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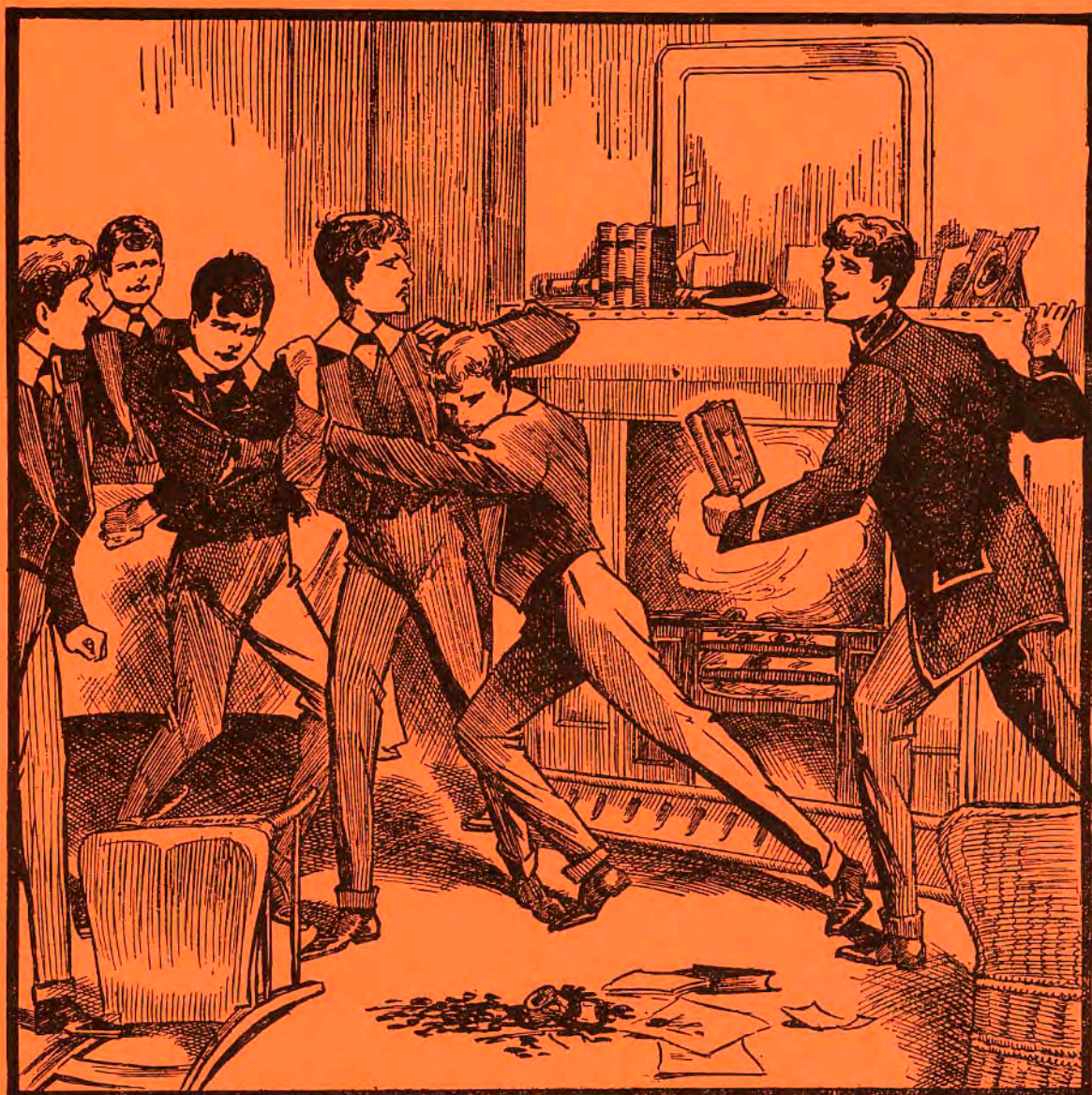
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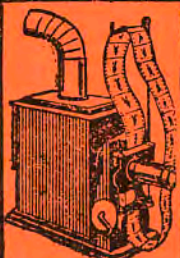
No. 252.

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Vol. 7.



Coker picked up a Liddell and Scott from the table, and held it up for the Lancashire lad to look at. "Now, Linley," he said, "We have made up our minds that you are not going to swot us out of all the giddy prizes. Will you give your word to stand out of the exam?" "No!" "Last time?" said Coker. "Rats!" "Then here goes!" and Horace Coker put the expensive volume into the fire. (See inside.)



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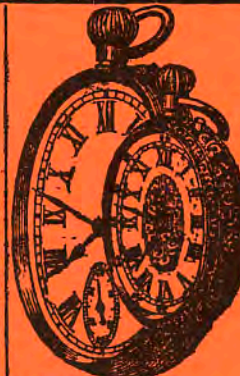
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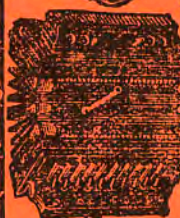
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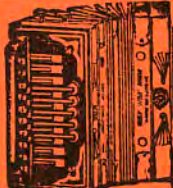



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- - BY - -

FRANK RICHARDS.

fallen upon his outstretched arms, and was hidden from view. And a sob was shaking the Lancashire lad from head to foot as Bob Cherry looked into the study.

"Marky!"

Mark Linley did not seem to hear. He did not raise his head—he did not move. Bob Cherry strode towards him, and dropped a hand upon his shoulder.

"Marky!"

Then the junior raised his head.

His face was pale, lined, and it looked strangely old. Mark Linley's face was of a more thoughtful cast than was usual in lads of his age. He had known more troubles than usually fell to the lot of a fellow in the Lower Fourth. He had come to Greyfriars on a scholarship, which he had won by hard work and perseverance, and since he had come to the school he had had an uphill fight. Pluck, patience, and good temper had helped him to win his way, and the best fellows in the Remove chummed with him; but there was a snobbish set that still affected to sneer at the "factory bouncer," as Vernon-Smith elegantly termed him. But Mark bore all his little troubles with quiet calmness, and gave few outward signs of them. And for that reason it astonished Bob Cherry the more to see his Lancashire chum knocked over in this way.

"What's the matter, Marky?"

"It—it's all right, Bob."

"It doesn't look as if it's all right," said Bob Cherry. "I've never seen you like this before, Marky. Something's happened!"

The Lancashire junior nodded.

"You're in trouble?"

"Yes," muttered Mark.

"Then tell me what it is," said Bob Cherry, seating himself

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Last Chance.

"MARK! Marky, old man, what's the matter?" Bob Cherry asked the question in surprise and alarm.

Bob had just come into his study, No. 13 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. Bob Cherry was not looking so cheerful as usual himself. It was only a few days since his chum Johnny Bull had been compelled to leave Greyfriars School. Bob Cherry did not forget a chum easily, and his usually sunny brow was clouded. But he forgot his own little troubles at the sight of Mark Linley.

Mark Linley, his study-mate and best chum, was seated at the table. He had pen and paper and open books before him, and had evidently been working; but he was not working now. His arms had fallen upon the table before him, his face had

on a corner of the table, and regarding his chum with a troubled, anxious look. "Out with it! Two heads are thicker than one, you know. I'm going to help you."

Mark Linley smiled faintly.

"You can't help me, Bob. I'm an ass to take on like this, but—but I couldn't help it. It came so—so suddenly."

"Bad news from home?" asked Bob Cherry, comprehending.

"Yes."

"Poor old Marky!"

Bob Cherry sat in perplexed silence. Mark Linley never spoke much about his home, and no Greyfriars fellow had ever visited him there. Bob Cherry knew that a lad who had worked for his living in a factory, before winning his scholarship, could not have come from a well-to-do place. He knew that Mark's people were poor, that Mark had plenty to do to make both ends meet at Greyfriars, even with the money he had won with his scholarship. But Mark was as proud as he was poor. Many of his friends at Greyfriars had plenty of money, and some of them, at least, would willingly have helped him, and thought nothing about it; but Mark was not the fellow to accept that kind of help.

The Lancashire lad made a great effort to control his emotion. There was a letter on the table before him, and he took it up and thrust it, crumpled, into his pocket. Bob Cherry watched it disappear.

"I suppose it means—tin!" Bob said after a pause.

Mark nodded.

"Much?" asked Bob.

"Yes."

"Look here, Mark—" began Bob hesitatingly.

Mark Linley interrupted him with a shake of the head.

"I know what you're going to say, Bob; but it's impossible."

"Look here," persisted Bob Cherry, "what's the good of having a pal if you don't let him help you? I haven't got much tin, I know; my people aren't well off. But there's Inky, and there's Wharton—and among us—"

"It's impossible!"

"You're an ass, Marky," said Bob Cherry. "I don't say we want to give you the tin—but what about a loan?"

"A loan I couldn't repay?" said Mark, with a faint smile.

"There's not much difference, Bob. I couldn't take a shilling, and it's a good sum that's wanted—more than you fellows could raise. Twenty pounds!"

Bob Cherry whistled.

"My hat! Twenty quid!"

"Yes."

"Oh, Marky!"

"My father's in trouble," said Mark, in a low, dull voice. "He's been ill—and they never let me know—not that I could have done anything—and now, unless the money is raised, they'll be homeless. And I—I shan't be able to stay here."

Bob Cherry jumped.

"Not stay here!" he exclaimed.

"No. I was a fool to come!" said Mark bitterly. "But—I didn't know all the difficulties then. A few years at Greyfriars, and then I thought I should have a chance of doing something for my people. The cash allowance made with the scholarship pays my exes. here, and helps them at home; but—but it doesn't help them so much as I used to when I was in work. They could have pulled through all right—but—father's been unlucky. I've thought several times I might have to chuck the scholarship and go back to the factory. Now I think it's come to that. I shall have to stand by my people."

"But—but your prospects here, Marky—"

"I shall have to give up Greyfriars, unless—"

"Unless your people can tide this over?"

"Yes."

"Then we're jolly well going to do it for you," said Bob Cherry determinedly. "I know it's a large sum, but we can manage it among us, and we're going to do it. And if you say no, I'll punch your silly head."

"It's impossible, Bob. I couldn't speak to any of you fellows again if I'd sponged on you. I'd rather chuck up Greyfriars, and go back to the factory, than take charity from anybody. And that's what it would be—charity—though you're too good

a chap to see it. I couldn't do it, Bob, it's impossible. You wouldn't!"

"I?" said Bob Cherry, starting.

"Yes. You wouldn't take money from your friends, if you were hard up—and I can't, Bob! It's one of the things that can't be done."

Bob Cherry looked at him gloomily. In spite of his generous impulse, and his strong desire to help his chum, he knew, in his heart, that Mark was right. It was impossible for the scholarship junior to take the money of his friends and retain his self-respect.

"But—but what are you going to do, then, Marky?" said Bob in dismay.

Mark shook his head.

"I don't know yet! It would be rotten to have to give all this up—after the fight I've made so far, too. I—I was trying to think whether I could earn the money."

"Earn it!" said Bob Cherry hopelessly. "Earn twenty quid!"

"I mean—there are a good many cash prizes given here, and—and my father, poor old chap, thinks I could beat any competitor. We were in trouble before, and I staved it off by winning a prize here—you remember that time."

"Yes. Smithy tried to cut you out, and you beat him," said Bob.

Mark nodded.

"Yes. But these things don't happen twice. There isn't anything like that going now. I'm entered for the Noble prize, but the exam. doesn't come off till next week, and the prize will be given later. And even if I win it—"

"It will be too late?"

"Yes."

"Rotten!" said Bob.

"If we could get over this, we should be all right," said Mark miserably. "The dad's got a chance of a good job, at better pay than he's been getting—if only we could get through this. I shall do my best for the Noble prize, and carry it off if I can, and—"

"Then look here, Marky, let us raise the tin, and lend it to you, and you shall pay it back out of the prize," said Bob Cherry.

"The Noble is twenty-five, in cash."

"And suppose I don't win it?"

"Oh, you will!"

"There's a strong set against me—Smithy and Ogilvy of the Remove, Temple of the Fourth, Hobson of the Shell, and two Fifth fellows. I haven't half a chance," said Mark. "I couldn't borrow money on the strength of that. And with this worry on my mind, I don't know that I shall even do my best—I don't feel up to the mark."

"Oh, rotten!" groaned Bob Cherry. "What are you going to do, then?"

Mark sighed.

"I never meant to tell you a word about it, Bob, only you've surprised me into it," he said. "I didn't want to worry you with my troubles."

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Is that what you call being a pal?" he demanded.

"Oh, Bob!"

"I'll give you advice, even if you won't let me give you anything else," said Bob Cherry. "Now, look here, you're going to win the Noble. You're going to write to your pater, and tell him he's got to stave it off somehow for a couple of weeks, and by that time you'll have the cash for the Noble exam. He can do that if you tell him you're certain."

"But I'm not certain," said Mark ruefully.

"Yes, you are. Smithy's your most dangerous enemy, and you've beaten him before, and you can beat him again," said Bob Cherry. "It's only a filthy Greek paper you've got to do, and you can do Greek with your eyes shut. You've simply got to buck up, and swot over Greek, and get ready for the pinch, then you'll go in and win, you bag the twenty-five quidlets, save the happy home, and stand a study feed with what's left. See?"

Mark Linley laughed. His spirits were already raised by Bob Cherry's cheery optimism. It was difficult for anybody to be downhearted in Bob Cherry's company.

"If I could only feel sure!" he said slowly.

"Feel sure—that's the best way!" said Bob. "The exam's next Wednesday, and next Wednesday you've got to be at the top of your form, and you're going to win, hands down."

Mark's face flushed, and his eye brightened.

"You're a good chap, Bob," he said gratefully. "I don't think I could have stuck it out here as long as I have, if it hadn't been for you. If I make a success of it, I shall owe it all to you."

"Oh, rot!" said Bob Cherry. "You're jolly well not going to leave Greyfriars. Besides, we can't spare you. Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull have left, and the old Co. is looking jolly thin. If you go, how are we to stand up against the Bounder and his gang? You can't desert the old firm, Marky."

"I shan't if I can help it, Bob."

"You can help it," said Bob Cherry confidently. "You're

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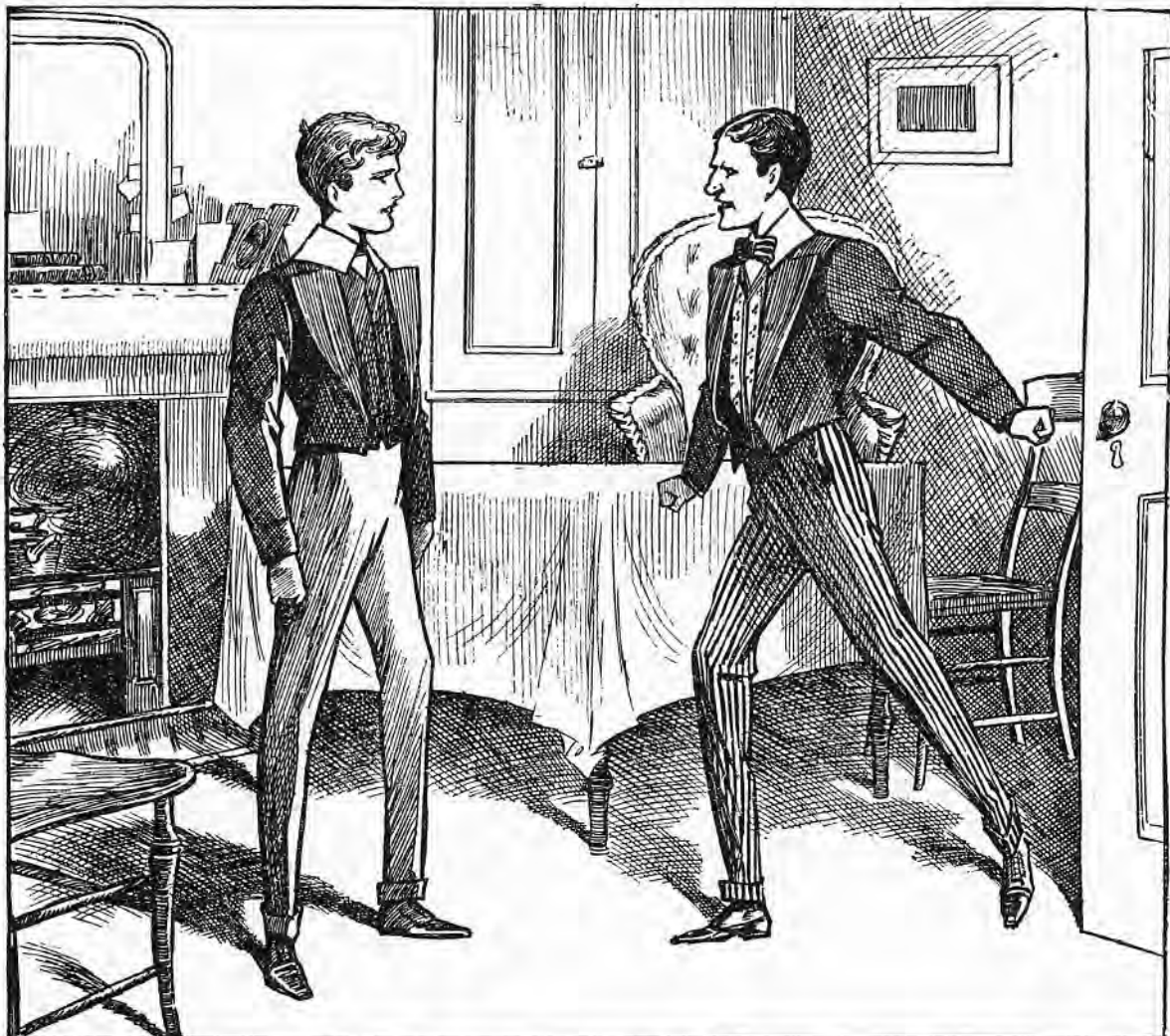
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—THE GEM—
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— OUR COMPANION PAPERS —

— THE PENNY POPULAR —
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The Bounder staggered to his feet. He reeled as he shook his clenched fist at the Lancashire lad. "I'll make you pay for this, Mark Linley!" he hissed. (See chapter 7.)

dead sure of the Noble prize if you put your beef into it—now don't you think so yourself?"

"I—I think I've got a good chance."

"That's right! If you swot away up to the exam., you'll make that good chance into a dead cert," said Bob encouragingly. "I'll keep an eye on you, and see that you don't slack."

"Not much fear of that, Bob."

"So just drop your pater a line, telling him to keep goal for another week or two, and then you'll be rolling in filthy lucre," said Bob. "You hear me?"

"Good! I—"

"And then you can begin on the Greek—Darius kai Parysatidos gignontai—what's the rest?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't that right?"

"Not quite," grinned Mark. "But never mind, I'll set to, Bob. I—I was an ass to be knocked into over in that way. I—"

"Of course you were. When in doubt, come to your Uncle Robert," said Bob Cherry sagely. "Now, I think— Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry broke off suddenly, and made a spring to the door. There was a rapid beat of footsteps in the Remove passage, and a fat junior vanished round the corner. Bob Cherry gave a roar of wrath.

"Bunter, you rotter!"

"Listening again?" said Mark, with a faint smile. "Well, never mind; he hasn't heard anything very interesting this

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 252.

time. I'll write to my pater now, Bob, and we'll run out and post the letter before locking-up."

"Right-oh!" said Bob Cherry.

And the letter was duly written and posted; and Mark Linley looked much more cheerful as he sat down to "swot," in preparation for the exam. of the following week—the exam. which was to decide whether he remained at Greyfriars or whether he left the old school to return to his early scene of labour as a factory lad.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Not Grateful.

VERNON-SMITH of the Remove—the Bounder of Greyfriars—sat in his study. The study was very handsomely furnished; the Bounder of Greyfriars had plenty of money, and he was accustomed to spending it lavishly for his own personal comfort. He was alone in the study, and he reclined in a comfortable armchair by the side of the open study window.

He gave a slight start as there came a sound of the door-handle turning.

"Hallo!" drawled the Bounder lazily. "Who's there?"

"I say, Smithy!" It was the voice of Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove.

The Bounder yawned.

"Buzz off, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Run away and play!" said Vernon-Smith.

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"I say, Smithy, I've got something to tell you," said Billy Bunter. "It's worth your while, I can tell you, Smithy."

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

Billy Bunter blinked round the study through his big spectacles. The table was laid for tea, and, from the good things on it, it looked as if Vernon-Smith expected visitors. Bunter's little round eyes glistened behind his spectacles at the sight of the tempting array.

"You were expecting me?" he asked.

"No!" said Vernon-Smith grimly.

"Ahem! I shouldn't mind coming to tea——"

"I dare say you wouldn't; but I should," said Vernon-Smith.

"If that's all you've got to say, you can buzz off."

"It's about the exam. I was going to speak to you," said Bunter hastily, as a frown gathered on the Bounder's face.

"But I always talk better while I'm eating."

"You're not going to eat here," said Vernon-Smith. "I'm expecting some seniors to tea—Potter and Bland of the Fifth, as a matter of fact, and I don't want any fags. Clear out!"

"All right—if you don't want to know about Linley and the exam——"

Vernon-Smith started.

"You can try some of the tarts, if you like, Bunter," he said, more graciously.

Billy Bunter did not need a second bidding. There was a large plate piled up with Mrs. Mimbles' best jam-tarts on the table. In a moment Bunter had one in each hand, and he was taking bites at them alternately, as if he fancied he could eat more quickly that way. Vernon-Smith watched him with a far from pleased expression. In his campaign against No. 1 Study in the Remove he had made use of Billy Bunter more than once: but he did not like the fat Removite, and he was intensely annoyed by the airs of chummy familiarity that Bunter adopted.

"I say, these tarts are prime," said Billy Bunter. "May I try the ham sandwiches?"

"No!" growled Vernon-Smith.

Billy Bunter blinked at him reproachfully.

"Oh, really, Smithy, I think you needn't be mean with an old pal. Haven't I stood by you through thick and thin, and bucked you up against Harry Wharton & Co. all the time? I must say I think you're ungrateful."

"Look here," said Vernon-Smith, "if you've got anything to tell me, go ahead, before I sling you out of the study neck and crop."

Bunter blinked at him, and seized two more tarts and backed round the table, as if to be more secure while negotiating them.

"I happened to be passing No. 13 a while ago," he said.

"Bob Cherry and Mark Linley were jawing about the exam."

"Oh!" said the Bounder.

"You know that Linley's entered for it," said Bunter. "I was going to enter myself—I could do with twenty-five quid—only I don't care for the trouble. Otherwise——"

"Why, you fat duffer, you don't know a word of Greek!" said the Bounder contemptuously. "How could you enter for it?"

"Ahem!" said Bunter, taking another tart across the table.

