose of a watering-can.

But the arrows came faster and faster.

The thatch was burning fiercely at one corner, and the shed was full of smoke that blinded and choked the defenders. They could not save it now. The smoke bent down in dense clouds; and the millionaire's voice bawled out:

"Boit into the other sheds, lads!"

They rushed through the smoke.

"Twenty-five minutes more, Ching!" whispered the millionaire. "Can we do it?"

"We must hope. We can do nothing else except hope and fight!"

(Another splendid long instalment next Tuesday. Please order your copy of "THE MAGNET" in advance. Price 1d.)

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NEXT
TUESDAY:

"THE RIVALS' TEST!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.
Order Early.

"A RACE AGAINST TIME!"

(Continued from page 23.)

had the Boulder, by some cunning, unknown device, succeeded in keeping the Indian junior, after all, from reaching the college? Had the Boulder known all along—had he suspected and taken precautions? These thoughts raced through Wharton's mind; but it was too late now.

At every moment he hoped for the appearance of the belated nabob, but a bitter feeling was coming over him that the nabob would arrive too late. Then the votes would tie, the election would be postponed, and the Boulder would be free to try his arts upon Wharton's supporters, and Wharton knew with what effects he would probably try them upon Hazeldene, if upon no others.

Nugent was looking furious. He was certain that the Boulder had a hand in Hurree Singh's non-appearance; but it was useless to say so; he had not a shadow of proof. The Boulder tossed the coin, and Wharton called.

"Head!"
Vernon-Smith unclosed his hand, and showed the figure of Britannia on the penny. A cynical grin curled his lips. "Wharton loses," said the Boulder. "I win! Wharton's votes will be counted first."

Wharton's backers lined up. It was a long line, with twenty-one juniors in it, and it reached from the Form-master's desk nearly to the doorway. Nugent was at the end of the line, and he cast an anxious glance towards the door. There was time yet, if Hurree Singh should arrive. "Count!" exclaimed the Boulder anxiously.

His scheme had evidently succeeded. Loder, or Gosling, or both, had kept the nabob away. But seconds might be precious—indeed, they were—for as Courtney began to count from the Form-master's desk there was heard a sound of flying feet in the passage outside.

Vernon-Smith's teeth came hard together. Was it some mischievous fag, or was it the nabob, arriving at the eleventh hour?

"Count! Count!" shouted the Boulder.
The hurried footsteps ceased outside the Form-room door. The door was flung open, a dusky youth, hatless, covered with dust, his dark face streaming with perspiration, his dark eyes gleaming, staggered panting into the room. There was a roar.

"Inky!"
"Hurrah!"
"Inky—here!" yelled Nugent.
The nabob took in the scene at a glance. He almost recoiled towards Nugent, and Frank caught him by the arm, and steadied him, and held him there, last in the line.

"I am in the esteemed line!" gasped the nabob huskily.
"Just in time, old chap," said Nugent, squeezing his arm ecstatically. "Just in time—it's safe as houses now!"

The nabob mopped his streaming face with a handkerchief. Courtney came down the line counting.

"Fifteen—sixteen—seventeen—"
Vernon-Smith cast a last desperate look at Hazeldene. But Hazel avoided his eyes. Bob Cherry was on one side of him, and Johnny Bull on the other. Hazel stood firmly in the line, gaining courage from his comrades.
"Eighteen—nineteen—twenty—twenty-one—TWENTY-TWO!"

It was not much use to count for Vernon-Smith now. There were only twenty-one voters left in the room. But, as a matter of form, the counting was gone through, and then the prefect announced the result.

"Votes for Wharton, twenty-two! For Vernon-Smith, twenty-one! Wharton wins! Harry Wharton is elected Captain of the Remove!"

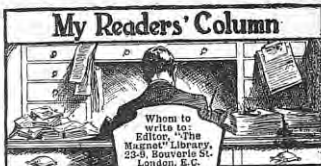
Vernon-Smith stood with his teeth clenched, his face pale with rage. From all the backers of the Remove's old leader burst a roar of cheering.

Juniors shook hands with Harry Wharton, and slapped Hurree Singh on the back. The nabob's dusky face beamed with delight. He had saved the situation. Wharton grasped his hand, and wrung it hard.

"Good old Inky! Welcome back to Greyfriars!"
"Yell, you beggars, yell!" roared Bob Cherry. "Three cheers for Inky, and three for Wharton! Let 'em rip!"
And the juniors let them rip, with a vengeance; and all through the School House rang the cheers, announcing to all Greyfriars that Harry Wharton was once again Captain of the Remove!