"Well, as I was saying, they were talking about it. My opinion is that that factory cad ought to be stopped roping in the prizes in this way. He always goes for the cash prizes, and he generally gets them. And he never stands a Form feed or anything of that kind. I think it disgusting. Why, that scholarship boulder must have made a lot of money out of Greyfriars since he's been here! And yet when a chap asks him for a little loan, he says he's got no money to lend—quite short and sharp, too—the rotter!"

And Bunter snorted, and helped himself again. His speed with the jam-tarts was something really marvellous. Each tart occupied him only a few seconds. His fat hands were stretched out for the fourth time, and the Bounder's pile showed signs of diminution. Vernon-Smith frowned, and made a movement towards him; and Bunter felt that it was time he came to the point. He did not want to be pitched into the passage so long as there were any tarts left in the study.

"Well, Linley's people are in frightful difficulties," said Bunter. "Linley's had a letter to say they're going to be sold up if he can't send them an awful lot of money—twenty pounds. He's depending on winning the Noble prize to pay his pater's debts, and save them all from the workhouse. What do you think of that?"

"Is it true?" said the Bounder coldly.

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

"I heard it with my own ears, old fellow."

The "old fellow" from Bunter made Vernon-Smith wince.

"I suppose you couldn't have heard it with anybody else's!" he snapped. "But if this is one of your rotten yarns——"

"Honest Injun," said Bunter, with another grab at the tarts. "I say, these are prime! I'll stay to tea, if you like, Smithy. I don't mind meeting the Fifth Form chaps; and they'll be pleased to have a really good conversationalist at the tea-table. About Linley, it's all right; he was blubbing."

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II — OUR COMPANION PAPERS — II

"THE PENNY POPULAR" —

—Every Friday—

"Blubbing!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith, with a start. "He's not the kind to blub."

"He was blubbing, all the same. Blubbing over the happy home being busted up, you know," said Billy Bunter, with a grin. "If he doesn't get the Noble prize, he's got to leave Greyfriars, and go back to the factory. He told Cherry so."

"My hat!"

"He's writing to his father to put off the duns till after the exam., and then he's going to square up with the cash," Bunter explained. "If he can't get the prize, he'll have to go—and work in the factory, you know, as he used to—to help keep the family. Just where he ought to be, in my opinion. The rotter, he actually had the cheek to tell me it was dishonest of me to borrow money of young Banthorpe when I couldn't pay him back, as if it's my fault that my postal-order's been delayed in the post. Look here, Smithy, I thought it out; and I've got an idea. You're up against that crowd, and so am I; and I think it's time a move was made to keep that factory boulder from collaring all the cash prizes. There ought to be a general protest against it. And if we could stop him, then he would have to clear out of Greyfriars, and go back to his giddy factory. Jolly good thing. Suppose all the factory chaps went to public schools, what would become of the trade of the country?" demanded Billy Bunter indignantly.

Vernon-Smith's eyes gleamed. He could see that Bunter was telling him the truth. Bunter was habitually untruthful, but it was always easy to tell when he was dealing with the facts. And it seemed to the Bounder that his chance had come at last. He had been very successful so far in his campaign against Harry Wharton & Co.—Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull had left Greyfriars owing to his machinations—but against the quiet, hardworking scholarship junior he had felt helpless. And now, if Mark Linley did not win the exam., he, too, would have to go.

But whatever schemes might pass through the Bounder's mind, he was not likely to take Billy Bunter, the chatterbox of the Form, into his confidence.

Bunter paused in his chatter, and even in eating the tarts, as he saw a black look gathering upon the Bounder's brow.

"I—I say, anything the matter, old chap?" he asked.

"Yes," said Vernon-Smith grimly; "I don't believe a word you say. And I'm not going to have you listening at keyholes and coming to me with the tales you hear. It degrades me."

"Wh-wh-wh-what!" stammered Bunter. He had not supposed that anything could degrade the black sheep of the Remove, and his look betrayed as much.

"And I'm jolly well going to make an example of you!" said Vernon-Smith.

"What!"

The Bounder ran round the table. Bunter made a spring for the door; but Vernon-Smith's grip closed upon his collar even as he reached it. Bunter roared.

"Ow! Ow! Leggo! Murder! Help! Ow!"

"You young rotter!"

"Ow! Help! Yah! Murder!" roared Bunter, as the Bounder shook him fiercely. "Oh! Ow! Yarcooh!"

But, heedless of his yells, the Bounder, with an iron grip upon his collar, marched him out of the study, and down the passage and the stairs, and into the junior common-room. There was a general exclamation as he marched Bunter in.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Runs the Gauntlet.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"What's the row?"

"What's Bunter been doing?"

"Faith, and what's the matter intirely?"

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Help! He's gone potty! Yew!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was raining in the Close, and almost all the Greyfriars fellows were indoors. There were a crowd of the Remove and

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the Fourth in the common-room, and they all gathered round the Bounder and his prisoner in surprise.

Vernon-Smith had a tight grip upon the back of Billy Bunter's collar, and the fat junior could not escape. He could only wriggle and yell—and he did both.

"Shut up, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton. "You're not hurt yet!"

"He's going to be!" said the Bounder.

Wharton frowned. He was captain of the Remove, and it was his duty to put down bullying in the Form.

"Hold on!" he said. "We'll know what Bunter's done before he's ragged. What's the trouble?"

"There isn't any trouble," wailed Bunter. "Smithy's gone potty, that's all. I thought he'd be pleased when I told him about Linley. Ow!"

"About Linley!" exclaimed Bob Cherry sharply.

"Ow! Help! Look here, Wharton, if you're a rotten Form-captain, you ought to stop a rotter from rotten bullying. Ow!"

"What is the trouble, Smithy?" asked Bolsover major, the bully of the Remove, and one of Vernon-Smith's firmest backers. He was surprised at the sight of Bunter in the Bounder's grip, as Bunter was supposed to belong to the new Co.

"Gentlemen—" said Vernon-Smith.

"Hear, hear!" shouted Snoop.

"Gentlemen of the Remove," said the Bounder, "you are all aware that Bunter is a spying, prying cad, and that nobody can ever talk without danger of Bunter eavesdropping, and spreading every blessed word over the whole school?"

"Faith, and ye're right!" said Micky Desmond. And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, remarked in his peculiar English that the rightfulness was terrific.

"Bunter has been eavesdropping again, and he had the cheek to come to me with his yarns," said the Bounder.

"Not for the first time!" said Harry Wharton.

Vernon-Smith did not appear to hear that remark.

"He has been listening at Linley's study, and has found out—or says he has—some of Mark Linley's private affairs," continued Vernon-Smith.

"The cad!" said Bob Cherry, with contracted brows.

"Ow! I haven't—I didn't—I—I—ow!" roared Bunter.

"Now, you fellows, you know I don't like Linley; I don't like factory bounders, and I don't approve of scholarship cads, on principle," said the Bounder. "But I think it's time Bunter was made an example of."

"Hear, hear!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, for once in complete agreement with the Bounder.

"Sure, it's right ye are!"

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific."

"Bravo!"

"If Linley's people are hard up and going to have the brokers in, it's Linley's bizney, and not ours," resumed the Bounder.

"I think Bunter ought to be stopped from picking up rag-ends of information and retailing them all over the school."

"Quite right!" said Tom Brown, with a nod of approval. "It's a case of Satan rebuking sin; but you're right, Smithy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suggest, therefore, that Bunter is made to run the gauntlet of the whole Form, as a lesson to mind his own business!" said the Bounder.

"Hear, hear!"

"And if he says another word about Linley's private affairs, and what he heard at Linley's keyhole, I suggest making him run it a second time."

"Good egg!"

"By Jove!" said Bob Cherry. "I must say you're acting decently for once, Smithy!"

"Even Old Nick isn't as black as he's painted," agreed Tom Brown.

"What do you say, Wharton—as captain of the Form?" said the Bounder, with an air of exaggerated deference.

"The fat rotter's hardly worth licking," said Harry. "Still, it would serve him jolly well right to make him run the gauntlet."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yow-ow!" roared Bunter. "I won't! I sha'n't! I—ow, ow! Look here, I didn't hear anything; and I never told Smithy that Linley was going to have the bailiffs in. I didn't hear him talking to Cherry at all—ow!"

"Why, you fat fibber," exclaimed Bob Cherry, in disgust. "I saw you at the door myself, and nearly caught you!"

"Ahem! I—I mean that I had stopped to tie up my boot-lace, and happened to hear a few words by accident—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, these accidents ought to be put a stop to," said Bulstrode. "Form up, you claps, and we'll give him the giddy gauntlet!"

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"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"All of you got something to lick him with," said Vernon-Smith. "Then I'll let the fat bounder go!"

"Right you are!"

And the juniors, laughing, formed up into two lines nearly the length of the room, each of them grasping some weapon for the castigation of the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars. Books and rolled-up paper, caps and knotted handkerchiefs were the chief weapons. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth joined in, for the fun of the thing. Billy Bunter was yanked to the end of the line, struggling and yelling.

"Ready, Smithy darling?" sang out Micky Desmond.

"The readyfulness is—"

"Terrific!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Start him!"

"Run!" said Vernon-Smith, releasing his grasp upon Billy Bunter's collar.

Bunter gasped.

"Ow! I won't! Yow! I sha'n't! Yah! Oh!"

"You'll get booted if you don't!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Ow! Help! Yah!"

Biff! Vernon-Smith's boot came with a crash upon Billy Bunter's stout person, and started him. He staggered between the rows of waiting juniors, and the weapons descended upon him. The fat junior roared, and ran. He was in for it now, and he realised that only speed could save him from a severe punishment. He dashed along as fast as he could with exercise books and caps and knotted handkerchiefs swiping at him as he ran.

Bunter was not a good runner. He was pretty severely punished by the time he reached the end of the line. He gasped for breath as he ran past the last of the juniors.

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

"Make him run again!" roared Russell.

That was enough for Bunter. He dashed out of the doorway and fled at top speed, leaving the juniors in the common-room roaring with laughter.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Courtfield Match.

HARRY WHARTON came out of the School House into the clear, frosty air of the Close. He was in footer rig, with an overcoat and a muffler on. It was the day after the scene in the common-room, when Billy Bunter had run the gauntlet. It was a Wednesday, and therefore a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and—as was usual on half-holidays in the winter—the

Remove had a footer match on.

Football matters in the Lower Fourth Form had not been going well of late. The departure of Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull from Greyfriars had robbed the Remove eleven of two of its best players. It fell to Harry Wharton, as captain of the Form, to fill the vacancies in the team; and he filled them according to his own judgment—and his judgment led him to exclude Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, and Vernon-Smith's personal friends. It was not merely dislike of the Bounder that caused Harry to pursue that course. He attributed Nugent's and Bull's enforced departure from Greyfriars to the machinations of the Bounder, and he would not allow Vernon-Smith to profit by his rascality.

The other fellows in the Remove were far from agreeing with Wharton. Even his closest chums, like Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh, doubted his wisdom. Tom Brown, the New Zealander, had pointed out that it wasn't footer. Whatever Vernon-Smith might or might not have done with regard to the "sacking" of Nugent and Bull, football was football, and it was a footer captain's duty to play the best men, wherever he found them. And a crushing defeat at the hands of the Fifth Form team, the week before, had emphasised these views. Harry Wharton held firm.

He was ready to resign the captaincy of the Remove, and to stand out of the footer altogether, if the Removeites wanted him to. But he said quite plainly that, so long as he was captain, Vernon-Smith should not play in the Form team.

Pressure had been brought to bear on Wharton from various quarters. Wingate of the Sixth, captain of the school and Head of the Games, had remonstrated with him, and was very angry with him for not yielding the point. The Remove were very angry with him, too; even the members of the eleven did not approve. Wharton stood almost alone in his opinion; indeed Mark Linley was the only fellow who backed him up wholeheartedly and undoubtingly. Bob Cherry and Inky and Tom



Brown stood by him, but without wholly approving of his determination.

But Wharton did not falter.

And the Remove, angry as they were with him, did not care to "sack" him from the captaincy. Wharton was the best captain the Form team had ever had, and all the fellows knew it. They had lost two good players, and they did not want to lose the best one of all in addition.

But Wharton's friends felt that it could not last. The defeat by the Fifth had raised a storm, and the Form captain had been ragged by the Form. Now the Remove were about to play Courtfield School, and Wharton had not changed his views. Johnny Bull's place in the team was filled by Micky Desmond, and the Bouncer & Co. were still kept rigidly out.

The Removeites growled; but short of breaking with Wharton, there was nothing they could do. But if the Courtfield match ended in a defeat, it was only too clear that trouble would come of it.

Bob Cherry, Tom Brown, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh joined Wharton as he walked down to the football ground. They were all three looking very serious, and they had made up their minds to speak once more to Harry before the visiting team arrived.

"Ahem!" Bob Cherry began.

Close chum as he was of the Remove captain's, Bob Cherry found it rather difficult to speak to him. The frown on Wharton's brow was not encouraging.

"The ahemfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wharton glanced at his chum.

"What is it, Bob?" he asked.

"About the match," said Bob hesitatingly.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips. He knew what was coming now.

"Well, Bob, what about it?" he asked shortly.

"What team are you playing?"

Wharton drew a paper from his overcoat pocket and passed it to his chum. Bob Cherry read out the pencilled list of names: "Newland; Desmond, Morgan; Leigh, Treluce, Brown; Hurree Singh, Cherry, Wharton, Penfold, Linley."

"It's a good team!" said Bob.

"I think it is!"

"But do you think it's up to the form of the Courtfield fellows?"

"I hope so. Trumper & Co. may beat us; but we've beaten them before—twice to once."

"That was when we had old Nugent and Johnny Bull with us," said Bob, with a sigh.

Wharton's brow darkened.

"And whose fault is it that Nugent and Johnny Bull aren't with us still?" he exclaimed.

"The Bouncer's, I suppose."

"Yes; and now the fellows are grousing at me for not giving their places to Smithy and Bolsover, who plotted against them, and got them sacked!" said Wharton bitterly.

"H'm!" said Tom Brown. "The fellows don't agree with you about that, Wharton. Nugent was sacked under the accusation of pub-haunting—some of us think it was a mistake, but there you are! Bull was sacked for fighting, after being specially ordered by the Head not to. It was Bulstrode he was fighting with. Vernon-Smith denies having been mixed up in either affair in the remotest way."

"Lies don't cost Smithy very much!"

"Some of the fellows think it a bit thick for you to bring accusations like this against Vernon-Smith, without a particle of proof, outside suspicion," said Tom Brown rather tartly.

"And you're one of them, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, I am!"

"Well, look here—"

"Oh, don't begin to rag!" said Bob Cherry pacifically.

"The fact is, Harry, the Form are against us in this; and it would be graceful to yield the point. After all, we play footer matches to win, and private feelings don't count."

"That's what I think," said Tom Brown.

Wharton shook his head.

"I hold to what I've said already," he replied steadily. "So long as I'm captain of the Remove, I don't play Vernon-Smith or Bolsover, or any of that set. And since Bulstrode has joined them, and failed us just before a match, I don't play him, either—or Russell. I'll play fellows I can depend upon."

"Most of the team think—"

"I know what they think; and it doesn't make any difference," said Wharton. "If the Remove don't like it, let them elect a new skipper."

"We don't want that!" said Tom Brown. "You're our best man, and it wouldn't be much of a benefit to leave you out if we put Smithy in."

"Well, you can't have both!"

"Then I suppose there's nothing more to be said," muttered Bob Cherry.

"Nothing!"

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And the matter dropped.

It was nearly time for the kick-off, and most of the Remove were on the ground. The eleven gathered round Wharton, but they did not look so cheery and confident as the Remove eleven were accustomed to look.

The Courtfielders were a very tough team, and nobody in the Remove considered that the Form eleven was the best the Remove could produce. They were going to face the visitors with at least two of the best players in the Form—Vernon-Smith and Bolsover major—looking on instead of playing. Bulstrode, too, who was a first-rate player, was left out now. He had resigned from the team of his own accord, but his look was very bitter as he saw the eleven getting ready. Bulstrode had not expected so much firmness on Harry Wharton's part; and he was beginning to regret a little that he had thrown in his lot with the Bouncer & Co.

There was a yell from some of the Removeites as Harry Wharton appeared.

"Are you playing Smithy?"

Wharton looked round with an unwavering glance.

"No, I'm not playing Smithy," he said.

"Shame!" yelled Snoop.

"We shall be licked," said Morgan, the left-back.

"If you think that, you'd better get out of the team while there's time," said Harry Wharton sharply. "I can fill your place."

Morgan flushed angrily; and there would probably have been high words, but just at that moment the Courtfield fellows arrived. Harry Wharton turned to greet them. Trumper, Grahame, Solly Lazarus and the rest were well known at Greyfriars. They belonged to the County Council School at Courtfield, and there were not wanting fellows in the Remove who sneered at the idea of playing them at all. But, as a matter of fact, the Courtfielders always played a good game, and generally gave the Remove a very hard tussle.

"Here we are again!" said Trumper cheerfully as he shook hands with Harry Wharton. "I hear that some of your chaps have left. I'm sorry."

"Yes; Nugent and Bull," said Wharton, his brow clouding a little. "But we'll give you a good tussle all the same, Trumper, old man."

"I hope you will," said Trumper heartily.

And Coker, of the Fifth, who was to referee the match, having arrived upon the scene, the rival teams went into the field. Bolsover major, who was looking on with Vernon-Smith, and Snoop and Stott, and others of the new Co., snuffed and shrugged his shoulders.

It will be the Fifth match over again," he said. "Fancy being licked by a giddy Board School! Pah!"

The whistle went, and the match started.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Rough Tussle.

TRUMPER & CO., of Courtfield, were in good form.

They showed that from the start. Greyfriars had kicked off, and a minute after the ball had started rolling it was in the home half, and Trumper & Co. were after it like steam. Within three minutes Newland was called upon to save, and to save again.

"All over bar shouting!" said Vernon-Smith, with a curl of the lip. "Look at young Penfold! He falls over if a Courtfield chap gets near him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Leigh, too!" snorted Bulstrode. "Look at him! Did you ever see a half play like that? Grahame got his last pass."

"And Trumper will get his next, I expect."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

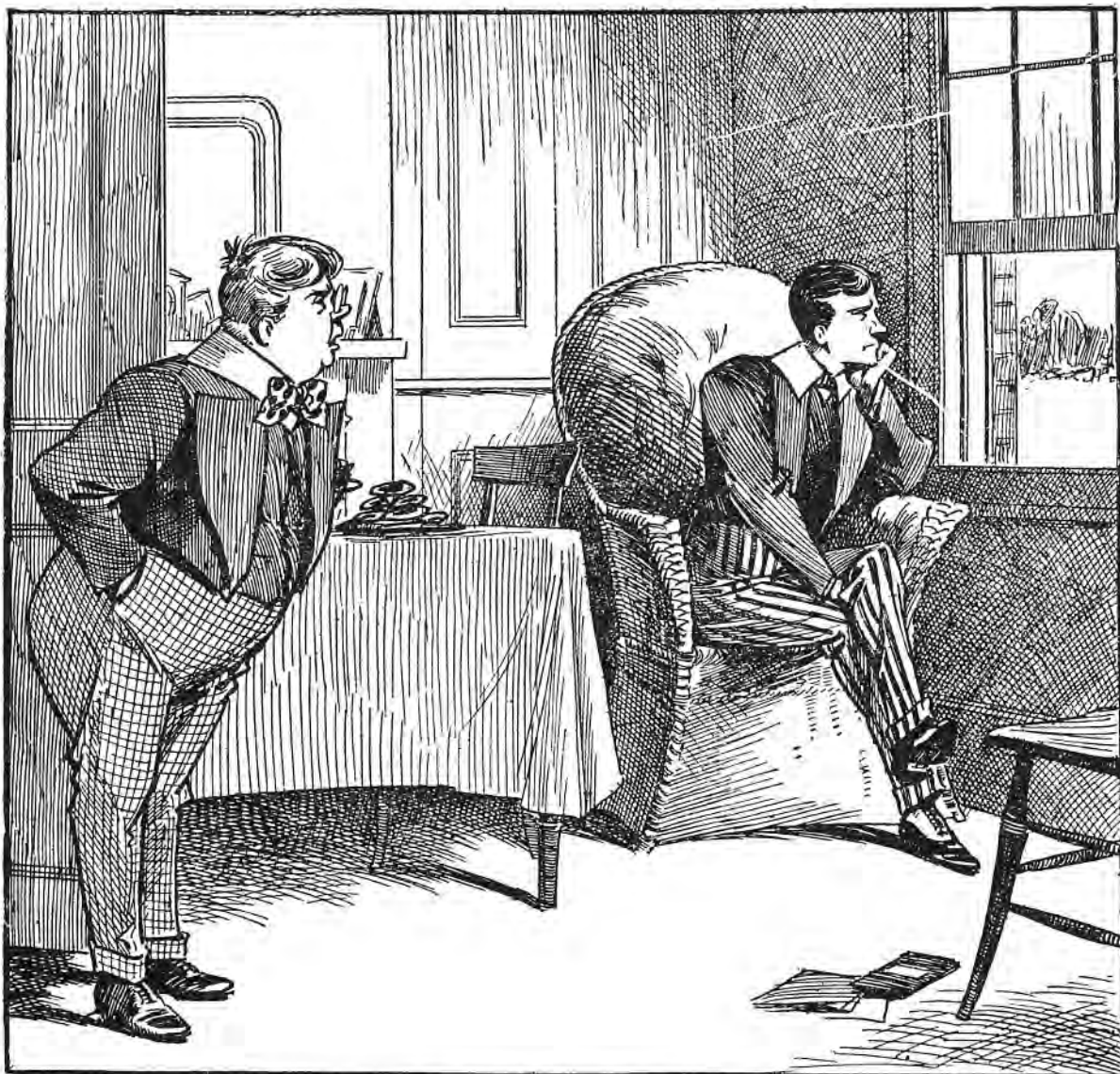
It did not take the Courtfielders long to discover that the Remove eleven were not up to their old form. And Trumper & Co. pressed hard for victory.

During the first quarter of an hour it looked as if the visitors would have it all their own way; but Newland kept the goal safe and sound, and at last Morgan cleared away to Tom Brown, who gave the ball to Mark Linley, at outside left; and the Lancashire lad was away with it like a flash, almost along the touch-line. There was a roar from the Remove crowd.

"Go it, Linley!"

"On the ball!"

Mark Linley was certainly "going it." There were some fellows who sneered at Mark Linley for being a scholarship boy, and some of them who sneered at him for being a "swot." But it was impossible for even his enemies to sneer at him as a footballer. He played the game with keenness, and played it always well. The passing game was the favourite with the Remove team, but Mark Linley showed now that he could dribble the ball as well as any old hero of the game. He brought it along at a tremendous speed, the other forwards being too far behind to take a pass. The Courtfield forwards were nowhere—their halves were left standing—and Mark dribbled the ball fairly round the feet of the Courtfield right-back, the



Billy Bunter blinked round the study through his big spectacles. "I say, Smithy," he said, "I've got something to tell you. It's worth your while to listen, too, Smithy!" "Well?" growled the Bounder, ungraciously. "What do you want?" (See chapter 2.)

other back being too far afield to trouble him. And then he streaked for goal with the ball at his feet, with only the goalie to beat. The shouts of the crowd had become a continuous roar.

"Buck up, Linley!"

"Shoot! Shoot!"

"Put her through!"

"Good old Lancashire!"

The goalie was watching with all his eyes. He was all that stood between Greyfriars and a score, and he knew it. And Linley would have barely time for the kick, the enemy were closing in on him fast. But Mark Linley was "all there."

Whiz!

The goalkeeper made a wild spring at the ball, and it almost grazed his finger-tips as it shot into the net. But it was in! The Remove roared.

"Goal!"

"Hurray!"

"The hurrafulness is terrific!" yelled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Bravo!"

"Good old Marky!" yelled Bob Cherry, clapping his hands.

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"Good old Mark! First blood to the Remove, after all! Hurra!"

The Courtfield goalie pitched the ball out. Harry Wharton clapped the Lancashire junior on the shoulder as they walked back to the centre of the field.

"Good for you, Linley!" he said. "That was ripping!"

Mark Linley flushed with pleasure.

"It was good luck," he said.

"And good footer," said Bob Cherry. "If you talk about leaving Greyfriars again, Marky, we'll—we'll scrag you!"

Mark Linley laughed, and lined up with the team. The Lancashire lad's face was very happy now. In the keen excitement of the grand old game, he could drive from his mind the home troubles that at other times seldom left his thoughts.

"My hat! That was ripping," said Bolsover major as Courtfield kicked off. "Blessed if that factory bouncer doesn't play footer like a giddy angel!"

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth. The whole Remove were cheering Mark Linley, and the Lancashire lad's popularity was not likely to help on the Bounder's schemes concerning Linley. Vernon-Smith was not troubled with patriotic scruples, and he

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would very willingly have seen the Remove beaten, if it would have helped on his plans in any way.

"They won't get a chance like that again," said Bulstrode. "Trumper & Co. are marking Linley. He'll be bottled up this journey."

Bulstrode was right. Mark Linley had no chance to play a lone hand again. But he had scored first for the Remove, and given the game a start. The play was gruelling for some time now, and the minutes were away without a score. It was not till close on half-time that Solly Lazarus broke the duck for Courtfield, putting the ball in with a long shot that gave the Remove custodian no chance.

"Half-time—one to one!" said Bolsover major. "Not so bad as I expected."

It was not so bad as the eleven had expected, as a matter of fact, and they looked a little more cheery in the interval. But when they lined up again for the resumption of play it was evident that the Courtfield team were on their mettle, and they played with great keenness.

Again and again the enemy's forwards swept down to goal, and at last Newland was found wanting, and Trumper sent the ball in.

"Another against!" sneered Vernon-Smith.

"I should have stopped that if I'd been in goal," said Hazel-dene, who had kept goal for the Form team until quite lately. Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll never keep goal for the Remove again so long as Wharton's skipper," he said. And Hazel-dene nodded and gritted his teeth.

"The defence is rotten!" remarked Ogilvy. "Brown's the only good man in the half-line, and the backs aren't what they might be."

"Ya-as," remarked Lord Mauleverer, the dandy of the Remove; "they're missing poor old Johnny Bull at back."

Bolsover major scowled at him.

"They're missing me!" he growled. "Do you mean to say that I couldn't play back better than either of those chumps?"

"I don't mean to say anything, my dear fellow," said his lordship gracefully. "But I wish poor old Johnny were here, you know."

"Oh, rats!"

"And Nugent, too——"

"Blow Nugent!"

There was a roar.

"Keep it out, Newland!"

It was a hot attack on the Remove goal. Newland did his best, but the press was too hard. The ball whizzed in and lodged in the net.

"Three for Courtfield!" said Vernon-Smith. "What did I say!"

"Oh, it's another licking!" growled Bolsover major. "I wonder how long the Remove's going to let Wharton muck up the Form matches in this way?"

"I wonder!" said the Bounder.

Harry Wharton's face was very grim as he walked back to the half-way line with his team. There remained only twenty minutes to play, and the enemy were two ahead. Wharton did not regret his decision in the slightest, but he knew that the team was not up to beating the Courtfielders. The Remove would be lucky to draw, if they could do that. But Wharton did not give up hope. When the game restarted he played up splendidly, and by his example infused new life into his men. And then the Remove forwards had a chance to show the stuff they were made of. With the exception of Penfold, who was only passable, the Remove front line was first-class. And now they brought the ball up the field, passing like clockwork—the quick, short passing for which the Remove were well known. The Courtfielders were beaten all along the line; the halves were stranded, the backs eluded, and the goalie found himself subjected to such a hot attack that it seemed to him that there were three or four footers in play.

Bang into the net the leather went, from the foot of Harry Wharton, and the crowd roared with applause and relief.

"Goal!"

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry as they lined up again. "Go it, my sons, and we'll beat them yet! We're only one behind, and we've got ten minutes yet."

And the Remove players grinned rather doubtfully. Ten minutes was not an exorbitant time allowance to make up the leeway and win. But Harry Wharton seemed to be a host in himself just now. Again he brought his men sweeping down the field, and the passing was perfect—as pretty an exhibition as might have been seen on a Newcastle United ground. Again the ball slammed in, this time from the foot of Bob Cherry at inside right, Wharton having passed out just a second before he was bumped over by a charging back. The loud hurrah of the watching crowd rang in Wharton's ears as he staggered up.

"Goal!"

"Bravo, Cherry!"

Bob ran to his skipper.

"Hurt, old man?"

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Wharton panted.

"N-no. It was a bit of a bump, that's all. I'm all right."

Bob Cherry looked at him rather anxiously. The charge had been a perfectly fair one, and the Remove players would have been the last to complain of a fair charge, however rough. But Wharton had fallen heavily, and he was very much shaken. He had only thought of passing the ball, and not of saving himself. When the teams lined up again, Wharton was looking decidedly groggy. And there were four more minutes to play! The Remove fellows yelled encouragement to their side. The team had equalised, but they were wanted to do more than that. The Remove wanted a win. And Harry Wharton, to whom a win meant very much at that time, exerted himself as he had seldom done before. But it was no use; he was groggy. That heavy charge had done the business for him as far as the present match was concerned. The Remove forwards, with their swift, short passing, brought the ball right up to goal again, and Bob Cherry centred to Wharton. It was a good chance, but Wharton did not kick with his usual deadliness, and the ball rebounded from the goal-post. There was a groan of dismay from the crowd. Was there time for more? Trumper & Co. cleared, but Tom Brown, at half, sent the ball flying on again, and Mark Linley captured it and rushed in. There was a roar.

"Kick, kick! Kick, you beggar, kick!"

Mark Linley kicked. There was no good chance of passing either to Penfold or Wharton, but it was a difficult kick from the left, with a back charging even as the Lancashire lad toed the ball. Buzz it came into the net, and the juniors shouted. But they shouted too soon. This time the Courtfield goalie was all there. His ready fist bumped on the ball, and it flew out again, and the shouts died away.

And then came one of the kaleidoscopic changes of footer. Instead of the hot attack on the Courtfield goal continuing, a back cleared out to the forwards, and Trumper, Grahame, and Solly Lazarus rushed the ball up the field. They left half the Greyfriars field standing, and rushed through the backs without giving them a chance. The ball whizzed in, and Newland fisted it out, right upon Trumper's head!

Biff!

And it was in again!

"Pheep!"

Coker blew the whistle.

"Goal!" gasped Trumper. "My hat, goal!"

It was the winning goal, on the stroke of time! Courtfield County Council School had beaten the Greyfriars Remove by four goals to three!

"Jolly good match!" said Trumper to Harry Wharton, as he rubbed himself down afterwards. "We've beaten you, but honours are even. That last goal was a giddy fluke."

Harry Wharton nodded. The last goal had been a fluke, just as Trumper said; but that last goal meant that the Remove had been defeated, and that there was trouble, hot and heavy, for the Remove footer captain!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Swot's the Word.

"BLESSED muff!"

Mark Linley flushed. Bolsover major muttered the words loud enough for him to hear as he came off the footer ground. Bob Cherry swung round on the burly Removeite.

"Who's a muff, you rotter?" he exclaimed hotly.

The finish of the match had not left Bob in his usual sunny temper.

"Linley is!" said Bolsover defiantly. "If he hadn't muffed that kick for goal, Remove would have scored, and Courtfield wouldn't have had the time to score again, anyway."

"It was a very difficult kick," said Mark mildly. Bolsover major snorted.

"Difficult be dashed! Why didn't you pass in, then?"

"Penfold wasn't up to take it."

"Quite right," said Dick Penfold. "Mark Linley left me yards back. I haven't got his pace. Linley was quite right to kick."

"You could have centred to Wharton," growled Bolsover major.

"I wasn't ready for a pass, and Linley knew it," said Harry Wharton. "You're talking out of your hat, Bolsover, and you know it! Linley took the only possible chance, and it very nearly came off. He had bad luck."

"Bad rats! It's a fool kick, that was what was the matter!" "Oh, shut up!" said Wharton irritably. "Don't talk to him, Mark. You've not got to account to Bolsover for what you do. Let him go and eat coke."

ANSWERS

"Are we going to be licked in every match we play because you won't put good players in, Wharton?" bawled Bolsover major.

"Oh, buzz off, and cheese it!"

And Harry Wharton & Co. swung on their way, leaving Bolsover major and the crowd talking excitedly over the result of the Courtfield match.

The Courtfield fellows took their leave, and the crowd broke up. There was deep and bitter irritation in the Remove over the result of the match. The fellows felt that it was no use talking to Wharton; but they talked about it among themselves without end. The brilliant goal Mark Linley had taken in the beginning of the match seemed to be forgotten; that he had failed to bring off a very difficult shot, and thus save the team from defeat at the finish was all the fellows cared to remember. Vernon-Smith asked sneeringly what was to be expected of the factory bouncer, and there was a murmur of assent from many voices.

Mark Linley went to his study. He was a little worried in mind over the result of the Courtfield match, partly because he took the Remove's football reputation very much to heart, and partly because he foresaw more trouble for his friend Wharton as a result. But all thoughts of football were driven from his mind as Trotter, the house page, brought him a letter.

"It came while the match was going on, Master Linley," said Trotter.

"Thank you, Trotter!"

There was a Lancashire postmark on the letter, and the address was in the somewhat heavy hand of Mr. Linley.

Mark took the letter into his study to read. He opened it, and read it, and a look of relief came over his face. Bob Cherry came into the study, and slung a footer into the corner.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Marky!" Bob exclaimed. "What's that? A billet-doux?"

Mark smiled.

"No, Bob. A letter from home."

Bob Cherry's face became grave at once.

"No more bad news, Marky?"

"No. It's in answer to what I wrote to father yesterday. Bob, I must win the Noble prize!"

"So you shall, my son," said Bob Cherry cordially.

"But—"

"Father says it can be managed—if I get the prize. He has been able to make an arrangement with the chief creditor. That's his landlord. The man was paid once before out of a prize I won here, and he knows it. Father thinks I'm certain to get the Noble prize. I've explained it all to him, and it will tide everything over if I do. He will be able to take his new job—at a rise."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Bob Cherry heartily.

"If I get the Noble prize!" Mark exclaimed, with almost feverish energy. "Father thinks I'm certain, though I've told him it's not at all sure. He's got more faith in me than I've got in myself."

"Not more than I've got in you, Marky," said Bob Cherry. "You'll win the giddy quidlets hands down, you take my word."

"I'm going to try. I'm going to swot, and swot, and I'll strain every nerve to get it! Bob, old man, if I win it, it means the end of all the trouble. If the dad gets that new job, it will be a permanency, and they'll be safe at home, and I can keep on here, and have a chance of doing something decent in the future. If I don't get it—"

Mark's face clouded over again, and he paused.

"Rot!" said Bob.

Mark laughed ruefully.

"If I don't get it, it's all up," he said. "I shall have to leave Greyfriars. It will be the last fight, for good or ill."

"Then put all your beef into it," said Bob Cherry. "I—I'll help you! I wish I knew some of the filthy Greek, so that I could help you with the rotten swotting. But I'll back you up, anyway. I'll see that you're not disturbed. I'll buck you up when you're inclined to slack. I'll tie wet towels round your forehead—"

"Ha, ha! That won't be necessary! After all, I'm only afraid of Smithy and Potter of the Fifth," said Mark thoughtfully. "I think I can distance the rest. And I think that Smithy is too busy with other things now to be mugging up Greek."

"Right-o!" said Bob Cherry. "That's so! He's trying to make us all the trouble he can in the Remove, especially in football matters, and I know he hasn't been swotting lately. I fancy he'll let the Noble prize slide this time, Marky. You'll beat him, even if he goes into the exam. As for Potter of the Fifth, you've got as much brains as all the Potters that ever potted."

"I wish I thought as much of my chance as you do, Bob," said Mark, with a smile. "But if hard work can do it, I'm going to do it!"

"Hear, hear!"

Bob Cherry sorted out Mark's books and piled them on the table. Then he laid out pen and ink and paper. Mark watched him, smiling.

"What are you up to, Bob?" he asked.

"Fagging for you," said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "It's all I can do, and it's little enough. Now, pile in, and I'll tell Wun Lung and Inky to keep out of the study for a bit."

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"No, don't do that—"

"But I will, and I'll keep out myself. You're going to have the study to yourself," said Bob obstinately. "You've got to collar the Noble exam. If you want me, you'll find me in No. 1. So long!"

"Thank you, Bob, old man! You're awfully good!"

"Oh, rot!"

And Bob Cherry marched off, leaving the Lancashire lad alone in the study. There was a very tender look on Mark's face.

"Good old Bob!" he murmured. "I'll make it up to him some day for being so jolly decent to me. Now to work!"

And Mark Linley sat down at the table, and in a few minutes was ears over head in Greek. So deeply immersed was he that he did not hear a tap at the study door. The door opened, and the Bouncer of Greyfriars looked in.

"Hallo, Bob, is that you?" said Mark, as he heard a footstep, without turning his head.

There was a slight laugh.

"No; it isn't Bob!" said a drawling voice.

Mark Linley frowned, and rose from the table, and turned round to face the Bouncer of Greyfriars.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Conditions of Peace.

VERNON-SMITH closed the door of the study, and faced the Lancashire lad again. Mark Linley looked at him without speaking.

"You haven't asked me to sit down," said the Bouncer with a smile.

"I don't want you to stay!" said Mark.

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"You are not polite, at all events."

"I haven't any politeness to waste on you!" said Mark, in his direct way. "What do you want? You haven't come here from any friendly motive, I know that."

"That's just where you make a mistake," said the Bouncer, leaning against the mantelpiece, and keeping his eyes upon the Lancashire lad's face. "I want to be friendly if you'll let me. I did you a favour yesterday. I think, when I stopped Bunter from making your affairs the talk of the school. Bunter hasn't said a word on the subject since. Neither have you, for that matter, though a fellow might have expected just a word of thanks."

"I may as well be quite plain with you," said Mark Linley.

"I know what you did, and I don't take it as a favour. I believe you had some motive or other for acting as you did. I don't know what it was, but I don't trust you. I can't trust you. Even your own friends don't trust you. That's no secret."

The Bouncer winced a little. He knew that that was true.

"I'd like to prove that my motives were friendly," he said.

"I could be of a lot of use to you now, if you liked. Over the Noble exam, I mean."

"You are competing against me there," said Mark.

"Suppose I withdrew?"

The Lancashire junior looked astonished.

"Why should you withdraw?" he asked.

"To give you a clear field."

"But—but why? Are you joking?"

"Not at all. If what Bunter said was true, you need the Noble prize. It will make all the difference to you between staying at Greyfriars and having to get out of the school. As for the prize, it is nothing to me. My father would send me twenty-five pounds to-morrow if I asked him—or twice as much. I've only entered for it partly to please the pater by getting my name into the prize list, and partly to prevent a friend of Harry Wharton's from carrying off the prize. I'm up against No. 1 Study, as you know very well. Wharton has been my rival ever since I've been at Greyfriars, and he has generally had the best of it. Wharton has got to go!"

Mark's lip curled.

"I mean it!" said the Bouncer quietly. "I said that I'd drive him from the school, and his pals, too!"

"You said so!" said Mark contemptuously.

"Where is Nugent now?" asked the Bouncer. "Where is Johnny Bull?"

Mark Linley started.

"You will be the next to go!" said Vernon-Smith. "This affair of your father's puts the chances into my hands. If I win the Noble prize, you'll have to go!"

"Very likely."

"And you know I am your most dangerous opponent?"

"I think so. But I think I can beat you all the same!" said Mark. "You have been slacking for a long time, while I have been working hard. I think I shall beat you at the exam, and the other fellows I feel almost sure about."

"If I withdrew you would win hands down."

"Yes, that is true."

"I will withdraw if you like," said the Bouncer. "As I

said, the prize is nothing to me—not worth the trouble of winning. I'd rather get out of the fog of the exam. Of course, I should only withdraw on certain conditions."

"I don't ask you to withdraw. I think it is caddish of you to enter for the prize at all, as you're not in need of the money," said Mark. "The prize was founded to help poor scholars."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"All's fair in war," he said. "All I ask of you is that you leave No. 1 Study alone. I am going to down Wharton—I am going to make myself captain of the Remove, if only to prove that I can do it if I choose. You have been against me all the time—"

"I am against you now."

"I want you to stop all that. Bulstrode has changed sides, and I want you to follow his example."

Mark Linley laughed scornfully.

"You won't do it?" asked the Bounder.

"No fear!"

"If you become my friend, you'll find me a good pal," said the Bounder calmly. "If you make me an enemy, you'll find me a bad enemy. I give you your choice of the two."

"You know my choice already. I'd rather have a fellow of your sort as an enemy than as a friend."

"Better think it over," suggested the Bounder. "You know what it means to you if you don't get the Noble prize."

Mark drew a deep breath.

"I feel sure now that I shall get it," he said.

"And why?"

"Because you have come to me and made this offer. You were the only opponent I really feared; and now I do not fear you. If you thought you could beat me in the exam, you would not come here and make me this offer. You are offering peace, because you feel you have no chance of beating me on the Greek paper."

The Bounder bit his lip hard. There was no fellow at Greyfriars who could read his dark and tortuous character so easily and clearly. But Mark Linley saw through him, and saw through his motives, without a doubt.

"You feel sure of that?" he asked, with a sneer.

"I feel sure of it now."

"And you are certain of bagging the Noble prize, and paying your father's debts, and sticking here at Greyfriars?"

"I feel almost certain now."

"Well," said the Bounder slowly, "you won't get the Noble prize. You will have to leave Greyfriars. Nugent and Bull have left, and you will follow."

"Beat me at the exam, if you can," said Mark. "I shall give you a tussle."

"There are more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream," said Vernon-Smith. "I may not be able to beat you at the exam. But it isn't necessary for me to beat you—so long as you lose somehow."

"I don't see how you can make me lose, except by beating me."

"Don't you? Nugent didn't see how I could drive him out of Greyfriars—Johnny Bull couldn't see it, either. But they are gone."

"Do you mean that you will use foul play?" demanded Mark, hotly.

"All's fair in war!" repeated the Bounder.

"That maxim may suit your ideas," said Mark, contemptuously. "Where I come from we say that fair play's a jewel."

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"I've given you a chance," he said. "Leave Wharton alone, and remain neutral—mind your own business, in fact. That's all I ask. In return, I'll stand out of the Noble exam, and leave you a walk-over. That's a fair offer."

"I refuse it. I'm backing up Wharton all the time—as long as I stay as Greyfriars."

"That won't be very long, then."

"What can you do?" said Mark contemptuously. "You can't prevent me from entering the exam. You can't prevent me from doing my best."

"Perhaps I can!"

"You are welcome to, if you can. But I've said enough to you. You are a rotten cad—or rather a criminal. That's the right name for you. You dare not repeat in public what you've said in this study."

"I shouldn't care to, certainly. If you repeat it, I shall deny it."

"I know that." Mark threw open the door of the study. "Will you kindly get out? It's hard work for me to keep my hands off you."

The Bounder lounged towards the doorway. He paused there, and fixed his eyes upon Mark Linley, gleaming with anger.

"I've given you a chance," he said. "I've talked to you fair and square. Now look out for squalls. I'll drive you out of the place—I'll send you back to the slum you belong to. When you're slaving in the factory again, you can remember that I gave you a chance. When you're rotting in a slum, along with your low relations—"

The Bounder did not get any further.

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THE GEM LIBRARY

—Every Wednesday—

Mark Linley's patience was exhausted. He was upon the Bounder with a spring like a tiger. The Bounder was ready, and he struck out furiously as Mark's hands came upon him. His fist crashed into Linley's face, but the Lancashire lad seemed scarcely to feel the blow. His powerful grasp swept the Bounder off his feet.

"You cad!" Mark muttered, between his clenched teeth.

"You cad! Outside!"

The Bounder went whirling through the doorway.

Crash!

With a yell Vernon-Smith rolled over on the passage floor. There was a shout.

"Faith, and what's the matter there?"

Micky Desmond and two or three more Removites came racing up. The Bounder staggered to his feet. He reeled as he shook his fist at the Lancashire lad. "I'll make you pay for this, Mark Linley!" he hissed.

"Go in and wipe up the floor with him, Smithy," said Elliott. The Bounder did not take the advice. He walked away unsteadily down the passage, panting for breath, and went into his own study.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bolsover Major Objects.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry paused before the notice-board in the hall, as the Remove came out after morning lessons the next day. There was a paper on the board, in the handwriting of Vernon-Smith.

"What is it, Bob?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Look here!"

"The Bounder again!"

A crowd of fellows gathered round to read the notice. Harry Wharton & Co. frowned as they read it; but most of the other fellows grinned. It ran:

"NOTICE.—A meeting will be held in the Rag at half-past six to discuss the question of the Noble examination. Chair will be taken by H. Vernon-Smith. Fellows of all Forms are cordially invited to attend and express their views. An important resolution will be submitted to the meeting by H. Temple."

"What is the silly ass getting at now?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I knew there was any question of the Noble exam. at all!"

"Important resolution by H. Temple!" said Tom Brown. "That's Temple of the Fourth! What bee has he got in his bonnet?"

"The bee-fulsness in his esteemed bonnet is terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Well, I shan't go, for one," said Harry Wharton.