THE END.

(Next week's grand, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "The Rivals' Test," by Frank Richards. Order your copy of "THE MAGNET" Library well in advance. Price 1d.)

**For Next Tuesday.**

In next Tuesday's grand, complete Greyfriars tale, entitled

"THE RIVALS' TEST,"

by Frank Richards, the question of the captaincy of the Remove is still unsettled, and Wingate, the wise and genial captain of the school, suggests a novel way of disposing of it. This decision is accepted, and results in

"THE RIVALS' TEST."

which in its turn is provocative of some exciting events. My readers should not miss this fine story on any account, and will be well advised to

ORDER NEXT WEEK'S "MAGNET" IN ADVANCE**REPLIES IN BRIEF.**

George E. B. (Manchester).—A boomerang, to possess the peculiar characteristics which such an instrument should have, must be very skillfully made indeed, and I doubt whether a satisfactory one could be made by an amateur without experience. Messrs. A. W. Gamage, of Holborn, London, are the firm most likely to be able to supply you with a genuine boomerang.

C. S. (North Shields).—In regard to your request, I would remind you that Mark Lanley, one of the most prominent of the Remove juniors, hails from the North Country. The answer to your second query is that it depends upon the amount of tea you drink, and upon the way it is made, whether the beverage is harmful or not. One or two cups a day of fresh-made tea, not too strong, is not likely to do you any harm, but indulgence in much strong tea, or tea that has been standing for some time, will certainly have a bad effect upon your system.

Robert R. (Edinburgh).—From what you tell me, I think it would be a pity to give up your trade now that you have had a year's experience of it, unless it has become distasteful to you. Even if your present master does retire, the business will probably, I should imagine, be carried on by someone else, and if you have had time to show yourself a competent assistant, a good chance for you may crop up. If you have had no experience of the sea, but wish to adopt it as a profession, your best chance would be to interview the captain of a ship personally. If you can present yourself, armed with an introduction, so much the better.

Ernest F. (Darwen).—Many thanks for your letter. I am very glad to hear your good opinion of the good old MAGNET, and shall rely on your promised assistance in increasing its popularity.

B. G. (Birmingham).—Thanks for your letter and practical help. The "Midgit Magnet" Competition was indeed a great success.

Ella T. (Finsbury).—Many thanks for your long and chatty letter. I much appreciate your high opinion of THE MAGNET and "The Gem." You need not be afraid that Marjorie & Co. have been forgotten—indeed, Hazeldene's pretty sister will be much in evidence in next Tuesday's tale of Greyfriars. In regard to your query re narcissus bulbs, these should have been planted in the garden many weeks back if they were wanted to bloom this spring. The bulbs, however, will grow indoors any time, if planted in a bowl of fertilized fibre, and kept for some weeks in a dark place. After this, they should be placed in the window of a warm room, where they will catch as much sun as possible, and if kept well watered, they should grow quickly and bloom well. Your request for a correspondent will appear in the "Gem" Correspondence-Exchange in due course.

Edwin R. (Torquay).—Thanks for your effort on behalf of our two good old papers, which I much appreciate. In regard to your query, Vol. 6 will cost with No. 500. When you have had the whole of your volume bound you will have a splendid volume of bright reading-matter, indeed.

THE EDITOR.

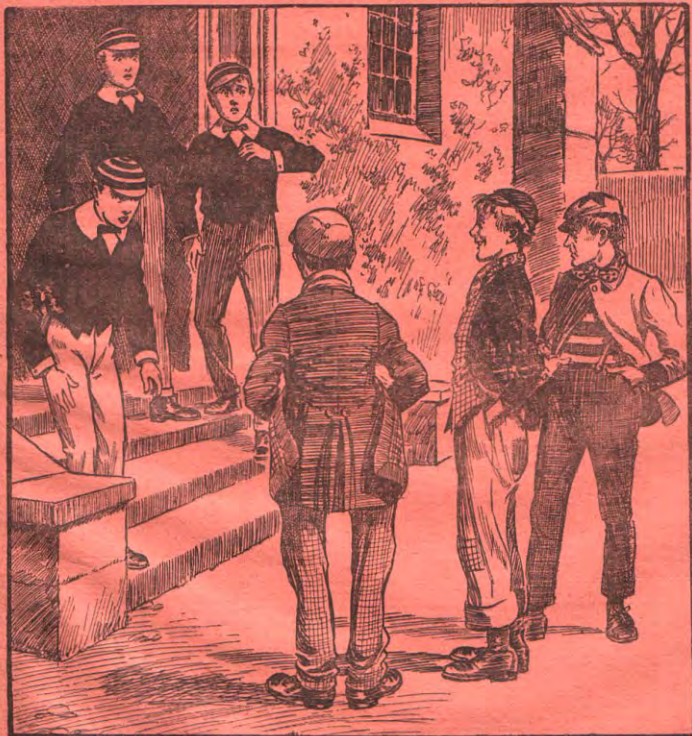
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A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