"Like the Bounder's cheek to call a meeting without his Form captain's permission," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, it isn't a Form meeting," remarked Bulstrode. "It's a meeting generally. Fellows of all Forms—the Sixth can come if they like!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think I can see the Sixth rolling up to the Rag to hear Smithy in the chair!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Smithy's a silly ass!"

"And a rotten cad!" growled Harry Wharton.

"Faith, and I shall go to hear what it's all about, entirely," said Micky Desmond.

Wharton walked away with Bob Cherry. His face was very angry.

"What does it matter, Harry?" Bob Cherry asked, as he noted the clouds upon the brow of the captain of the Remove.

"Can't you see? Vernon-Smith is going for Mark—this is some scheme to upset him over the Greek exam."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"But I don't see what he can do," he remarked. "Marky is entered for the exam, and Smithy can't stop him."

"A good many of the fellows have been saying that Mark has taken enough prizes," said Harry. "Some of them think he ought to let the Noble alone."

"Oh, what rot!" said Bob, warmly. "That prize was specially founded for poor scholars, and it was caddish of Smithy to enter at all. It's an understood thing that it goes to poor chaps to help pay their expenses, though there's no rule on the matter."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I know that, Bob. But Smithy means to make capital out of it, all the same; and he will have a big following among the fellows—especially those who've entered. And there are some who were going to enter, but dropped the idea when they knew Mark was in it. They knew they wouldn't have a chance against him."

"Well, that's as it should be. I know there isn't a chap at Greyfriars who needs the tin as much as Marky, unless it's young Penfold—and he hasn't entered. The exam's above his weight. Whatever the Bounder says, it can't make any difference to Marky, though."

"No, that's true."

"But if he's going to jaw about Marky, we'd better turn up, and see fair play," said Bob. "If he goes over the line, he'll get something in thick ears."

Meanwhile, some of the more curious of the fellows were seeking information. Tom Brown and Micky Desmond and Hazeldene and several more looked for Vernon-Smith, and found him in the Close. The New Zealand junior clapped him on the shoulder.

"I've just seen your notice," he said.

"You're welcome," said Vernon-Smith.

"What does it mean?"

"What it says!" said the Bounder blandly. "A meeting will be held in the Rag at half-past six to discuss the question of the Noble exam."

"Oh, cheese it! I've read that on the notice."

"Chair will be taken—"

"Oh, shut up! What are you calling the meeting for at all?" demanded Tom Brown. "There ain't any question of the Noble exam, at all."

"Faith, and that's thrue for ye."

"Question whether factory bounders are to be allowed to bag all the giddy prizes in the school," Vernon-Smith explained. "Good!" said Hazeldene. "Something in that."

"Yes, there's something in it—there's rotten caddishness in it," said Tom Brown, in great disgust. "Why can't you let Linley alone?"

"You needn't come to the meeting, if you don't want to," yawned the Bounder.

"I shall jolly well come, and back up the right side," said the New Zealand junior warily. "I'm not going to hear a chap run down without tooting a little bit."

"Come and toot, then," said the Bounder, with unbroken good-humour.

"Oh, rats!"

Tom Brown swung away angrily; but there was no doubt that many of the fellows did not share the views of the young Colonial.

The fact that it was not much use entering for a prize that Mark Linley had entered for, rankled with a good many juniors.

True, those with whom it rankled most were the fellows who were not likely, under any circumstances, to do the hard work necessary for a difficult exam.

Fellows like Hazeldene, and Snoop, and Stott, who escaped work on every possible occasion, were indignant at Mark Linley's undertaking a task that required hard "swotting" for weeks in advance.

Right or wrong there was little doubt that there would be a large gathering in the Rag to discuss the precious "question" the Bounder had started.

Fellows in other Forms besides the Remove felt very keenly about it, and some of them told Vernon-Smith during the day that he might expect them. Even some of the Fifth joined in. There were two Fifth-Formers entered for the Noble exam, and both of them felt that their chance was slim against Mark Linley's. They did not like the idea of being beaten by a junior. And as Potter indignantly remarked, why couldn't the waster be satisfied with the prizes he had bagged already. If his people were hard up, that was no reason why the Greyfriars prizes should be bagged one after another to keep their home going. At least, Potter couldn't see that it was a reason. And many fellows agreed with Potter.

The coming meeting was very much discussed during the afternoon. Curiously enough, one of the fellows who opposed the idea turned out to be Bolsover major, the bully of the Remove himself. Bolsover major had hitherto backed up the Bounder through thick and thin in his campaign against Harry Wharton & Co. But Percy Bolsover was observed to wear a very thoughtful look during the afternoon, and after lessons he joined the Bounder when the Remove came out of the Form-room, looking very serious indeed.

"I've been thinking over that meeting, Smithy," he said abruptly.

The Bounder smiled.

"It will be a big success," he said.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, rather! Quite a crowd of the fellows are up against Linley taking any more prizes," said Vernon-Smith, with a nod. "He hasn't taken such a blessed lot, come to think of it," said Bolsover. "He's been beaten in some of the exams, he entered, you know."

"Well, he's roped in three or four good cash prizes."

"There are fellows here who've taken six or seven."

"Very likely," Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"That's got nothing to do with it. I sha'n't make a point of that in my speech when I take the chair at the meeting."

"No; I suppose you won't."

"You see, he's captured a good bit, even if there are senior chaps who've bagged more," said the Bounder; "and we can lay stress on the fact that he's an outsider—chap who came here on a scholarship in the first place."

"Can we?" said Bolsover major.

"Yes," pursued Vernon-Smith, too busy with his own thoughts to notice, for the moment, the expression upon his companion's face. "That will be a strong point. Sons of gentlemen being left out in the cold because a factory chap wants to take Grey-

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friars money home to his people, instead of his wages from the factory."

"What rot!"

"Well, of course it's rot, between ourselves," agreed Vernon-Smith. "But we must have ammunition, you know, to fire on the enemy. It's no good getting up and saying what a splendid chap Linley is, when we want to down him."

Bolsover laughed.

"The fellows will feel very strongly about this," said Vernon-Smith. "I've got Temple of the Fourth to get a resolution ready for the meeting. We're planning an appeal to the Head to stop Linley's prize-grabbing."

"Look here, Smithy," said Bolsover abruptly. "I've stood by you pretty well, haven't I?"

"You have, Bolsover; and I'm going to stick to you when I become top dog in the Remove. You can always depend on a place in the Form eleven when I skipper it."

"That's, good enough!" said Bolsover. "But about Linley—"

"There will be another vacancy in the team when Linley's gone," said the Bounder with a grin.

"Is he going?"

"He must go if he doesn't get the Noble prize."

"Look here! I want you to stop this about Linley," said Bolsover.

Vernon-Smith stared at him.

"Gone potty?" he asked pleasantly.

"No," said Bolsover major, flushing. "But—but it's not good enough. I'm up against Harry Wharton & Co. as much as you are, and as Linley backs No. 1 Study up, I'm up against him too. But this is too thick!"

"You don't mean to say that you are getting chicken-hearted in your old age, Bolsover?" asked the Bounder banteringly.

"Chicken-hearted or not, I don't like this about Linley," said Bolsover obstinately.

"What on earth does it matter to you what happens to Linley. I've heard you call him a factory cad and a rotten outsider a hundred times."

"I've called you some names, too, in my time," said Bolsover.

"Look here, Smithy, I suppose you haven't forgotten that holiday you and I had in Blackpool last vac.?"

"Ancient history now," said the Bounder.

"Yes; but I can't forget how Linley stuck to me when you made me ill on your filthy champagne, and then left me to shift for myself," said Bolsover frowning. "You got me into a disgusting state, and left me in the lurch."

"My dear chap—"

"I wasn't anything to Linley, but he stood by me like a brick, and wasted a half-holiday looking after me. He was down at Blackpool for the Bank Holiday, and he spent it looking after me. I should be a cad to forget that."

The Bounder yawned.

"Have you been reading a dictionary?" he asked.

"Dictionary!" repeated Bolsover, puzzled. "No."

"I thought you might have. There's a word in the G's—the word 'gratitude'—found only in the dictionary and in novels," said the Bounder lazily. "My dear Bolsover, don't you set up as a grateful little Eric. It would be too funny!"

"I'm not grateful!" yelled Bolsover, as if the suggestion were an insult. "But if a chap treats you decently—chap I'd always been down on, too—why, you're called upon to be a bit decent to that chap."

"You can be as decent to him as you like," said Vernon-Smith. "Go and help him with his swotting, if you like, and kiss him on his baby-brow when he goes to bed. Read out 'Eric,' or 'Bit by Bit,' to him, and follow it up with 'The Goodness of Georgie and the Badness of Bertie.' But don't talk such piffle to me. I don't like it."

"Will you let Linley off?"

"No fear!"

"Not to oblige me?"

"Can't be done!"

"Then don't depend on me to back you up! I'm with you in downing No. 1 Study—Linley and all—but to try to run a chap's prospects in life is too thick for me. I won't have a hand in it."

"Don't!"

"Do you mean that you don't want my help?"

"I can do without it," said the Bounder coolly.

Bolsover clenched his fists.

"Look here, Vernon-Smith—"

"All serene, old fellow!" said the Bounder, in a conciliatory tone. "I dare say you're right in what you say. You had better not take a hand against Linley, if you don't feel inclined to. Stand out of it altogether."

"I shall!" said Bolsover, gritting his teeth. "And look here, Smithy—"

"I'm going in to tea," said the Bounder. "Coming?"

"No!" growled Bolsover.

"So-long, then!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER. The Resolution.

"BEGAD! there's a crowd!"

Lord Mauleverer made that remark as he came into the Rag with Harry Wharton & Co. Mark Linley did not come; he was having additional tuition—extra foot, as the fellows called it—from Mr. Quelch, in the Remove master's study. But Wharton and Bob Cherry, and Tom Brown, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and Micky Desmond, had come in in a body, with several of their friends. They meant to see fair play.

But there was, as Lord Mauleverer remarked, a crowd. Harry Wharton & Co. were not likely to avail much against so large a meeting.

Nearly all the Remove had come in. Half the Fourth were there, headed by Temple, Dabney & Co. Hobson and Hoskins, and Benson of the Shell, with a crowd more Shell fellows, formed a noisy group. Coker & Co. of the Fifth strode in with an air of great importance, and were greeted very cordially by the Bounder. Coker of the Fifth was very lauch down on all juniors; indeed, Horace Coker appeared to believe that his special mission in life was to keep cheeky juniors down. Coker had a special interest in the affair of the Noble exam, too. Not that Coker had entered for the prize. Coker did not know a word of Greek, and he confided to his friends that he didn't want to, either. As Coker said, with feeling and emphasis, he'd as soon study Chinese as Greek, and as soon be shot as either. But his chum and study-mate, Potter, had entered, and Coker felt that he was called upon to acknowledge the claims of friendship. If Potter won the prize, Potter was going to have a new bike, to stand the Fifth-Form footer club a new footer for matches, and to expend the rest of the cash in a series of splendid study brews. Under such circumstances, it was evidently the right and correct thing for Potter to have the prize. The idea of anybody else chipping in and getting it away from Potter seemed to Coker & Co. nothing but pure and unadulterated cheek.

"Half the blessed school here already!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Blessed if I ever knew of any exam. making such a stir before."

"The stirfulness is terrific!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo! There goes the half-hour!"

"Time!" called out someone, and there was a laugh.

Vernon-Smith mounted upon a chair.

"Gentlemen—"

"Hear, hear!" said Temple of the Fourth.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"Gentlemen of Greyfriars—"

"Bravo!"

"I have only a few words to say—"

"Good!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This meeting has been called to consider the important subjects of factory bounders and Greyfriars scholarships."

"Hear, hear!"

"Rats!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Order!"

"Silence for the chair!"

"Rats for the chairman!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Gentlemen of Greyfriars, I suggest that the chairman has now talked enough rot, and that he be forthwith bumped."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen!" said Vernon-Smith, when the laughter had subsided a little, "I appeal to all present, as sport-men, for fair play."

"Hear, hear!"

"Are you ill, Smithy?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Ill? No!"

"Then what on earth are you talking about fair play for? You must be ill, or wandering in your mind. Talk about things you understand."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

"I appeal to the meeting for a hearing!" he shouted. "Anybody who wishes to reply will be given an opportunity in due course. I submit that it is not cricket to interrupt the chairman of a meeting in this way."

"Hear, hear!"

"Order!"

"Silence!"

"Turn 'em out!" yelled Snoopy.

"Order!" roared the Bounder's party, in stentorian tones.

"Gentlemen," resumed the Bounder, "I have only a few words to address to you. But they are upon an important subject—a subject that touches the honour of the old school."

"Bravo!"

"Owing to what I cannot but regard as a bad regulation, scholarship fellows are admitted to this great and glorious foundation—"

"And moneylenders' sons, too!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith turned crimson with rage. The fact that

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"THE GEM" LIBRARY

—Every Wednesday—

Samuel Smith, the millionaire, made some of his enormous fortune in the same line of business as the celebrated Shylock, was a fact the Bounder did not like to hear discussed. And the meeting roared with laughter. They sympathised with the chairman in the object of the meeting, but they were by no means unwilling to see the millionaire's son taken down a peg or two, at the same time.

"Order!" shouted Bulstrode. "Fair play! No interruptions!"

"Silence!"

"If we treat scholarship bounders civilly, I think that's all we're called upon to do," said Vernon-Smith, resuming his speech. "Are we called upon to sit quiet while they bag prize after prize, cash after cash, and leave us nothing?"

There was a roar.

"No!"

"Shame!"

"Linley came here on a scholarship. Well, nobody grumbled at that. He took a big cash prize soon after he came. We said nothing. He bagged another; and some of us thought that he ought to be satisfied. But was he?"

"No!" yelled Snoopy.

"He has entered for every blessed prize that he had a chance for, or thought he had a chance for! Is the money spent in anything decent—standing feeds to the fellows, or anything of that sort? Does he even spend it in dressing well and keeping up appearances for the honour of the school? No! The money goes! Greyfriars doesn't see anything of it! He bags our prizes and sends them home, as I suppose he used to do with his wages at the factory."

"Shame!"

"Now he has entered for our handsomest prize but one—the Noble prize of twenty-five quid! Gentlemen of the Lower School, I ask you, where is this going to stop? Are we going to see Greyfriars stripped bare by this outsider?"

"No!" roared the meeting. "Never! Yah!"

"Is it time Linley stopped bagging our prizes?"

"Yes, rather! Hear, hear!"

"Is he likely to stop of his own accord?"

"No!"

"Then isn't it up to us, as Greyfriars chaps, to put the stopper on?"

"Yes! Yes! Hurray!"

"Yah!" roared Bob Cherry. "You know that Marky will beat you in the exam, because you've been slacking, you rotter! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gentlemen," said Vernon-Smith calmly, "I regard that taunt as unworthy of a Greyfriars fellow and a gentleman!"

"Why, you—you—" sputtered Bob Cherry.

"But I have a reply ready for that unworthy taunt!" said Vernon-Smith. "And it is this. I have resigned from the contest. I have withdrawn my name from the list of entrants for the Noble exam!"

"What?"

"By Jove!"

"Begad!"

There was no doubt that Vernon-Smith's statement made a great impression. The cleverness of the Bounder, when he chose to exert himself, was well known. After Mark Linley, it was known that he had the best chance at the prize, if he chose to work for it. If the agitation on the subject resulted in the exclusion of Linley, most of the fellows thought the exam would be a walk-over for Vernon-Smith. Most of them had thought that that was his object. His statement caused general astonishment. There was a pause of sheer surprise; and the Bounder took advantage of it to continue:

"I was quite aware that some persons would attribute personal motives to me in this matter. My position, as one of the competitors for the prize, was delicate. There was only one way for me to show my disinterestedness, and to prove that I am acting for the good of the school. That was by standing out of the exam. I have informed the Head that I shall not enter, and my name has been erased."

"Great Scott!"

"Bravo Smithy!"

"Good old Bounder!"

The meeting cheered Vernon-Smith till the Rag rang again. Potter and Bland and Temple and other competitors for the prize, who had feared Vernon-Smith's opposition almost as much as Mark Linley's, were especially loud in their applause. Undoubtedly the Bounder's conduct had a great appearance of disinterestedness.

"Gentlemen, I have finished. My friend Temple, of the Fourth, has a resolution to propose to the meeting. I hope it will be passed unanimously!"

"Hear, hear!"

Temple of the Fourth stepped up.

"Go it, Temple!" roared Fry of the Fourth.

"Oh, rather!"

"Play up!"

"On the ball!"

"Gentlemen," said Temple, "I beg to submit to the meeting—"

"Hear, hear!"

"That this meeting disapproves of Mark Linley's conduct in bagging all the prizes, and thinks he ought to be satisfied with what he's bagged already."

"Hear, hear!"

"And that this meeting shall form itself into a deputation, to wait upon our headmaster, and beg him to erase Linley's name from the list for the exam."

"Oh!"

"My hat!"

The meeting were breathless with surprise at the bare idea. But the very novelty and daring of it caught on. There was a roar.

"Hurrah!"

"Passed!"

"Passed, by George!"

"Nem. con!" yelled Bulstrode.

"You silly asses!" roared Bob Cherry, jumping on a chair.

"I protest! I——"

"Yah!"

"Dry up!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Shove him over!"

"I protest!" roared Bob Cherry. "You're a set of silly asses! Smithy's a rotten cad! Temple is a babbling jabber-wock! Yah! I say—Ow!"

Crash!

The chair was kicked over, and Bob Cherry sprawled upon the floor. He rolled breathlessly under the feet of the excited crowd as they marched out of the Rag under the leadership of Vernon-Smith, to "deputate" to the Head of Greyfriars.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Deputation.

DR. LOCKE, the Head of Greyfriars, was in his study. The Head was very busy. He was going over the paper for the Noble exam., getting out the "final edition," so to speak, which was to be sprung upon the unhappy competitors. He paused in his work, and looked up as there came a sound of many footsteps in the passage.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Dr. Locke. "What ever is the matter? It sounds as if the whole school were coming here!"

As a matter of fact, it was something very like it.

The trampling footsteps stopped outside the door of the Head's study, and there was a buzz of whispering voices.

"Dear me!" said the amazed doctor.

He put the papers he had been working upon out of sight. It would not do for any intended competitor to see them in advance. There was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" the Head called out.

The door opened, and the deputation swarmed into the study. Vernon-Smith and Temple came in first, and after them came Coker & Co., of the Fifth, and Hobson, of the Shell, and then a crowd of other fellows. Behind them appeared a thicker crowd, swarming in the passage.

The Head of Greyfriars gazed at them in utter astonishment.

"What ever is the meaning of this?" he exclaimed. "Vernon-Smith! Temple! Coker! What does this—invasion mean?"

"If you please, sir——" said Temple.

"You see, sir," began Coker.

Vernon-Smith held up his hand.

"Gentlemen, allow your chairman to speak!"

"Oh, go ahead! Cut it short!" said Coker.

"Pile in, Smithy!" came a shout from the passage.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head. "I really do not understand. You are interrupting my work, and wasting my time."

"Dr. Locke!" said Vernon-Smith, who had his speech ready. "Pray excuse this interruption. We are a deputation, sir."

"A—what?"

"A deputation, representing all Greyfriars, sir. Half the school has come, and the other half is in full sympathy."

"Hear, hear!" came from the crammed passage.

"But what is it about?" exclaimed the bewildered Head. "I do not understand. Do you mean to say that there is something amiss with the food arrangements?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Not at all, sir!"

"It's the Noble exam., sir."

"The Noble examination!" repeated the Head. "It is too late for names to be entered now, and this is not the way, in any case, to——"

"It isn't that, sir."

"Then what is it?" said the Head testily.

"We want to protest, sir."

"Protest!"

"Yes, sir."

"Hear, hear!" came in a roar through the open doorway.

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And some enthusiastic fags stamped on the floor by way of emphasis.

"Pray allow me to explain, sir," said Vernon-Smith.

"I shall be very glad if you will do so immediately," said Dr. Locke tartly.

"Very well, sir! I have resigned, and am standing out of the exam——"

"I am aware of that."

"So that I can act in a disinterested way, sir, in taking up this position. I am chairman of this deputation, which has come to you to enter a protest on the subject of the Noble exam., sir."

"Hear, hear!"

"Among the names entered, sir, is that of Mark Linley."

"Well?"

"Linley came here on a scholarship, sir. He bagged that! Since then, he has bagged several valuable prizes. We don't deny that Linley is clever, and he swots harder than any other chap at Greyfriars. But what we think is, that one chap—especially a scholarship chap—oughtn't to be allowed to bag prize after prize, while other fellows are left out in the cold. It's discouraging. Lots of fellows would like to enter, but they see Linley's name down, and they stand out. We think, sir, that after a time a chap who always swots and bags prizes, ought to stand down and give other fellows a chance."

"Hear, hear!"

"So we think, sir, that if you will be kind enough to take the matter into consideration, you may see your way to exclude Linley from the exam. this time, and give the other fellows a look-in!"

"Hear, hear!"

Dr. Locke rose to his feet.

His brow was dark and frowning, and his eyes were gleaming with anger.

"Do you mean to say seriously, Vernon-Smith, that you have come to me with this impudent request?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder, unabashed.

"Don't see that it's impudent, sir," said Temple of the Fourth. "We don't think it's cricket for Linley to bag all the prizes worth having."

"Linley works for the examinations, and any other boy is free to do the same," said the Head, frowning. "Linley, too, is especially entitled to enter for this prize, as it was founded for poor scholars."

"But, sir——"

"I regard this as impudent, unfeeling and unmannerly," said the Head severely. "I have a great mind to punish you all."

"Oh, sir!"

"Leave my study at once!"

The deputation looked at one another. The shouting in the passage died away. The fellows had not known how the Head would take it. But he had certainly taken it very badly indeed. The usually kind and good-tempered old doctor had cut up very rusty.

Vernon-Smith was the only member of the deputation who retained his coolness. The other fellows all wished themselves well out of the Head's study.

"Then Linley is not to be excluded, sir?" asked the Bounder.

"Certainly not!"

"But, sir——"

"If you say another word, Vernon-Smith, I shall cane you!"

That was enough even for the Bounder.

The deputation crowded out of the study.

Temple closed the door, and the juniors in the passage looked at one another in dismay.

"My hat!" murmured Temple. "The old bird has cut up rough, and no mistake."

"Made me feel rather rotten with his eye on me," confessed Coker. "It was a rotten idea of yours, after all, Smithy!"

"I don't see it. We've done our duty," said the Bounder loftily.

Coker grunted.

"Oh, don't Eric me," he said crossly. "We've made giddy asses of ourselves, you mean! The Head doesn't seem to think it's out of the way for Linley to enter, either. I dare say he's right."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Bland.

"Oh, the Head backs Linley up because he swots," said Vernon-Smith. "He'd like to see us all swotting on half-holidays over filthy Greek, instead of playing footer."

"Br-r-r-r!"

"If Linley played footer more, and bagged a few less prizes, he might have got that goal yesterday, instead of getting us licked by the Courtyard cads," said Stott.

"Something in that," said Snoop.

"Oh, rather!"

"Well, the game's up now," said Potter, "we can't do anything after the Head's put his hoof down. Linley will go in—and win!"

Harry Wharton & Co. met the disappointed deputation as they returned.

"Well, what did the Head say?" asked Bob Cherry, with a grin.

"Oh, rats!" growled Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you talk him over, Smithy?" asked Tom Brown, laughing.

"No," said Vernon-Smith. "I fancy he feels the same as we do about it; but he's sticking to the rules."

"Rot!"

"Gentlemen," said Vernon-Smith, "keep together. The work of the deputation is not finished yet—not by long chalks."

"What is there to do now?" asked Coker.

"We've deputed the Head, and he won't hear us. Well, I think we ought to depute Linley. Although he's only a factory bouncer, he may have a rag of decency in him, and when he knows how the whole school looks on the matter, he may stand out."

"Catch him!" growled Potter.

"Well, at least it will show him what we think of him, if he sticks to it."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"Good!" said Coker. "Let's go and talk to him. We can talk plainer to him than to the Head, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on!" shouted the Bouncer.

"Follow your leader!" chuckled Bulstrode.

"Right!"

"Look here, you silly asses!" exclaimed Wharton angrily.

There was a roar.

"Shut up!"

"Get out!"

"Go home!"

It was impossible for Harry Wharton & Co. to stem the tide. They were brushed aside by the excited juniors, and the numerous deputation, led by the Bouncer, swarmed away to Mark Linley's study in the Remove passage.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Visitors for Linley.

MARK LINLEY had finished his "extra toot" with Mr. Quelch, and returned to his study with his books. The Lancashire lad was in a calm and almost happy frame of mind. He had been working hard with Mr. Quelch, and the Remove-master had had a word of praise for him. And he had had a word of encouragement, too. Mr. Quelch was a "Grecian" of great gifts, and the Greyfriars fellows who took Greek as an extra came mostly under his hands. Mark Linley could not afford extras, as his scholarship did not provide for them. But Mr. Quelch was only too glad to give up some of his spare time to help a lad who has keen to get on and distinguish himself. The mere fact that he took up Greek as a study, without being forced to it, recommended him to Mr. Quelch; and the Remove-master did everything he could to encourage and help him. The "extra toot" cost Mark nothing—nothing but hard work. And that he was used to. Some of the Greyfriars

fellows regarded the school work as hard, and especially if they had Greek. It made Mark smile. He had worked in a factory from his early years, and he had tasted the stern realities of life outside school walls. The work of the exam. was not easy, but it was nothing to what he had done for a pittance in earlier days.

Mr. Quelch had dismissed him with words of encouragement. He had told Mark that he had every chance of success, if he continued to work for the exam. as he had started. And Mark meant to do that. He came back to his study feeling lighter-hearted than he had felt for a long time. It looked as if he would win the reward of his labours, that the Noble prize would be his, his home would be saved, and he would be able to stay at Greyfriars to finish out the term of his scholarship.

He had sat down to his table to work, when the tramping of the deputation was heard in the Remove passage. Mark had heard some of the noise, and he knew that there was a meeting in the Rag, but he had paid no attention to it. He had more important matters to think of. He closed his ears to the noise, and started work, till the tramping ceased outside his own door.

He understood then. It meant visitors for him.

Bang!

Crash!

The door flew suddenly open.

Vernon-Smith & Co. crowded in. In a moment the study was swarming with excited fellows, and the passage outside was swarming with more. Vernon-Smith was not so prominent as he had been in the Head's study. He had worked the fellows up to a high pitch of excitement, and he was willing to leave them to "rip."

Mark Linley rose to his feet. His face flushed a little, but he faced the invaders with perfect calmness.

"What's wanted?" he asked.

"You are!" roared Coker.

"Yah!"

"Factory bouncer!"

"Prize-hunter!"

"Yah!"

It was a roar from outside. Mark Linley's face was crimson now. He understood the work of the Bouncer.

"Will you tell me what you want, you fellows?" he asked quietly. "I'm busy now, I'm doing extra work as well as my prep."

"Extra work for the exam.!" sneered Snoop.

"Yes."

"You needn't trouble. You're not going in for it.

"That's the music!" said Potter.

"You're standing out, Linley," said Temple.

Mark looked puzzled.

"I don't understand you," he said. "I'm going in for the exam., of course. I've been working up for it all the term."

"Rotten swot!" growled Hazeldene.

"Well, a chap must swot a bit, if he wants to pass an exam.," said Mark patiently. "I hope I haven't neglected anything else, if that's what you're both raving about."

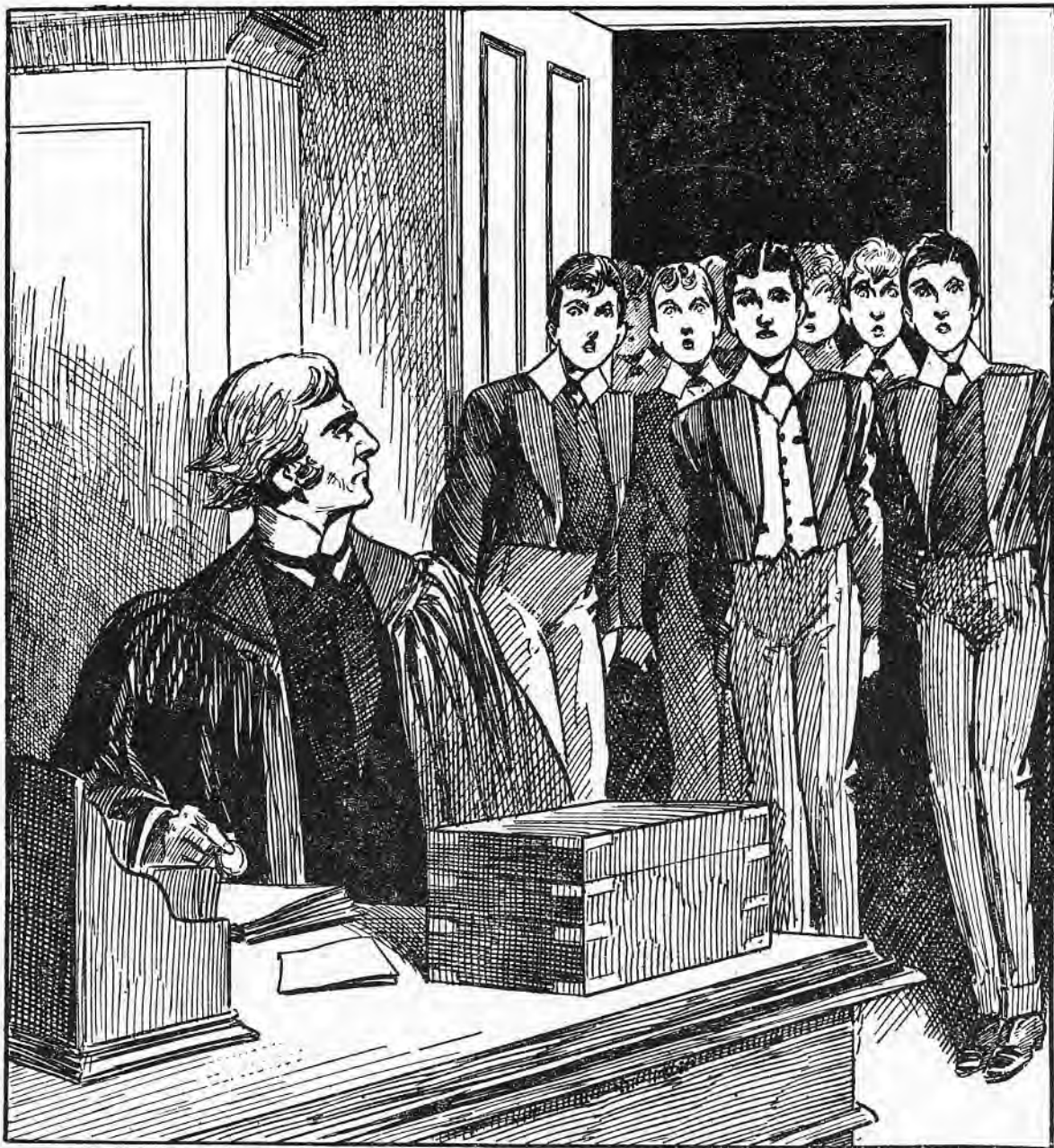
"You chuckled away the footer match yesterday," said Bulstrode.

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No. 7.—COSLING: Mrs. MIMBLE: TROTTER.

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"Do you mean to say seriously, Smith, that you have come to me with this impudent request?" exclaimed the Head. "Yes, sir," answered the Bounder unabashed. The Head's brow grew dark and frowning. "If you say another word, Smith, I shall cane you!" (See chap. 10.)

"That's hardly fair. I took a goal for the side," said Mark. "And you needn't complain, as you objected to my being played at all, Bulstrode."

"The fact is—" said Temple.

"Pitch it to him, Smithy!" shouted the crowd in the passage.

"Temple can pitch it to him," said the Bounder. "Linley will put down bagged everything I say to personal dislike. He can't say that of Temple."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Temple!"

"I'm ready to go it," said Temple. "Linley, we all think that you've bagged enough prizes since you've been at Greyfriars."

"Oh, rather!"

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"Hear, hear!"

"What rot!" said Mark.

"Eh? What?" said Temple, a little taken aback.

"I said it was rot, and it is rot," said Mark. "Every fellow in the school is open to take his chance for the Noble, and I'm taking mine."

"You've bagged too many!"

"I've only taken three, besides my scholarship."

"Well, isn't that enough for any reasonable chap?" demanded Coker.

"Rats! Courtney of the Sixth has taken four since I've been here—and more before I came, very likely. Several fellows have taken more."

"Look here!"

"And a chap is entitled to sweep the whole board, if he can

do it," said Mark. "The prizes are for passing exams. with top marks. That's all you've got to do."

"We're not all filthy swots!" said Dabney.

"I think I play footer as well as most chaps in the Form," said Mark.

"That's not the point. You came here on a rotten scholarship, and since then you've been bagging all the prizes. We want you to stop, and give other fellows a look-in."

"The other fellows can compete on fair terms if they like."

"Not without swotting as you do," said Temple, with a grunt, "and I don't feel inclined to do that, for one."

"Then you can't expect to win," said Mark.

"I expect you to leave off prize grabbing, and give the others a show," said Temple.

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, it's not much good discussing it," said Mark. "I'm not going to stand out of the exam., if that's what you mean."

"The whole Form calls upon you to do it," said Vernon-Smith.

Mark's lip curled.

"The whole Form means you, I suppose," he said. "You are leading the fellows by the nose as usual!"

There was a yell of wrath.

"Bump the cheeky cad!"

"Roll him over!"

"Shut him up!"

There was a threatening movement on the part of the deputation. Vernon-Smith pushed his way forward, and raised his hand to restrain his followers.

"Gentlemen, no violence!"

"Rats!" roared Coker. "The rotter's going to stand out of the exam., or we'll rag him baldheaded!"

"Hurra!"

"Rag him!"

"Wreck the study!"

"Chuck his rotten books into the fire!"

"Bump him!"

The Bounder's eyes gleamed. The mob of excited fellows were at the right pitch now. They were ready for any lawless act directed against the scholarship junior, but it was not the Bounder's game to render himself conspicuous in lawlessness. The ragging could be done without his assistance—he could retire with the credit of having attempted to save the victim.

"Gentlemen—"

"Shut up, Smithy! We're going to bring him to reason!" yelled Trevor.

"Yes, rather," said Temple. "He stands out of the exam., or we rag him."

"Hear hear!"

"I protest!" said Vernon-Smith. "Hold back! Listen to me a minute! If Linley persists in defying the whole Form, the fellows of other Forms as well, and keeping on like a greedy rotter, we can't possibly stop him. We can't do anything—he's got the upper hand of us, and he can do as he likes."

There was a yell.

"Can he?"

"We'll jolly well show him!"

"Get out of the way, Smithy, or we'll rag you too!"

"Oh, rather."

"But look here, you fellows——" appealed the Bounder.

"Oh, you buzz off!" exclaimed Coker, losing all patience. And he seized the Bounder by the shoulders and swung him towards the doorway. Many hands were stretched out to shove the fellow who presumed to stand between the raggars and their victim, and Vernon-Smith was hurled breathless and dishevelled into the passage.

He staggered away gasping for breath, and was brought up by a hand on the shoulder. Harry Wharton had seized him.

"What are you doing now, you cad?" Wharton exclaimed. Vernon-Smith panted.

"They're going to rag Linley!" he said. "I've tried to stop them—"

"Liar!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"You can ask any of the fellows, if you don't believe me," he said. "I've done my level best, but they won't listen to me. I can't say I blame them; but I've tried to stop them. Try it yourself, and see if they'll take any notice of you."

"I jolly well will try it!" said Wharton, between his teeth. "Line up, you fellows!"

And the Famous Co. lined up and made a rush down the Remove passage towards Study No. 13. There were half a dozen of them, and they were the best fighting-men in the Remove. But they had no chance of penetrating the thick crowd outside Linley's study. The fellows were wedged together, and they did not yield an inch. And it was not only Removites the Co. had to deal with, but Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows and Fifth-Formers. They were hurled back breathless and panting. And meanwhile, in Mark Linley's study, the raggars had started operations.

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THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Rag.

THE departure of Vernon-Smith was followed immediately by uproar in No. 13 Study. The deputation had had to retire peaceably from the Head's study. But Mark Linley was a very different person. True, he was a sturdy and plucky lad, and could have accounted for any of the raggars in a fair fight, even the Fifth-Formers. But it was not a question of a fight.

Mark Linley was, for the moment, the most unpopular fellow in the school. The boys did not reason the matter out very clearly. They only realised that here was a fellow who had bagged a good many prizes, and was intent on bagging more. He was a "swot"—the Greyfriars name for a reading fellow; and swots were not popular. Then there was the old prejudice against the scholarship junior; and there was the fact that, owing, of course, to his "swotting," no other chap had a chance against him for the prize. The general impression was that it would only be the handsome thing for Mark Linley to bow to the will of the majority, and stand out of the Noble exam. Mark Linley was not likely to do it. He needed the prize—how bitterly he needed it only Vernon-Smith knew, as well as Mark and his friends.

His whole career at school was at stake, and he was not likely to sacrifice that to a prejudice on the part of the anti-swots. And indeed, once he felt himself persecuted, and had his back up. Mark Linley was the last fellow in the world to yield, especially to threats. In spite of his quiet ways, his pleasant manners, there was the grim determination of the North Country in his blood. He might break, but he would never bend.

He stood like a rock now, his shoulders squared, his lips set, his eyes gleaming. His hands were clenched hard. The odds were very great, but he did not count them.

The raggars surged forward—they were swarming in the study. They surrounded the table, and fists were shaken in the Lancashire lad's face, and angry voices shouted at him on all sides.

"Are you going to chuck it?" yelled Temple.

Mark shook his head.

"Will you stand out of the exam. and let the prize alone for once?" howled Potter.

"No!"

"Are you going to back up against all the Remove, and the Fourth, and the Shell, and the Fifth, you young ass?" demanded Coker.

"Yes, if necessary!"

"Bump him!"

"Rag him!"

Mark's hands clenched harder as the fellows surged closer round him. Not a hand had been laid upon him so far; his look was discouraging. It was pretty clear that the Lancashire lad would not take it "lying down."

Snoop started with the books upon the table. He seized a Greek Grammar, and opened it, and grasped the leaves to tear them out.

"Go it, Snoopy!" exclaimed Hazeldens. "Muck up his rotten books, and then he can't swot."

"Hear, hear!"

Mark's eyes blazed.

"Put that book down, Snoopy!" he said between his teeth.

Snoop hesitated. Singly, he would as soon have encountered a champion of the boxing ring as Mark Linley. But there was safety in numbers. The other fellows howled encouragement to Snoopy, and with a defiant laugh he started tearing the grammar. Mark grasped the book and pulled at it, and Snoopy pulled back.

"Let go!" said Mark.

"Rats!"

"I shall hit you if you don't!"

"Rats!"

Biff! Right upon Snoopy's chest came the right-hander, and the sneak of the Remove rolled over on the carpet among the feet of the raggars. He gave a roar as he disappeared. Mark laid the book on the table. It was snatched up again in a second by Stott, who started tearing the leaves. Stott fell across Snoopy with the book in his hand, yelling.

Trevor caught the book up and hurled it into the fire, and jammed it down with his foot.

Mark made a spring to save it, and Coker caught him as he swung him back.

"Let go!" yelled Mark.

Coker grinned good-humouredly.

"Take it easy, kid," he advised. "You've got to stand out of th exam. or be shoved out. That's your choice."

"Will you let me go?" panted Mark.

"No fear!"

"Then take that!"

Coker took it—with his nose. He gave a roar and staggered back, and Mark wrenched himself free. Then he rushed at Trevor. Trevor, still jamming down the book in the fire with his heels, put up his hands, but his hands were not of much use to him. Mark's attack swept him off his feet, and he collapsed into the fender, yelling with anguish.

"Ow! Rescue! Ow!"
Trevor did not yell for rescue in vain. The ragers closed in on Mark on all sides.

"Collar him!"
"Bump him!"
"Hands off!" yelled Mark.
"Ha, ha, ha!" He's going to lick the lot of us!" roared Bulstrode. "Ha, ha, ha,"

"Collar the cad!"
"Down with the factory bounder!"
Mark's blood was now up. He hit out with all his strength—hard, straight blows, and in spite of the odds he held his ground for some minutes. Potter and Greene of the Fifth rolled on the carpet, and Hobson of the Shell rolled over them. Hazeldene and Elliott joined them there. But then many hands were laid on the Lancashire lad, and he was dragged off his feet by sheer weight of numbers.

"Crash!"
Mark Linley went down, with a pile of the ragers on top of him. He was still struggling, but he was pinned down by weight. There was a roar.

"Sit on him!"
"Make Bunter sit on him!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Bunter! Bunter!"
"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, blinking into the study, "I'm quite willing to lend a hand. I was going to enter for the Noble myself, you know, only—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Shove him on the factory cad!"
Bunter was plumped down on Linley's chest. Trevor stood on his legs, and Stott and Snoop held his arms. A couple of other fellows lent their aid, and the Lancashire lad was quite helpless. Horace Coker was on his feet now, mopping his nose ruefully. His nose was streaming with red, and his handkerchief was rapidly being transformed into a limp rag. But Coker kept his good temper.

"Don't hurt him," said Coker. "He's a plucky young beggar, anyway. Don't hurt him; but hold him tight while me muck up the study."

"Oh, rather!"
"We've got him!" grinned Snoop.
"I don't think he'll find it very easy to shift this little lot—especially Bunter."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mark Linley struggled, but he could hardly move a limb. He was helpless. The ragers set to work in earnest now.
"Rescue!" shouted Mark, in the faint hope that Harry Wharton & Co. might be able to come to his aid. He knew they would help him if they could.
There was a sound of scuffling and shouting in the passage. The Co. were doing their best—but they were attempting the impossible. The odds were too great. Bob Cherry's stentorian voice could be heard.

"Let us pass, you cads! Ow! Ow! I'll smash you for that, Benson—lemme get in my study!"

"Clear out!"
"Yah!"
"Shove them back!"

The scuffling died away. It was evident that Harry Wharton & Co. had been repulsed. There was no chance of rescue for the scholarship lad, unless the prefects came upon the scene. The terrific uproar was certain to bring masters or prefects up to the Remove passage sooner or later. But they would not come in time to prevent the ragging.

"Those cads have cleared off!" panted Potter. "Now rag this factory bounder!"

"Hear, hear!"
"Lock the door," said Coker. "If any prefects come, we won't hear 'em—till we're finished, at any rate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
The door was promptly locked. There was still a big crowd in the passage—but quite a dozen fellows had crammed themselves into the study for the ragging. Coker picked up Liddell and Scott from the table, and held it up for the Lancashire lad to look at.

"Now, Linley," he said, "we've made up our minds that you're not going to swot us out of all the giddy prizes. You understand?"

"Go and eat coke!"
"Will you give your word to stand out of the exam?"
"No!"
"Last time!" said Coker.
"Rats!"
"Then here goes for a beginning!"

And Liddell and Scott's lexicon was jammed into the study firegrate. Mark Linley watched it go, almost fascinated by the sight. That expensive lexicon was a necessity to him, and it had meant a pinch to buy it at all. It was gone now. Greene of the Fifth stirred it up with the poker, and jammed it down and the leaves blazed and flared.

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"All the blessed Greek you can find," said Coker—"books, papers, everything—all the rotten Greek there is in the study."

"Yes, rather!"
"Hear, hear!"

The ragers were very thorough. Greek books, Greek exercises and even the written sheets containing Mark's own work, disappeared into the fire, and were stirred up into flames. The Lancashire lad watched the destruction of his property with stony eyes. He could have cried as he watched it. How was he to work after this?

"I think that makes an end of the Greek," said Potter, with a grin. "May as well wreck the rotten study while we're about it."

"Hurrah! Pile in!"
The juniors were too excited to care what damage they did now. The table was rolled over, the ink poured into the grate, the cupboard was emptied and the contents scattered over the study. It did not take long to reduce No. 13 to a perfectly hopeless state. Then Coker unlocked the door.

"May as well clear now," he said. "This will want a lot of explaining if a prefect comes along asking questions."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
And the ragers crowded out.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton Lays Down the Law.

MARK LINLEY was left alone.
He rose to his feet, breathless, panting, exhausted by his vain resistance to the ragers. The study was a scene of utter confusion. The grate was piled with the smoking remains of the burnt books and papers.

Mark looked round him with a miserable face. He was too miserable now even to be angry. A sense of utter desolation came upon him.

He tried hard to force back the tears from his eyes.

There were footsteps in the passage—the door opened—Harry Wharton & Co. came in. They were looking very dishevelled and dusty, and all of them bore the signs of combat upon their faces. They had done their best, but the odds had been too great. Bob Cherry uttered a roar of wrath at the sight of the interior of his study.

"The cads! They've wrecked the place! The rotters!"

"The rotterfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "My esteemed chum, Marky, I am very-funny sorry."

"Have they hurt you, Marky?"
Mark shook his head.

"They've mucked up the place," remarked Tom Brown. "We did our

best to come in and lend you a hand, Linley."

"I know you did," said Mark, dully. "It can't be helped. I know you did all you could. But—but they've done me in, this time."