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HAND!"**A grand, short,
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Detective, and
Dolores — his
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tant.**The GEM**
LIBRARY VOL. 6. No. 211.**THE NEW FIRM ARRIVE AT TOM MERRY & CO.'S SCHOOL**

"THE GEM" LIBRARY CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

A Popular Feature of the Famous Companion Paper of "The Magnet" Library, by which fellow readers in England and all parts of the British Empire are brought into touch with one another. If you wish to have your name included in this Popular Correspondence Exchange, join the ranks of "Gemites," and obtain a chum to write to. Start to-day by giving your newsagent an order for this week's issue of "The Gem" Library. Price One Penny.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED.

J. Adair, of 7, Rose Square, Rose Hill, Liverpool, would like to correspond with a Blackpool reader.

E. J. Cater, of 45, Arabin Road, Brockley, S.E., would like to correspond with a reader (either sex) in Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, and United Kingdom.

J. W. Evans, of 86, Beacon Lane, Eretton, Liverpool, wishes to correspond with any boy or girl reader about his own age (15-16).

S. Bellringer, of 95, Portland Avenue, Spring Grove, Kingston-on-Thames, would very much like to correspond with any boy or girl reader of THE GEM.

Reginald Stewart, of 32, Wmiford Street, Liverpool, would like to correspond with a girl chum.

Frank King, of 22, Mount Pollon, Halifax, Yorkshire, would like to correspond with a public school boy who is a reader of THE GEM.

H. W. Bettles, of 5, Balston Street, North Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, would like to correspond with a boy or girl reader, and also wishes to exchange picture postcards.

Lewis E. Rowlands, 44, Anderson Street, Ballarat, West Victoria, Australia, would like a girl, about 15 years of age, to correspond with him.

E. B. Phillips, of 52, Coveney Street, East Moore, Cardiff, would like a girl reader to correspond with him, age about 15 or 16.

Miss M. M. Edwards, the Medical Hall, 111, Salmon's Lane, Limehouse, London, England, would like to correspond with a Gemite (either sex), residing in America.

R. Dummer, of 25, Eastbourne Street, Midhurst, Sussex, wishes to exchange letters with a girl reader, aged 15-17, of THE GEM.

M. Sutton, Holywell, Burton Road, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire, would like to correspond with a boy from Wales, who goes to school, and is about 12 or 13 years of age. S. Forrest, of 46, Bear Lane, Leeds, would like to correspond with some boy reader who is interested in boxing; and he would also like to correspond with a boy or girl reader living abroad.

W. Jackson (19 years of age), of 320, Great Cheetham Street, near Broughton, Manchester, wishes to correspond with a girl reader of THE GEM.

H. J. Boot, of 41, Holborn Avenue, Smeaton Dale, Notts, wishes to correspond with a boy reader.

Miss Ethel Willoughby, of Havensworth, Carlisle Road, Enabourne, England, would very much like to correspond with a boy or girl reader of THE GEM, somewhere in Australia, age about 19.

Miss "Bobbie" Welford, of Alston Lodge, Mansfield Road, Ilford, Essex, would be glad to correspond with any other GEM readers who may care to write to her.

W. Read, of 11, Madron Street, Surrey Square, Old Kent Road, S.E., would like to correspond with a girl reader.

A. E. H. Yates, of Longwood Cottage, Aldridge Road, Walsall, Staffs., would like to correspond with a girl reader of THE GEM, aged 17-18.

J. L. Billington, of 73, Ribbles Lane, Central Drive, Blackpool, wishes to correspond with another reader of THE GEM.

G. Noakes, of 25, Woodland Road, Leytonstone, N.E., wants to correspond with a boy or girl reader of THE GEM, age about 15, who lives in or near Leyton or Walthamstow district.