"Never say die!" said Bob Cherry, as cheerfully as he could.

"We'll soon get the study to rights, Marky."

Mark pointed to the grate.

"What have they been burning?" asked Wharton, in surprise.

"My Greek books and papers."

"Oh, the rotters!"

"Faith, and that's rotten intirely!" said Micky Desmond.

"Won't ye be able to do yere work for the exam. now, Marky?"

"The rotters!" said Harry Wharton, drawing a deep breath.

"It was a rotten thing to do! But that needn't make any difference to you, Linley. You can borrow the books. Lots of the fellows have books they can lend you—and Mr. Quelch will lend you his. If they can't be borrowed, we'll buy them. You're not going to be done out of the exam. by a trick like this! Books can be replaced easily enough!"

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry, brightening up. "That's all right, Marky!"

Mark's face had a weary look.

"It's no good!" he said, miserably. "The whole school seems to be against my trying for the Noble. I was a fool to come to Greyfriars! The best thing I can do is to get out."

"Faith, and ye're not having a good time, Marky darling!" said Micky Desmond.

Bob Cherry clapped his chum on the shoulder.

"Buck up, Marky! Never say die!"

"You're not going to give in, Linley!" said Harry Wharton.

Mark made a hopeless gesture. During the struggle, during



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the ragging, he had been defiant and unconquered. But the reaction had set in now.

"What's the good of sticking it out?" he said. "I'm done."
"Rot!" said Bob Cherry, in great alarm. "You can't give in—you sha'n't! I'll jolly well wallop you if you do!"

"Don't give in, Linley," said Wharton. "Can't you see that that's what the Bounder's been playing for all along? He worked up the fellows to do this—though he sneaked out of it before the ragging started. He won't even be punished, I suppose, if there's an inquiry, and the other fellows get caned. But it's his work—from start to finish. He knows you will have to leave Greyfriars unless you win the Noble prize—and he means to drive you out, as he's driven out Nugent and Johnny Bull! You can't let him do it! You've got to fight—fight to the last gasp!"

Mark's eyes gleamed.

"You're right," he said, his face flushing. "I will fight—if it's the last fight I put up at Greyfriars, it shall be a good one! I'll fight it out to the end—and I'll win the Noble prize, if it's in me to win it!"

"Bravo!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"But look here, something ought to be done about this!" said Tom Brown, looking round the wrecked study. "It's altogether too thick. And those books they've burnt—they ought to have to pay for them! How much were they worth, Linley?"

"A couple of pounds or more," said Mark, sadly.

"They ought to be paid for!"

Mark smiled.

"Not much good telling them that."

"You are entitled to complain to the Head if they don't make good the damage they've done," the New Zealand junior exclaimed wrathfully.

"Can't be done, though!" said Wharton, with a shake of the head. "The fellows are wild enough now, and that would give them an excuse for calling Marky a sneak. And, unless a complaint is made, they certainly won't pay up!"

Tom Brown grunted.

"Well, it's rotten!" he said.

"Yes, it's rotten enough."

"It's all right," said Mark. "If I win the Noble prize, I can get a fresh set of books: if I don't, I sha'n't want them."

"Oh, Marky!" said Bob Cherry, wretchedly. "You've got to win it. You can't leave!"

"I think I can win it," said Mark, quietly. "Mr. Quelch thinks so, too, and he knows something about it: he had the drawing-up of the papers last year. If I get a fair chance, I shall win it—and I'm going to pile in hard. If they begin ragging me again—"

"You'd better work with your door locked," said Wharton. "But look here, Linley, you can't be ragged out of the exam. If you don't get a chance to work, you can't mug up the Greek. can you?"

"I suppose not."

"I think I can see Vernon-Smith's little game!" said Harry, with frowning brows. "If your books are destroyed, and your work interrupted, you'll lose at the exam. I fancy he's planning more raggings after this—a regular rag till after the exam., when your chance will be gone."

Bob Cherry clenched his fists.

"I'll smash him, if there's any more raggings here!" he said between his teeth.

"What's the use? The Bounder works them up to it, and keeps out of it himself. If there's an inquiry into this row, he'll be able to say that he tried to stop it—though we know he arranged the whole bizney."

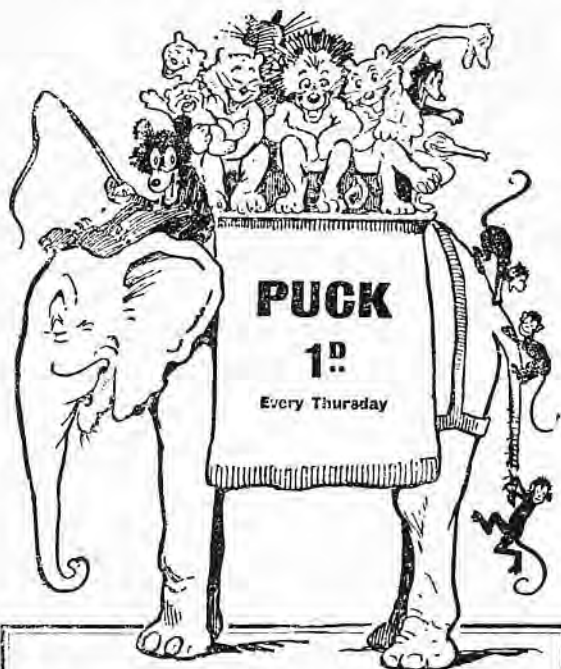
"That's true!" said Bob, despondently. "There really doesn't seem to be any way of keeping one's end up against Smithy. He's too jolly deep for us."

"I'm going to speak to the chaps!" said Wharton, determinedly. "Come on, and back me up—the study can be cleared up afterwards."

"Right you are."

The juniors followed Harry Wharton down to the common-room. They did not know what he intended to do, but they had faith in their leader.

There was a big crowd in the common-room; most of the raggers had collected there, and they were talking and laughing over the



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raid of No. 13. There was a shout as Harry Wharton & Co. came in.

"Hallo! Looking for more trouble?" demanded Bulstrode. Wharton took no notice of his old rival. He mounted upon a chair and raised his hand for attention.

"Fellows of the Remove—"

"Yah!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Go and pal with prize-grabbers!"

"Gentlemen—"

"Go home!"

"Shut up!"

"Gentlemen, I have a few words to say, and I mean to say them. You've listened to Vernon-Smith, and you can listen to me. Mark Linley's study has been ragged, and his books burnt!"

"Oh, rather!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Down with scholarship rotters and prize-hunters!"

Harry Wharton waited for a hull. Then he resumed calmly:

"It won't make any difference to Linley. New books will be found, and he will go on working for the exam.—and he'll win it, too."

"Booh! Go home!"

"Yah!"

"We'll jolly well see that he doesn't win it!" said Temple, with a grin. "We've arranged for the fellows to keep an eye on that study. Every time Linley is found swotting on Greek he's going to be ragged in the same way."

"I thought as much," said Harry quietly. "Whose idea is that?"

"Vernon-Smith suggested it, but we all back it up," said Dabney. "We're not going to have any more of Linley's swotting and prize-grabbing!"

"Very well! You've ragged Linley's study, and you've burnt his books. You know he won't sneak to the Head—you know you'd be punished if he did. You're taking advantage of his being a straight chap who plays the game!"

"Oh!"

"Rot!"

"If he sneaks, we'll scrag him!"

"Yes, rather!"

"He won't sneak," said Harry Wharton quietly. "Linley's not that kind. He won't say a word. But I will!"

"You?" yelled the Removites.

"Yes, I!" said Wharton firmly. "As captain of the Remove it's my duty to put down raggings in the Form. It's my duty to stop foul play!"

"Foul play?" yelled Temple indignantly. "What do you mean?"

"This is foul play—ragging a chap and interrupting his work so that he loses his chance of winning in an exam.," said Harry.

"Rats!"

"Fiddle!"

"Bosh!"

There was a roar of denial and angry dissent, but some of the fellows seemed struck by Wharton's remark, and remained silent. Most of the fellows had acted thoughtlessly, not reflecting on the matter at all; they had left the thinking to their leaders. But Wharton's words went home to a good many of them.

"There's going to be no more of it," said Harry. "Mind, I mean what I say! Linley won't sneak, but I'm not going to see him swindled."

"Swindled?" yelled Temple.

"Yes, that's the word."

"Why! You—you—"

"If Linley is ragged again, in such a way as to interrupt his work—"

"He will be, too!" giggled Snoop.

"If he is, then I shall go directly to the Head and explain the matter to him, and ask for his protection for Mark Linley!" said Harry Wharton deliberately.

There was a general gasp of astonishment. Many of the fellows held the view that a chap never knew what Wharton was going to do next. But nobody, certainly, would ever have dreamed that he would take this line.

"You wouldn't dare!" yelled Bulstrode.

"Wouldn't I?" said Wharton, his eyes gleaming. "Try me, that's all! Mind, a single fellow going into Linley's study to damage anything there—that will be enough! Then we'll have the whole business out before the Head!"

"Sneak!" yelled Stott.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"You can call me a sneak if you like," he said, "but I'm not going to see Mark Linley spoofed out of the prize if he can win it. I'm standing by him, through thick and thin. There's going to be no more ragging. If you can beat Linley in the exam., go in and win; if you can't, take your licking like sportsmen. But there sha'n't be any foul play while I'm round the place to chip in."

And Wharton stepped down from the chair and walked out of the common-room. He left the room in a buzz. The fellows were angry enough; and yet Wharton's words had made an impression. If Linley had complained to the Head, the whole

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School would have condemned him as a sneak without hesitation. But it could hardly be called sneaking for the captain of the Form to appeal to the Head for protection for a Removee who was to be ragged without cessation to spoil his form for an exam. And whether it was called sneaking or not, there was no doubt that Harry Wharton would do it, since he had said that he would. He had passed his word, and all the Remove knew that he never broke it.

"My hat!" said Fry of the Fourth. "This rather puts a damper on the bizney, doesn't it?"

Temple grunted.

"Come to think of it, it was a bit thick," he said. "Smithy rather led us away in this, Fry. I'd rather let the chap alone, far as I'm concerned."

And a good many fellows expressed the same views as Temple. Whether it was a case of reflection and repentance, or whether they did not like the prospect of having to explain the raggings to the Head, we cannot undertake to say. But there was no doubt that when the Lower School went to bed that night, Vernon-Smith's scheme of ragging the Lancashire lad out of the exam, had, as Fisher T. Fish expressed it in the beautiful American language—"petered out." A fact which Vernon-Smith had to realise, and make the best he could of.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Vernon-Smith's Trump Card.

DURING the next few days, Mark Linley worked steadily. He had a gift for hard work, partly the result of his early training in hardship. And he had much at stake now. His whole career was staked on the winning of the Noble prize, and it was worth the greatest efforts he could make. The ragging had not been renewed; the raggars' knowledge that Wharton would carry out his threat stopped that. It caused a considerable amount of bitterness towards Wharton, but he went on his way unregarding it. Some of the fellows, when they were cool, agreed with Wharton's views; and the Bouncer affected to do so. He had opposed the ragging—in words which had urged the raggars on all the more. Now he announced that he was still opposed to it, and that he backed up No. 1 Study in putting down anything of the sort. Give every fellow a fair chance, that was the Bouncer's view—so he declared. If Mark Linley wouldn't have the decency to stand out of the exam., let him win the money—and let the other fellows tell him what they thought of him. So the Bouncer expressed himself. And the fellows were quite willing to take up that view, which saved them from the unpleasant consequences of falling foul of Wharton—which they certainly would have done if they had attempted any further ragging of the Lancashire lad.

Most of the fellows took Vernon-Smith at his word, but the few who knew his secret plans were puzzled. Bolsover major fancied that the Bouncer was regarding his wish that the campaign against the Lancashire junior should be dropped. A couple of days before the date of the examination he made that remark to Vernon-Smith.

Vernon-Smith, Bolsover, and Snoop were in the Bouncer's study at tea. The table was well spread, as it always was. The Bouncer had plenty of money, and although he was very far from being a generous fellow, he spent money like water when it suited him. And he knew there was no surer means of rallying his party round him than by standing unlimited study "brews."

"The Noble exam. day after to-morrow," Snoop remarked.

"Sorry you got out of it, Smithy," said Bolsover major, as he helped himself to ham and poached eggs.

"No," said the Bouncer. "It wasn't worth the fag, anyway."

"Did you really think you'd get Linley to drop it?"

"Well, he ought to have dropped it."

"I don't see it," said Bolsover. "I say, this ham is prime; and that minor of mine poaches eggs a treat! Linley's entitled to enter if he likes, and to take the prize if he can."

"The fellows don't think so," sniggered Snoop. "He will be pretty unpopular in the school if he does rope it in."

"Yes; that's Smithy's doing," said Bolsover.

The Bouncer smiled.

"Yes, I think it's been worked very well," he said. "If Linley gets the prize, it won't be much satisfaction to him."

"Excepting that he'll be able to stay at Greyfriars. He couldn't do it otherwise, if what Bunter said was true."

"That will be a big satisfaction to you, too, I suppose," said the Bouncer, with a sneer.

"Well, I don't want him to be pushed out," said Bolsover obstinately. "He stood by me very decently once, when you left me in the lurch, and I'm not going to forget that. And if that ragging had gone on, as you meant it to, I should very likely have chipped in if Wharton hadn't."

"As I meant it to," said the Bouncer in surprise. "I was against it."

Bolsover major chuckled.

"You can tell the fellows that!" he said. "It's not good enough for me. You meant that Linley should be ragged incessantly, so that he couldn't get any work done for the exam, and then he would have failed. It will be a twister for him at the best. Wharton has knocked your scheme on the head, and you've had to drop it. Now you're making the best of a bad job. What's the good of lying to a chap who knows you, Smithy?"

"Oh, go and eat coke," growled the Bounder.

"I'll eat ham and eggs instead, thanks," said Bolsover major, with his boisterous laugh. "But I'm glad you gave up the idea, Smithy. I asked you to, and I think you were called upon to oblige a pal who's stuck to you pretty tight."

"Well, that's why I did it, but I don't want to make a song about it," said Vernon-Smith, in his most agreeable tone. "I've dropped the whole bizney, and more to oblige you than anything else. So let's say no more about it."

"Good enough," said Bolsover.

There was a very curious expression upon Snoopy's face as he listened. The cad of the Remove was more in the Bounder's confidence than anyone else, though he was far from being admitted to all the plans of the Bounder of Greyfrairs. After tea, Bolsover major left the study, Snoopy remaining behind.

"I suppose you were pulling Bolsover's leg, Smithy," Snoopy remarked, as the door closed behind the bully of the Remove. "You gave up the ragging wheeze because of Wharton, not on Bolsover's account."

The Bounder laughed.

"Of course. Wharton meant what he said, and there's no good in getting into a row with the Head. That's the last thing I want just now."

"And are you going to cry off, then, and let Linley walk off with the prize?" asked Snoopy in astonishment. "Will you be satisfied simply with making the fellows growl at him?"

"Is that likely, do you think?"

"Well, no," said Snoopy, watching him curiously. "But I can't see what other card you have up your sleeve, Smithy. It's only a couple of days now to the Noble exam, and it looks to me as if you've done nothing since the raggings had to be stopped. Mark Linley's got a clear field before him now."

The Bounder's lip curled.

"You asked me to put some tin on Bully Boy for the next race at Liverpool, Snoopy?" he said. "How much do you want on?"

"I was speaking about Linley," said Snoopy, rather nettled at the sudden change of the topic.

"And I'm speaking about the Liverpool races," said Vernon-Smith. "How much do you want on Bully Boy?"

"Put half-a-crown on for me," said Snoopy. "I'll let you have it at the end of the week."

"All serene." The Bounder made a note in his pocket-book. "I'll have the half-crown if you win—you can forget about it if you lose."

"You're a good chap, Smithy."

"I'm a good chap to those who stand by me," said Vernon-Smith. "I'm writing to the bookie I do business with in Liverpool to-night, and I'll mention your little bit. I've got something to put on for Bolsover, too."

"Isn't it a bit risky, Smithy, writing to bookies?" said Snoopy uneasily. "I should think it was safe to deal with Banks at the Cross Keys in Friardale, as you always used to."

"Not since Nugent was sacked for hanging about the Cross Keys," said the Bounder, with a grin. "I have to be very careful now. As long as my tussle with No. 1 Study goes on, I'm not going to give any openings to the enemy."

"Yes, but suppose the man in Liverpool should round on you any time—suppose he gave you away to the Head—you'd be sacked!"

"He dare not!" said the Bounder coolly. "He's under my father's thumb. There are a good many men who have to hop out to whatever tune is called by my pater, Snoopy. That's one of the advantages of being a giddy millionaire."

"I suppose it is," said Snoopy.

"He's a useful man, that man in Liverpool," said the Bounder with a yawn. "Suppose I wanted a letter posted with the Liverpool postmark—there he is! Suppose I wanted a wire sent from a place in Lancashire—there he is on the spot."

Snoopy stared at him open-mouthed.

"What on earth should you ever want a wire sent from Lancashire for when you're at Greyfrairs?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I might."

"Blessed if I can see it, then!"

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"The less you see, the safer for you," he said. "Mind, mum's the word. I've only mentioned it to you so that you'll be on your guard if a telegram should come—"

"Is one likely to come?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

Snoopy drew a deep breath.

"Is that it?" he said. "Is that the trump card—that's going to down the scholarship bounder?"

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"Who knows?"

"But I don't see—" began Snoopy.

"It isn't necessary for you to see, old man," said the Bounder. "Don't say any more—and mind, mum's the word! Finish the tarts, and we'll have a cigarette before we go down."

And the two young rascals were soon smoking with a great appearance of enjoyment—more of appearance than of reality, as a matter of fact!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER

Called Home!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Feel fit?"

Bob Cherry clapped his chum on the shoulder as the juniors came out after dinner on that fated Wednesday—the day of the Noble examination, which was to decide the fate of Mark Linley.

Mark smiled.

"Quite fit, Bob."

"Quite up to form for the exam.?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Quite!"

"Good egg! I hope you'll win!"

"Faith, and so do I, intirely," said Micky Desmond. "How has the swotting gone on?"

"Rippingly," said Mark, with a laugh. "I owe that to you, Wharton. They were going to keep it up and make it impossible for me to study. You stopped all that."

"Fair play's a jewel," said the captain of the Remove.

"Hear, hear!" said Tom Brown. "We'll keep round you, Linley, till it's time to go into the exam. room. There's no telling whether the Bounder mightn't whisk you off and hide you somewhere to keep you out of it."

The Lancashire lad laughed merrily.

"Not much risk of that," he said. "Even the Bounder would draw the line there, I think. But I shall be glad of your company. When I'm alone I get rotten doubts about the result, and that's discouraging."

"Oh, you'll win," said Bob Cherry. "Blessed if I don't think you could pass a Sixth-Form exam. if you liked, Marky."

"Well, hardly that," said Mark. "But I think I could pass this one, given a fair chance—and I've got that! By George! I'm going to put my beef into it, anyway."

"That's the tune!" said Tom Brown.

"Let's have a stroll round the Close, and then you shall sit down and rest till it's time to go into the slaughter-house," said Bob Cherry. "They've got a giddy Oxford professor down for the jabberjee part of the bizney. He's been lurching with the Head, and somebody heard 'em jawing Sophocles to one another. Have you ever heard of the Seven against Thebes?"

"Yes," said Mark, with a smile.

"Was that Sophocles?"

"No, that was Aeschylus," said Mark, laughing.

Bob Cherry yawned.

"Was it? Blessed if I know how you get these things into your head, Marky. Come for a trot: that beats all your giddy Greek."

The chums of the Remove walked round the Close sedately enough. Harry Wharton and Co. were careful to keep with Mark; they could not help fancying that the Bounder might have some card to play at the last moment, some new trick to disable the Lancashire lad on the very eve of success. The Bounder had been lying very low for the last week; but the Bounder was most dangerous when he was lying low, and that he would be content with the harm he had done, and would allow Linley to enter for the prize in peace, Harry Wharton could hardly believe. Yet what he could do now was certainly a problem. The exam. started in less than an hour. Linley was ready for it, in the best of condition. Nothing could postpone the examination, and in forty minutes Mark would be in his place with the other competitors, and all would be going well.

"Half-past two!" said Bob Cherry, glancing up at the clock-tower over the leafless elms. "Begun at three. Better go in and rest a bit, Marky."

"Just as you like, Bob."

They strolled back towards the School House. Trotter, the house page, caught sight of them from the door, and came to meet them. There was a telegram in his hand.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "That for one of us?"

"Master Linley," said Trotter.

"For me?" exclaimed Mark, in surprise.

"Yes, Master Linley."

"Thank you."

Mark took the telegram, his face changing in expression. He very seldom received a telegram. To the Lancashire lad a telegram meant bad news. He remembered his sister's illness, he remembered the family misfortunes, and his heart was heavy as he clipped open the buff-coloured envelope.

He opened the message inside with shaking fingers. He looked at it, and a sharp cry broke from his lips.

The telegram fluttered from his hand to the ground, and Mark Linley staggered back, his face going white as chalk. Bob Cherry's strong arm was flung out to catch him, or he would have fallen to the ground.

Bob Cherry was pale himself.

"Marky, what's the matter?"

"Bad news?" asked Wharton anxiously.

"It's from my father," groaned Mark. "Read it."

Wharton picked up the telegram. The chums of the Remove read it together. It was brief—brief and terrible.

"Mabel very ill. No hope. Asking for you. Come at once. —Father."

"Good heavens!" muttered Wharton. He looked at the telegram again. It bore the name of Mark Linley's town in Lancashire, with the inscription, "Handed in at 1.15." It had taken little over the hour to reach Greyfriars.

The juniors remembered Mabel Linley. They remembered that she had had a serious illness before, and the terrible anxiety Mark had suffered. And now—

"Poor old Marky," said Bob Cherry. "Poor old Marky."

"Mabel!" muttered Mark, with haggard eyes and trembling lips. "Poor little Mabel. Dying. Dying! It—it can't be. It's too sudden. They haven't said anything about her being ill, even. It must be the old illness again. Oh, heavens! The tears were running unchecked down the face of the Lancashire lad, who never cried for his own sufferings. "Mabel! I—I must go at once. When is there a train, do you know? My head's in a buzz."

Bob Cherry's grip was strong upon his arm.

"Buck up, Marky! It can't be as bad as that. You'll find her all right. We'll take you to the station. There's a train at three for Courtfield. You change there, and get the express to London, and then—"

"We shall have to hurry," said Tom Brown.

"The Head must be told."

"But—but—" Bob Cherry gave a cry of dismay. "The exam.!"

"Oh," said Wharton, "I'd forgotten that. The exam.!"

"The exam.!" said Mark, pressing his hand over his sweating brow. "I'm not very fit for an exam, now. Hang the exam. Let it go. Let everything go. I must get home. Home—I was a fool ever to leave it. I must get home." He ran unsteadily towards the house.

Vernon-Smith met them in the doorway. He started at the sight of Mark Linley's drawn and haggard face.

"What's the matter?" he cried.

"You've got your way, you cad!"

said Bob Cherry, between his teeth.

"Marky's out of the exam. His sister's ill, and he's got to go home and miss it. Make the most of that! Get out of the way, you cur!"

"I—I say—I'm sorry—"

"Oh, get out!"

Bob Cherry pushed the Bounder roughly aside. No time was lost. Harry Wharton carried the telegram to the Head to obtain permission for Mark to leave the school at once. Bob Cherry hurried up to the dormitory with him to get the things he needed, and Tom Brown dashed into the tuckshop for a lunch-basket for him to take on the journey—not that Mark was likely to eat much. Not a moment was lost. Within ten minutes after the telegram had been received the chums of the Remove were racing for the station with just time to catch the local train, which in its turn caught the express at Courtfield.

Harry Wharton took four tickets at Friardale, and the chums tumbled into the train with Mark Linley. Mark sat silent as if turned to stone while the train lumbered on. The other fellows were silent too. In the face of a terrible misfortune like this, what could they say? Words were useless, and they did not speak. Mark would not have heard them. Bob Cherry was making queer little noises in his throat, and he kept his face turned away from his friends.

The train rolled into Courtfield. The express was waiting on the opposite platform: there was one minute to change.

"I—I ought to wire," Mark gasped.

"We'll send the wire for you," said Harry. "We know your address. Shall we say, 'Coming at once.—Mark'?"

"Yes, that will do."

Bob Cherry threw open a carriage door in the express. Tom Brown put the lunch-basket and Mark's overcoat in.

"Got your ticket safe, Marky?" asked Bob, in a checked voice.

"Yes, Bob."

Mark sank down in the corner seat, white as death. He shook hands with the juniors.

"God bless you all," he muttered. "You've done your best for me. I shan't come back. This is good-bye. I'm done at Greyfriars, but I shan't forget you. God bless you all."

"Marky—"

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EVERY
MONDAY,

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ONE
PENNY.

The engine shrieked; the train moved.

"Write as soon as you can," shouted Bob Cherry. "Let us know."

"Yes, yes. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Marky, and good luck!"

The express vanished down the line.

The chums of the Remove stood upon the platform, silent, dismayed, with a heavy sense of desolation upon them.

Mark Linley was gone! Fate had played into the hands of the Bounder! Mark Linley was gone home. He had missed the exam., and without the Noble prize he could not come back to Greyfriars. His career there was closed. Mark Linley, the brave hearted Lancashire lad, had fought his last fight, and fought it nobly, but the luck had been against him. Defeated, crushed, and ruined, he was gone—gone to face, perhaps, a misfortune beside which even his ruined career, his ruined prospects, would be as nothing, or less than nothing.

"Poor old Marky," said Bob Cherry, fairly blubbering at last. "Oh, poor old Marky! It's too rotten!"

"Let's get out," said Wharton huskily.

They left the station. Harry Wharton sent the telegram to Mark's father in far-off Lancashire, and then they walked back to the school. There was a gleam of winter sunshine on the old place. On the playing-fields the Fifth were playing the Shell at football amid shouts from the crowd of onlookers. In the Close Nugent minor of the Second was punting about a footer with a gang of fags. In the exam. room the Noble examination was going on—half over by this time. But the Noble exam. had no further interest for the chums of the Remove. Mark Linley was not there!

It was a black half holiday to Harry Wharton and Co.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Wins.

THE day wore away. The Noble examination was over.

The competitors, looking tired and fagged, came out of the silent room. Dusk deepened over Greyfriars. Football was finished; the fellows came in from the playing-fields and the Close.

The story of the telegram was all over the school now. All the fellows knew that Mark Linley had had to leave Greyfriars before the examination started.

Most of the fellows who had taken part in the raggings looked sorry enough now. Even Temple and Potter, and the others who had been relieved of the Lancashire lad's dangerous com-

petition, were sorry.

When Vernon-Smith appeared in the junior common-room a good many grim looks were cast at him. The fellows who were sorry they had been so hard upon the unfortunate scholarship junior were anxious to lay the blame upon somebody else, and most of them agreed that it was all the Bounder's fault. His own staunch follower, Bolsover major, was as bitter against him now as anybody. The Bounder looked perfectly cool, however.

"Here he comes!" said Temple. "Here's the rotter who made us all rag that poor chap! I hope you feel satisfied with yourself now, Smithy."

"Pretty well, thanks," said the Bounder calmly.

There was a howl.

"Faith, and it's ashamed of yerself ye ought to be, ye spalpeen!" yelled Micky Desmond indignantly.

"Rotter!" howled Bolsover major.

"Shame!"

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"It seems to me that you're laying your own sins on my shoulders," he said. "I certainly was against ragging Linley. I said so at the time."

"And you were lying, as you always are," said Harry Wharton bitterly.

"The liefulness was terrific!"

"Cad!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"I'm as sorry for Linley as anybody," said the Bounder coolly. "Only I'm reserving my sorrow till I'm sure it's wanted."

"What do you mean?" said Bolsover major. "You know what was in Linley's telegram from home."

"I know that fellows have had wires sent to themselves before now to call them away from things they had undertaken that they didn't feel like tackling," said the Bounder. "I'd rather wait for further news before I weep over Linley."

"Why, you frightful cad," roared Bob Cherry, clenching his

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ists and rushing towards the Bounder, "do you dare to say that the telegram isn't genuine, that Marky had it sent by his people to dodge out of the exam?"

"I don't say so. I only say I've heard of such things, and I'd rather be certain before I begin shedding tears," said the Bounder, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"You—you scoundrel!"

Wharton dragged his excited chum back.

"Don't touch him, Bob. He's not fit to touch. It would disgrace a polecat to touch him."

"Faith, and ye're right."

Bob Cherry stamped out of the room. He felt that he could not remain there without laying hands upon Vernon-Smith. With most of the fellows Vernon-Smith's cynical explanation of the telegram added to the unpopularity he had suddenly acquired. There were but few who were inclined to believe there was anything in his suggestion. A fellow who knew he was certain to be beaten in a difficult examination might avoid making a ridiculous failure by such a trick certainly, but it was well known that Linley had had, at least, a good chance of winning. Besides, the trick was certain to be discovered, if it was one; it must soon be known at Greyfriars whether Linley's sister was really seriously ill.

Harry Wharton and Co. waited anxiously for news. They were down in the morning before rising-bell, and they waited in the Close for the postman.

There was a letter, as they expected—a letter addressed to Harry Wharton in Mark Linley's hand, and bearing the Lancashire postmark. It was news, and the chums of the Remove gathered round eagerly as Wharton opened the letter. They read it over his shoulder—all at the same time. And this is what they read:

"Dear Harry,—I've got good news—and bad. When I arrived home yesterday, I found that my sister was quite well. She had not been ill, even. Your telegram arrived before me, of course, and it puzzled my people very much. My father had not wired to me at all. He was amazed when I showed him the wire I had received. He had not sent it; he knew nothing about its having been sent. We have made inquiries at the post-office. The wire was sent by a man with a beard—a stranger in the place. That is all we can discover.

"It was a trick, of course—a trick to get me away from Greyfriars. You can guess the reason—the Noble exam. It made me miss the exam., and now I cannot return. I am staying at home now. I am going back to work. My career at Greyfriars is finished. It's my business now to help my people in the only way I can—by working. I'm going to do it. There's nothing else for me to do. You will guess who worked this rotten trick. You know who was plotting and scheming to make me fail in the exam., in order to drive me from the school. I don't know how he worked it. He must have had a confederate in the North here to send the wire for him. But he has beaten me—beaten me by low treachery—and there's no way of bringing it home to him. He was at Greyfriars all the time, and we can't find the man who sent the wire—and if we could, we couldn't prove the connection. It's no good complaining. He has kept his word, and driven me from the school. I'm sorry to leave—sorry not to see you chaps any more. Good-bye to all of you, and thank you a thousand times for all your kindness to me when I was with you!

"Always your pal,

"MARK LINLEY."

There was a dead silence among the Removites as they finished reading the letter. They looked at one another with blanched faces. Wharton was the first to speak.

"The Bounder!" he said.

"The Bounder!" said Bob Cherry. "The Bounder, of course! He's done this! Thank goodness, little Mabel isn't ill,

but Marky's done in! Marky's not coming back! The Bounder has driven him out of the school!"

Harry Wharton clenched his teeth.

"Follow me!" he said.

He hurried into the house. Vernon-Smith had just come down. Harry Wharton & Co. walked up to him, and Wharton held out the letter.

"Read that!" he said.

"Certainly, if you like."

The Bounder read it. A crowd gathered round, attracted by the scene. The Bounder laughed cynically as he finished reading.

"Quite a composition!" he said.

"Is that all you have to say?" asked Wharton.

"What else is there to say? It's as I expected."

"As you expected? What do you mean?"

"The telegram was all spoof," said the Bounder calmly. "Linley's sister isn't ill, as I guessed. He was afraid of the exam.—he knew he couldn't pass against Fifth-Form chaps, and this was his way of getting out of it—a spoof telegram from his father! He seems to be hinting in that letter that some chap did it to injure him. Of course, that's all rot!"

"You did it!" said Harry quietly.

"I?"

"You, you cad—you!" roared Bob Cherry furiously.

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"All the fellows know that I was at Greyfriars all yesterday," he said. "Without having the gift of being in two places at once, I hardly see how I could have sent that telegram, even if I had wanted to."

"You had a confederate—"

"My dear chap, you've been reading the newspapers, and they've got into your head," said the Bounder. "It's too thick, you know!"

"You villain!"

"Draw it mild!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'll tell you what. I believe Linley made his pater send that spoof wire, to get him out of his scrape. He knew he couldn't pass the exam., and he wanted to save his face. But if he brings any accusations against me, I'll have them all out in the open. I'll put it to my father, and start his lawyers on it, and bring a libel action, and give Linley a chance to prove what he says in a court of law! If he can prove anything of the sort, he's welcome to! If he can't, I'll brand him as a liar and a slanderer; and you, too, for backing him up!"

"Hear, hear!" said Snoop.

Wharton put the letter in his pocket. Even he was staggered by the perfect coolness of the Bounder, and he did not know what to say. Bob Cherry did—or, at least, what to do! He made a rush at the Bounder, hitting out with both fists. They grappled, and rolled over in the passage, struggling furiously, Bob Cherry hammering away with all the strength of his powerful arm. They did not separate till Wingate came up with a cane, and dragged them apart, and by that time the Bounder was a sorry spectacle.

It was a nine-days' wonder at Greyfriars. Even the Head did not know what to think, though he did not hear all the matter. The Removites were divided in opinion. Some of them agreed with the Bounder that the telegram was a "spoof" one, sent by Linley's desire, to get him out of failing at the exam; others opined that it might have been a trick of some enemy he had in his native town; but few leaned to Wharton's belief that the Bounder had had a hand in it. Indeed, Tom Brown and Micky Desmond could not take that in, and they said so. Wharton and Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh were the only ones who believed it, and they were left alone in their belief. But whatever was the true explanation, one thing was certain—Mark Linley was gone from Greyfriars, and his old place knew him no more. The Bounder, whether by treachery or by chance, had won the last round, and was the victor in Mark Linley's Last Fight!

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

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OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL STORY. START THIS WEEK!

TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE!

THE STORY OF THE
GREAT MAN-HUNT
BY SIDNEY DREW



Ferrers Lord, millionaire, and owner of the Lord of the Deep.



Prince Ching-Lung, adventurer, conjurer, and ventriloquist.



Nathan Gore, jewel collector and multi-millionaire, Ferrers Lord's terrible rival.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

"BY FOUL MEANS OR FAIR, I'LL WIN!"

Nathan Gore, millionaire and jewel-collector, clenched his hands furiously, and raved like a madman on the deck of the liner Coronation. He had started specially from America in order to be present at the sale-room in London where the costly diamond, "The World's Wonder," was to be put up for auction. "A telegram for Mr. Gore," a voice rang out through the darkness. The American was told the message, and as he listened, his face came over deadly pale, and he gave vent to a terrible oath. The message was: "Ferrers Lord purchased 'The World's Wonder' privately. No bidders. Price unknown." "I'll win yet," shrieked the man. "By foul means or fair, I'll win!"

"THE WORLD'S WONDER."

In the magnificent drawing-room of Ferrers Lord's house in Park Lane was assembled a varied collection of individuals. First of all there was the celebrated millionaire himself, and close to him sat Ching-Lung, a Chinaman, busily engaged in making paper butterflies. Hal Honour, the great engineer, was sipping tea, and Rupert Thurston yawned in a chair. "How much did you pay for that great diamond?" presently asked the latter. The millionaire smiled. "Money and fair words, Rupert," he replied. "By the way, you have not seen it yet?" The priceless gem passed from hand to hand. A thousand fires burned in its crystal heart; a thousand colours, ever changing, leaped from every facet. "I guess it would have been more money and less fair words if old Gore had turned up," remarked Ching-Lung sagely.

"I'LL TAKE THE CHALLENGE!"

The millionaire's house was wrapped in silence. A faint light shone from the drawing-room. Ching-Lung pushed open the door, then a cry broke from him. A man lay face downwards on the floor. There was a ghastly crimson stain on his collar. The man was Ferrers Lord. "Ching—the diamond!" came a hoarse voice. Ching opened the drawer which Lord indicated, but there was no diamond there. But a message had been left behind: "To Ferrers Lord,—Knowing that you would not sell 'The World's Wonder,' I have taken it. Do your worst. I defy you. The stone is mine.—Nathan Gore." The millionaire rose to his feet. "I take the challenge, Ching," he said. "I'll hunt him down and bring back my diamond." He begins the chase after the diamond thief, and for five months pursues Nathan Gore through Europe, New Zealand, Teneriffe, and back to London, never once being able to catch him up. While in London, he hears that Nathan Gore has bought from the Dutch a remote island named Galrin. Lord immediately purchased an island four miles south of Gore's, christening it Ching-Lung. Learning that Gore is fortifying his island, and has actually fitted out warships for his own use, Ferrers Lord arranges a hurried expedition, and in a few hours the whole party are aboard the Lord of the Deep, bound for the island of Ching-Lung. When they arrive they visit Nathan Gore's island, and find that it is well protected by forts. Ferrers Lord sends Rupert Thurston to interview Gore, taking word that unless Gore returns the diamond, and publishes an apology in every newspaper in the world, he will take further steps. "If you refuse his terms," says Thurston, "it will be a declaration of war. Man to man he will fight you." "Man to man!" screams Nathan Gore. "He shall have war—he shall have war!"

(Now go on with the story.)

Nathan Gore Refuses Terms of Peace.

A man entered with an envelope in his hand. Nathan Gore tore it from him and opened it. He danced with mad delight.

"Out of my ship, or I'll string you up, Thurston!" he screamed. "War! You shall have it! Hackerden, send the captain to me! Take that back to your own cur of a master!"

He crumpled up the paper and dashed it into Thurston's face.

"Thank you!" said Rupert. "And thank your luck for once that you are an old man."

"Out of my ship!"

Rupert picked up the paper, and turned on his heel. He entered the launch. They were hailed.

"Sorry," drawled the voice of Captain Joel F. Hackerden, "but you can't leave the bay for an hour. That's the order. And if I was you, stranger, I wouldn't try it. You might cause yer families unnecessary pain by bein' missin'."

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Them torts ain't built for show, and the guns ain't toys. Besides, it 'ud be a pity to sink a purty little craft like yours."

Rupert bowed to the inevitable. There was another small steamer in the bay. He had noticed her smoke when he had left the Lord of the Deep.

Both cruisers were in a state of bustle. Evidently something unusual had happened. Smoke began to pour from their funnels.

"Cast off yer durned string," shouted the captain, "and back away!"

Maddock untied the hawser. The winch began to rattle, and up came the cruiser's chain, with its tangle of rubbish dangling from stern and flukes.

The launch danced and rocked in her foaming wash as the screws pounded the water. She cleft away seawards, with the second cruiser only a biscuit-throw behind her, and drenched in her smoke.

Honk, honk, honk, honk!

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The launch scuttled at the warning siren of a huge tramp that was moving down on them astern.

"Yankee concrete!" said Joe. "That's her cargo; you can tell it by the dust."

"But what's all the blithery fuss about?" growled Maddock. "Where are they goin'?"

Honk, honk! came a shriller note.

It was a tug, towing a string of lighters and wherries.

"Great Jupiter!" said Thurston. "I forgot the paper!"

He unfolded the crumpled cablegram, and read:

"Gore, Galpin Island. (To Perth, W.A., and thence by special boat, as ordered.)"

"Christiana,—Your bid has been accepted. Deeds handed over to me as your representative. Island yours from date. Price enormous, but fulfilled instructions and bought. Cheque paid down. Cable broken. Tried consult you over heavy price, but failed. Sending this via Perth and special despatch boat. SOMERSET."

Thurston read the message twice before he fully grasped its meaning. It meant that Nathan Gore had bought the wretched swamp of an island that was too insignificant to be given a name on any map; it meant that it came from his arch-enemy Ferrers Lord; it meant that he had paid a fabulous sum for it; and it meant, further, that the Yankee millionaire, fearing an attack from that direction, was going to move heaven and earth to fortify it.

Rupert leaned back among the cushions, and laughed aloud. "Diamond cut diamond," he thought; "but Lord is the harder stone."

"Signal, sir!" said Maddock, shading his eyes. "From the fort, sir!"

"What does it say?"

"Launch may sail," said Maddock, slowly reading the message of the flags.

"Set her going, then."

The launch glided between the forts, Maddock rudely putting his thumb to his nose and spreading out his fingers as a farewell salute to the sentries.

The Stolen Duff—Gan-Waga, though desperately Wounded, Compels the Enemy to Surrender.

Yard-of-Tape was making plum-duff. It was a glorious plum-duff, as big as a fire-bucket, and all studded over with raisins as thickly as buttons on a page's coat. Its surface glistened and winked, and Gan, who was watching, uttered a deep sigh as the chief wrapped a cloth round it and hid its beauties.

"Nebber sees nothings morer butterfuller!" said Gan. "What yo' goin' to do with him now?"

"A-r-r! He shall in ze pot boil for ze great long time of many hour," explained the cook. "Ze spotted cur—ze spotted dog cannot boil too much. He shall be ze grand treat for you, and he shall melt ven you haf bited him. A-r-r! Ze pauvre English cook cannot make ze spotted chicken. Zey haf no brains, mon cher Gan-Waga, zey are cripples!"

Humming a tune, Yard-of-Tape tied up the pudding and placed it in an enormous saucepan. He put on the lid, and then sat down to enjoy a well-earned cigarette.

"I vill stretch ze legs of me," he said, with a yawn. "I vill talk to ze man at ze wheel, and zen I vill betake mineself vonce more hithaire back, and prepare ze partridges for ze saloon."

The chef set his long legs in motion, and strolled away to have a chat with Joe, the carpenter.

Gan stared lovingly at the big pot, gloating over the thought of dinner-time.

"Butterful!" he murmured. "Good 'nough, lovely! Ooh! I never stops eatin' for never mores. Oh, mi! All suet and raisins insider hims. Ooh!"

Gan drew in his breath rapturously.

"What are you gloating over, Blubberbiter?"

Ching-Lung had slipped in noiselessly, and was squatting on the table, with a carving-knife balanced point downwards on the tip of his nose.

"Spotted bow-vows, Chingy," said Gan. "Most butterfuls. Hims in dere."

"In the pot?"

"Yes; bigs as b'loon, Chingy, and all fulls of plumses. Yo' squints at him, Chingy."

Ching-Lung, with one quick jerk of his head, sent the knife whizzing through a loaf of bread, and rolled off the table. Shaking off one slipper, he approached the stove on his hands, lifted the heavy saucepan down with his foot, raised the lid with his teeth, and surveyed the plum-duff.

"Oh! Him's a stunners, hunk, Chingy?"

"A gem of the first water, my savage friend," grinned Ching-Lung.

"Me could swaller hims alls, Chingy!"

"I don't doubt it, my famished wolf," said the prince. "Good-bye!"

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—THE GEM LIBRARY
—Every Wednesday—

Gan-Waga glared in speechless horror. Ching-Lung passed through the doorway on his hands, the saucepan suspended from the sole of his left foot. Gan watched plum-duff and thief closely, until he could see them no longer.

"He pinch him—he pinch him! What fo' he pinch him?" gasped the perplexed Eskimo. "What fo', my Chingy? He com'n' backs, Chingy!"

A few swift handspings brought Ching-Lung level with the galley.

"Where's the chef, Gan?"

"What fo' you pinch—"

"Where's the chef, you great, oily lump? Never mind the duff! Where's the old egg-beater?"

"Him on deekses."

"Then go and keep your eye on him. See what the frog-eater is doing, and whistle if he starts to move this way. Hist! Not a wordlet! You'll have enough duff to last you a century in the sweet by-and-by. Fly, thou fat varlet!"

"Yo' gives me lots of duff, Chingy?" asked Gan doubtfully.

"Acres of it!"

"An' yo' nots picks de raisins outs befores?"

"No; not by fives, either! Hurry up, and don't forget to whistle. Begone, thou butter-factory!"

Gan, much mystified, perched himself at the bottom of the ladder. The prince dived into the galley. All the articles needed were ready to hand. Ching heaped up a pyramid of flour and turned up his sleeves. So swiftly did he work that he seemed to have ten bodies and twenty arms. Slap, slap! went his palms against the dough, and a great round pudding appeared, as if at the touch of a magician's wand. Across the table streamed the raisins. They were scooped up and rubbed in. A few more pats, a shake, a twist, a roll-out, the snapping of string, and the duff was tied up in its cloth. A moment later, and it was safely in a saucepan.

"There's more in this than meets the eye, as the man remarked when he sat down on a box of tints!" grinned Ching-Lung. "Now to relieve my trusty sentinel. What-ho, without there! Come hither, warder! Ho, Gan!"

"Mo heres, Chingy."

"But I want you here. Come away!"

Gan waddled after him to the billiard-room. There was the big saucepan steaming on the fire.

"What fo', Chingy, yo' pinches him?" asked the Eskimo.

"Silence, youth! Please do not say 'pinched.' It is a common, vulgar word. I looted the pudding for various reasons. Let her boil, and to-night we shall feast as well as any baron in his raftered hall. Like John Horner, Esquire, we shall put in our thumbs, and pull out the plums, and tell the company what model children we are."

Gan's little eyes began to twinkle. He rubbed his hand slowly up and down the front of his waistcoat.