E. Heathorn (and friend), of 11, Portsmouth Road, Woolston, Hants, wishes to correspond with some girl readers who live in or about Southampton.

Victor Liddaman, of 4, Carthew Villas, Hammersmith, W., wishes to correspond with a reader about 19 years of age.

Miss Beatrice Binnington, Pickwell Rectory, Oakham, wishes to correspond with some Colonial boy or girl reader of THE GEM LIBRARY.

Win. H. Waller, 50, Buchanan Gardens, Willesden, N.W., would like a girl reader of THE GEM to write to him.

Ernest Barnes, of 64, Walker's Square, Sykes Street, Hall, would very much like to correspond with a girl reader of THE GEM.

G. Hamlin, of Trafalgar Street, Belmore, New South Wales, Australia, wishes to exchange letters or postcards with some Gemite.

A. Shivas, of 5, Loanhead Place, Aberdeen, would like a girl reader, age about 16, to correspond with.

J. O'Donnell, of Lea Hurst, 32, Jules Street, Jeppesdown, Johannesburg, South Africa, would very much like to correspond with some boy or girl readers of THE GEM.

R. A. Dowell, of 18, Daws Lane, Mill Hill, London, N.W., wishes to correspond with a Gemite living in London or the suburbs.

R. Schofield, junr., of 125, Astley Street, Trysley, near Manor, Lancs., will be delighted to receive correspondence from any Gemite.

Will any Irish or Colonial Gemite, age 15, correspond with Miss Rose A. Hutton, of 103, Hammersmith Road, West Kensington, London, W., England.

Gemite, Box 5, Deer Park, P.O., North Toronto, Canada, wishes to make the acquaintance of a Scotch girl—between the ages of 16 and 19—living in Toronto, Canada.

Stanley R. Donaldson, of 317, Beaconsfield Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne, wishes to exchange postcards with a boy or a girl reader of THE GEM, age about 17.

Miss M. Whitehead, care of Mrs. Burke, 35, High Street, Rochdale, Lancs., wishes to correspond with a boy reader age 15.

M. Broadhurst, of Byers Road, Midland Junction, West Australia, would like to correspond with someone in the British Isles, Africa, and Canada.

F. Madger, of 43, Pedgate Street, Bridgwater, would like to correspond with a young lady reader living in England or the Colonies, age about 17-18.

R. J. Sturgeon desires to correspond with a boy reader of THE GEM, age 13, who is interested in cinematography. Address, 115, Foxhall Road, Ipswich.

C. G. Lead, The University and Literary Club, Berkley Square, Bristol, wishes to correspond with a young lady reader of THE GEM whose age is 18-19.

Miss M. H. Sutherland, of 23, Moray Street, Pulteney Town, Wick, Caithness, Scotland, wishes to correspond with a boy or girl Gemite.

H. Woodbourne, of 5, Cambridge Street, Longs Broughton, Manchester, would like to correspond with a girl reader of THE GEM, age about 15.

Miss Bewie Woodford, age 13, of Meadow View, Woodlands, Hatch End, would very much like to correspond with a boy chum in London of the same age.

E. Villiers, of The Limes, Mornington Road, Leytonstone, London, N.E., would like to correspond with a girl reader, age about 15.

R. Allen, P.O. Box 564, Amherst, N.S., Canada, would like to correspond with some Gemites and Magnetites in all parts of the world.

A FEW POINTS ABOUT THE CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE.

(1) This Exchange is FREE to all readers of "The Gem" Library. It is only necessary to send to the Editor of "The Gem" Library, 23-9, Boquerie Street, Fleet Street, London, E.C., your full name and address (this is important) together with particulars of correspondent required, and your request will be published in due course.

(2) Readers wishing to correspond with advertisers in "The Gem" are requested to write to them direct, as no correspondence on behalf of readers can be undertaken by this office.

(3) Readers writing to would-be correspondents and receiving no answer are requested to bear in mind the world-wide popularity of the Exchange, which is such that in some cases Advertisers have received so many (often from 100 to 600) replies that they were utterly unable to reply to all.

(4) Owing to the fact that we go to press some time in advance, and to the large number of readers who take advantage of the Exchange, no undertaking can be given that any requests will be published in any particular number, each advertisement being dealt with in its proper turn.

(5) No requests for correspondents can be published in the Exchange that do not bear the actual signature of the applicant. Every reader must apply for himself and sign his own request.