"Dat was good enough butterful joyousness, Chingy!" he sighed. "But when dey finds him goneses, dey kicks up ole Harry, and de band plays!"

"The risks of discovery," said Ching-Lung, picking up the sleeping cat, and dreamily placing it in his pocket, "are highly remote. I have manufactured a substitute."

"What a sub-she-shoot? Nebber met him, Chingy."

"A duplicate," explained the prince.

"Not knows hims, neither," said Gan, shaking his head.

"Your knowledge, Ganus," laughed Ching-Lung, "would fill a very small pill-box. I have made another pudding, which is at this moment stewing on the galley-stove. It is a rich pudding—almost as rich as this—a beautiful and speaking spotted-dog. They won't know the difference. To-night you shall eat your fill. But not a word, not a whisper, not a wink, not a cough, not a chuckle! We are brothers in crime. We have boned a man's dog. Beware!"

Gan went round the billiard-room on hands and knees.

"Hoo, hoo, hoo!" he panted. "Dey nots chains deir dogs up fasts 'nough, Chingy. He slips out of hims collar. Wonder if him savages? Oh, my! I goin' to fights dat dogs soon, and—oh-mi, ho-mi!—I bets I worry hims to rages. Oh, yo' are a funny chaps, Chingy."

"Somebody has been telling you, Ganus," said Ching-Lung. "Here, you keep goal—I mean you bowl up to me. If you hit the wall, I'm out."

Ching-Lung seized a cue, and kicked a tennis-ball to Gan-Waga.

"Overs or unders, Chingy?"

"Anyhow you like! Shy it if you want to. Look out for a catch!"

Gan shied his hardest, and the prince smote. Crack-slap! Like a shot from a gun the ball flew back, swift and true. It passed between Gan's head, and hit the Eskimo on the chin with terrific force.

"Murder!" howled Gan, and sat down violently.

"You butter-fingered son of an ice-merchant! Why didn't you catch it?" asked Ching-Lung.

Gan felt the tender spot, and rose wearily from the carpet. He barged the door behind him as he strode out.

"Haughty little juggins!" chuckled Ching-Lung. "I believe he's got the hump. Wonder where Ru is? This is about as bad as being in gaol. I must exercise a bit."

Ching-Lung made it a rule never to allow his wonderfully-trained muscles to become slack. Selecting a couple of cues, he gripped them firmly near their centres, one in each hand. Pressing the buttocks into the carpet, he slowly raised his legs above his head. Then, lifting the cues one at a time, he walked across the room on these extraordinary stilts.

He came back again, and remained motionless. His balance was easy and magnificent.

"I hope the giddy things won't break!" he muttered. Then he raised his right hand two good inches higher up the cue and his left followed. He went higher and higher still. The next movement would have brought him to the top, but he never got there. The door had opened. Gan-Waga stole in. Gan had a pillow under his arm. Gan crept up close to the unconscious acrobat. Behind Ching-Lung was a large ottoman, the seat of which could be lifted, and Gan lifted it. There was nothing inside except a few papers. Gan edged to the door.

"One to be ready," he grinned, swinging the pillow, "two to be steady, and free to biff him! Swat!"

The pillow flew from his hand, and smote the prince between the shoulders. The cues shot right and left, and Ching-Lung entered the ottoman head first. Snatching a syphon from the table, Gan banged down the lid of the ottoman, and threw himself upon it.

"Hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo-o-o!" he roared. "Yo' biffs me, Chingy, and I biffs yo' backs. I swats yo' butterful 'nough fine fo' dats. Ho, ho, ho-o-o! Am it darks in dere, hunk?"

It was very dark. Ching-Lung was carefully feeling his nose and wondering if his spine was really bent into a knob. It felt like it. He was glad he had got rid of the cat before making the journey into the interior of the ottoman. Then he heard the muffled voice of Gan-Waga, and the strangled laughter of that same Eskimo gentleman.

"Are yo' dere?" piped Gan.

"Gan, I shall murder you!" growled Ching-Lung.

"Speaks louders, Chingy. I deaf in dats eye. Ho, ho, hoo-o-o! Yell morer, Chingy!"

"I shall exterminate you, you fat beast!" roared the prince. "Let me out!"

"I—I s-shall t-tell me big bruvvers if yo' h-hit me!" blubbered Gan, pretending to be terribly frightened. "Oh, p-p-promises yo' nots h-hits me, Chingy! I never does it no morer."

"Let me out!"

"P-promise, den, Chingy—"

"Let me out!" bellowed the prince.

"Please—"

Ching-Lung got his shoulders under the lid, and heaved upwards. He was too cramped to exert his full strength, and Gan was no feather-weight. A second heave lifted the lid nine or ten inches, and Ching-Lung stuck out a fierce and wrathful visage.

"I'll kill—"

Szzzz! Bending down, Gan took aim with the syphon and washed the wrathful visage back into the ottoman. The lid snapped down, and muffled coughs, groans, sneezes, and howls, filled the interior of the piece of furniture.

Gan rolled on the lid in an ecstasy of delight. Nobly and well he was avenging his swollen chin. He loved Ching-Lung, but he could not permit even Ching-Lung to take liberties with his beauty. It was a moment of the purest bliss for the Eskimo.

Ching-Lung was slightly wet, but the cold soda-water had not cooled his anger. His pigtail was sticking out, and Gan's eyes fell upon it. The fall did not seriously injure Gan's eye, but it gave him an idea. He searched for a piece of string, and, finding one, he tied the Prince's pigtail to the coal-box.

"He not runs so fast wid dats!" gurgled the Eskimo. "Stick coals up here, too. Dey makes morer heavinesses. Ho, ho, ho-o-o! Are yo' dere, Chingy-Chang-Chong?"

There was silence in the ottoman. Ching-Lung was thinking. He got out his knife, and began to prod at the roof of his prison. It was wood.

"I can't dig through that!" he growled. "Ow!"

Gan had inserted the nozzle of the syphon under the lid, and was discharging the whole contents over the prisoner. Pulling himself together, Ching-Lung pressed up the lid; but the pressure above was too great. It fell again, and gave the prince a rap on the scalp that made him more angry because it hurt.

His Highness was horribly wet. He stabbed his knife into the side of the ottoman. The blade went clean through. Ching-Lung could have kicked himself for not having discovered before that the back of the ottoman was nothing tougher than silk.

"Ho, ho, hoo! Ho-o-o-o!" laughed the conqueror.

"You'll laugh down the back of your neck in no time!" snapped the prince. "Now for it!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 252.

EVERY MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

He cut a big hole in the silk, and clawed himself round for a spring. He meant to leave the ottoman in the same way that a pantomime demon arrives on the stage, through the trap, and fall upon his foe.

He left it.

One thing utterly ruined the plan. It was the coal-box. Ching-Lung never bargained for it. He was quite unaware that he was anchored, and that the anchor would want to go with him. With a fierce yell—a yell that would have struck to the heart of a waxwork figure—he sprang.

There was a sickening jerk that pulled him up short. An avalanche of patent fuel was poured over him, and, having discharged its cargo, the coalbox descended, and bonneted the prince.

Gan got out of the locality at express speed, and locked himself in the swimming-bath.

The Fate of the "Spotted Dog."

Plum-duff, as served up aboard the Lord of the Deep, was a great institution, especially as Yard-of-Tape, king of cooks, concocted it. On some ships—so the old hands declared—duff is a mixture of gritty flour, cart-grease, and cockroaches. On the submarine it was all prize beef suet, the best of raisins, and flour whiter than driven snow. So toothsome was the second course that Tuesdays and Fridays were quite looked forward to, and when Prout, raising the carving-knife erect, and spiking the fork into a smoking ham, remarked, "Duff to follow!" a smile of anticipatory joy ran round the table.

"Oi concidher," said Barry, "that Oi ought, bein' the janius o' the comp'ny, to write a little poem to that same duff. Oi have tasted duff and duff, and Oi have sharppened me razors on slabs of duff, Oi have paid docthor's bills on slabs of duff. But of all the duff, give me Yard-o'-Tapes for bein' the real genuine article. Loike Shakespeare wud have remarked:

"Some duff
Is horrid stuff,
And of that kind
Oi've had enough;
But there's one kind
Oi'd bear in mind,
Oi'd ate ut—"

A lump of bread smote Barry on the back of his skull, and before he could discover the culprit a plate of ham and haricot-beans was thrust under his nose.

"Eat, and shut up!" said Joe.

"Sartinly!" grinned the pacified Barry. "Shoot along the mustard and spuds."

Knives and forks clattered, and provisions vanished at the usual rate. As a rule, the brawny, healthy men could manage three helpings of meat, but on "spotted dog" days they were satisfied with two. They all stood up as Yard-of-Tape bore or the steaming dish, to do honour to it.

"By hokey," said Prout, "she's a scorcher!"

"She vas ze most excellent zat nevaire vas made, mine poy," said the chef. "A-r-r! Ze-ze vat you call very good. Ze talent and all ze-ze vat you call genius I haf put into her is terrible. She boil five hours, and ze tenderness of her vill make you much glaeuf. Eet is a scorchaire, for she haf only left ze fire at vonce. Ha, ha!"

"She's a dream!" grinned Joe. "Tickle up her ribs, Tommy!"

Prout gave the knife a preliminary scrape on the sharpening-steele.

"By hokey, it seems almost a pity to carve up her timbers!" he said. "Dashed if the chef spares the plums! You couldn't stick the head of a chisel atwixt 'em, and she's nigh as brown as a Christmas-pudden."

"Oi'm starving, doiein' to make her acquaintance!" cried Barry.

"So are we!" chimed in half a score of voices.

"Buck up, you fossil!" said Maddock.

Prout drove in the knife.

"What's that?" he asked, looking round him.

"What's what, Tom?"

"That clickin' row."

No one else had heard anything.

"Ut's yer oiesight that deceived yez," said Barry.

"Perhaps the spotted dog barked at him," suggested one of the men.

"If it did bark, it was at your face, Steve!" said Prout. "I wonder it doesn't run down the table and bite you. Now 'ere—what—come! By hokey, what's got it?"

Prout pulled at the knife, but could not move it.

"Thunderation, 'urry up!" said Joe angrily. "Are you waitin' for us to drop dead wi' starvation?"

"Drat it, it's stuck!" said Prout. "By hokey, I believe there's a bone in the duff!"

Me picks him, Tommy!" lisped Gan-Waga. "Me likes boneses!"

Yard-of-Tape sprang up. He always fized over the moment a hint was thrown out against his cookery.

"A-r-r-r!" he hissed. "The angaire of me shall burn in ze heart of me! Vat you daire say for zat zere shall be a bone in mine pudding?"

"Ere, simmer down—simmer down, long 'un!" said Prout. "It may only be a brick!"

"A brick in her!" spluttered the chef. "Ze wrath of angaire in me shall grow warmaire. I vill cut her. A-r-r-r!"

Prout flung down the fork, winked at the grinning men, and made room for the chef.

The chef curled his whiskers savagely, and glanced down at the table. Every face wore a deep and solemn expression that would have graced a funeral perfectly, and then—

"Do nots tickles haire!" sighed the voice of Gan-Waga, breaking the impressive silence; and they went into convulsions. "Oh, please do not tickle haire!"

"Name of a pipe!" howled the chef, white with rage. "Name of a pipe!"

Gnashing his teeth, the chef seized the dish, and raised it above his head.

"A yord, angaire, insult," he hissed, "and I dash her to ze ground, and jump on her wiz both ze feet of me!"

"Down on yer marrer-bones," cried Barry, "and apologise! Say ut afterher me."

The men got on their knees in two rows.

"We are so sorry—" said O'Rooney.

"We are so sorry—" chorused the men.

"Nevaire—"

"Nevaire—"

"Will we be rude to you again, saire; so please start cutting haire!"

"Will we be rude to you again, saire," chimed in the diners; "so please start cutting haire!"

Yard-of-Tape replaced the dish, quite satisfied with the apology. Leaving the carver where it was, he took up a smaller knife, and delicately cut a few thin slices.

"Eet is ze English vay to eat ze dog in slabs," he explained; "but zat is ze wrong way. You shall taste her, and you shall tell me vich is ze betaire. I cut her—so!—nice and thin, like the newspapaire of a sheet. Zis shall be for Gan-Waga. And now I shall show you ze lightning carve, for vich I haf von six medals in zat dear Paris. Mistaire Maddock, vil you remove ze plates?"

The chef thereupon made knife and fork twinkle as he pared off slice after slice faster than the plates could be removed. All the men waited to see the exhibition through. A burst of applause followed, and Yard-of-Tape bowed low, and stroked his moustache.

"A-r-r!" he said. "For zis recognition of mine efforts, much zanks. I am ze great carvaire of ze universe, and ze medal I shall show you von day, mon poys. And now eat ze spotted dog, vich shall melt in ze moufs of you, and zen I am prepare to still carve ze more of her."

Like Napoleon surveying his Old Guard, Mossos folded his lean arms, and fixed his eyes fiercely on the mustard. The hungry men began to eat. Suddenly every jaw stopped working—suddenly every man looked at his neighbour.

"Vat is ze mattaire?" asked the chef.

"Oi dunno!" growled Barry, turning over his portion with his fork. "She sames wrong, somehow. There ain't the roight flavour about her. Troth, how is ut, Tom?"

"Dryish, by hokey!"

"He forgets to put the suets in haire," lisped the soft and gentle Gan.

"That's it, Gan; you've struck it!" cried Joe.

"A-r-r-r! Scoundrel! Vat you say?" screamed the chef. "I shall haf forgot ze suets of mine pudding! I spit at your head! I shall haf ze revenge of ze honnaire for ze insult so terrible! A-r-r-r! I shall fling ze suet back in ze teeth of you!"

Boiling with passion, Yard-of-Tape bounded on the table, brandishing the fork like a dagger. His hair and whiskers stood erect. He had absolutely boiled over, and it looked unpleasant for Joe, who got ready to defend himself with a chair.

"Throws the stuffs at haire!" chuckled Gan-Waga.

And, like one man, the diners scooped the slices off their plates, and hurled them at Mossos. With plum-duff to right of him, plum-duff to left of him, plum-duff in front of him, and plum-duff behind him, the Frenchman halted and reeled, blinded by the volley.

Prout tore the carving-knife out of the pudding. The chef trod on a slice, and his heels shot above his head.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 252.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY

—Every Wednesday—

II

OUR COMPANION PAPERS

II

"THE PENNY POPULAR"

—Every Friday—

With splendid presence of mind and glorious alertness, Prout skimmed the remainder of the spotted dog across the table, and Yard-of-Tape alighted on it in a sitting position, with a howl and a squeal.

Up he bounded, the men shrieking with laughter, that died into a deathly, awful, horror-stricken silence.

The spotted dog had given up its deadly secret. Among its flattened and pasty ruins lay a pair of ancient and ragged slippers!

Mossos's second descent brought him down on hands and knees, his nose very close to the ruins. He saw the slippers, and his eyes began to bulge out of his head. He dug his eight fingers and two thumbs into his locks.

"Name of ze pipe!" he groaned. "Vat! Is eet ze vision of ze nightmaire? Vat! Oh!"

Prout had eaten some of the duff. With a mingled roar of horror and loathing, he seized Mossos by the ears, and pounded that gentleman's face down into the mass again and again. Gan made himself scarce. With wrathful howls, the men snatched up lumps of the duff and opened a deadly fire on the yelling chef.

"Do not hurts haire!" cried Gan, thrusting his face into the forecandle. "Oh, do not hurts haire, pleases!"

Ching-Lung, perched on a chair, was watching the thrilling scene through the circle of glass. He rolled down, and clasped the Eskimo to his bosom.

"Ganus," he choked, "I forgive you!"

The door shot open, and the luckless chef bolted out, followed by a fusillade of spotted dog, and a dozen blood-thirsty pursuers. The pursuers halted, and then fled. Mossos had come out of the galley with a gun.

Shortly afterwards Gan-Waga, his face beaming like the morning sun, sat on the rug in the billiard-room. Before him was the real duff. In each hand Gan held an enormous slice of the delicious compound, and he dipped the slabs alternately into a pot of strawberry jam.

"Never hads butterfuller grands treats!" he gurgled. "I nevers stops eating no morer! Oh, ze joyfulness of haire! Oh, ze liciousness of haire! A-r-r-r-r!"

"Good, Gan?" inquired the prince, who was sitting on the edge of the billiard-table.

"Butterful, grands enough! Chingy, I love haire!"

Ching-Lung grinned, and began to tap his foot on the carpet close to the edge of the table.

"How much do you love—A-r-r—love haire?"

"All I can eats, Chingy!" grinned Gan-Waga. "Ow! Say, Chingy, wh—"

Gan glared at the spotted dog in great alarm.

"Who's hit you now, Gan?"

"She— Ow! Chingy, she growin'!" grasped Gan-Waga.

"Rats, you idiot! How can plum-duff grow?"

"She am, Chingy!" said Gan-Waga hoarsely. "And she squeaking, toos!"

"That must be a mouse, idiot!" said the prince, still tapping the carpet.

There was certainly a faint chirping sound in the room.

"I sures she gettings bigger!" said Gan.

"By Jove, so she is!" said Ching-Lung. "That the baking-powder getting to work. All the better for you, Ganus; there'll be more of it."

"Baker's powders make 'um swell, hunk?"

"Always; that's what it's put in for. Why, you chump, if they didn't use it, the stuff would be as hard as a sea-biscuit!"

The explanation relieved Gan-Waga, and he went on wolfing his two jammy slabs with great gusto. Ching-Lung rolled a cigarette, took a burning match out of his right ear, and began to smoke.

"Do you still—A-r-r—love haire, Gan?"

Gan was giving in.

"Oh, don't give in!"

"I musts, Chingy!"

"Just another inch. It won't be half so nice cold."

Gan sighed again. He did not like to be beaten. He took up his knife.

"Good gracious!" yelled the prince. "Look there! On the duff, Gan! Ow!"

"Wh-where?"

Bang!

Gan drove the knife in too far. The spotted dog exploded into five pieces, and Gan rolled yelling across the room, plastered and half-blinded with paste, and lay there kicking.

Crimson with laughter, Ching-Lung tossed back the rug, and quickly removed a foot-pump, a length of indiarubber tube, and the flabby remains of a football-bladder that had been artfully concealed in the heart of the spotted dog.

Then he vaulted the table, and, with hands buried deep in the pockets of his trousers, he departed, humming a tune.

(There will be an extra long instalment of this splendid adventure serial in next Monday's Grand Christmas Double Number of THE MAGNET LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance. Price Two-pence.)

My Readers' Page.



OUR TWO
COMPANION PAPERS
"THE GEM" LIBRARY
EVERY WEDNESDAY
AND
"THE PENNY POPULAR"
EVERY FRIDAY.

NEXT MONDAY'S GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

For many weeks now I have been hard at work preparing a real treat for my readers—the treat which they have become accustomed to look forward to about this time of the year with eager anticipation, namely, our Grand Christmas Double Number. This will be placed before my chums next Monday, when they will be able to judge whether it has come up to their expectations or not.

It is never safe to boast, but I will say that I have little fear but that my chums' verdict will be a favourable one.

In the first place, the splendid 30-page tale of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled

"DRUMMED OUT OF GREYFRIARS,"

By Frank Richards,

will cause the heart of every lover of this splendid series of school tales to rejoice. In this story—certainly one of the most powerful and thrilling tales that Frank Richards has ever penned—a climax is reached in the bitter rivalry which wages between Harry Wharton & Co. and Vernon-Smith & Co. The malevolent cunning of the Bounder of the Remove Form reaches its limit, and Harry Wharton's star seems to have set for ever. But just as the darkest hour of night heralds the approach of dawn, so, when things look blackest for the hero of the Remove and his friends, affairs begin to show signs of taking a new turn.

"DRUMMED OUT OF GREYFRIARS,"

though he is, his justification is at hand!

The second magnificent, extra long, complete story is one that cannot fail to appeal to every reader by reason of its breathless interest and immense "holding" power.

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is a story which must be read right through to the end once it is taken up, such is the enthralling and sustained interest of it from the first line to the last.

The adventures encountered by three midshipmen of his Majesty's Navy in connection with the romantic, if dangerous, pursuit of gun-running form a fascinating theme which is taken advantage of to the full by the author of

"THE GUN-RUNNERS,"

and the result is a story that will more than satisfy the most critical of my readers.

Other items on next week's splendid programme are a long chatty article on

"CHRISTMAS TOPICS,"

full of bright and helpful suggestions for the festive season; also a

SPECIAL ENLARGED COMIC SUPPLEMENT, containing a splendid fund of seasonable jokes and pictures.

Then there will be a magnificent extra-amusing and exciting instalment of Sidney Drew's great serial,

"TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE."

in addition to another splendid

FREE NOVELTY,

consisting of a highly-amusing

CHRISTMAS MASK,

the grotesque features of which will at once be recognised by all "Magnetites."

Altogether, the list of splendid attractions contained in next Monday's special number make this something which no lover of good and seasonable reading matter can afford to miss. It is specially important, therefore, that all "Magnetites" and their friends should ask their newsagents beforehand to make a point of reserving for them

OUR GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 252.

OUR GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT MONDAY! ORDER EARLY.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"Loyal Reader" (Nottingham).—Sorry to hear that your attempt to form a League has not up to the present been successful—of course, it will be if you persevere.

H. Dixon (Wembury).—Thank you for your very nice letters. The answer to your questions are—(1) Vane has left Greyfriars; and (2) Yes.

"A Staunch Reader" (S. Wales).—I do not know of any text-books such as you mention, but I should think you could obtain them through any local booksellers. You could also write and make inquiries at W. H. Smith's, Strand, London, W.C.

F. Davidson (Australia).—Messrs. Upcott Gill, of Bazaar Buildings, Drury Lane, London, W.C., England, publish a good book entitled "Practical Ventriloquism" at 1s.

FURTHER HINTS FOR STAMP COLLECTORS.

To "write up" a stamp-album properly, a fair knowledge of some of the philatelic terms is essential. The following may prove handy:

The term "block" stands for a group of stamps unsevered. The least number it can contain is four—two horizontal rows of two each.

A "fake" is a genuine stamp so altered that its philatelic or postal value is increased.

A "fiscal" stamp is one used for duty and tax instead of the ordinary postage.

"Generalising" is collecting every possible stamp, without regard to countries or other divisions.

A "local" is a stamp which can be used for postal purposes within a certain stated area only.

"Mint" is a term which denotes that a stamp is in exactly the same condition as when it left the hands of the manufacturer—i.e., unused, clean, undamaged, and still retaining all the original gum.

Original gum—which is shortened to O. G.—is the gum first applied to the stamp.

"Obsolete" meant, in the first place, a stamp which had been withdrawn from circulation; but it is now applied to stamps which are no longer on sale.

"Provisional" is a stamp intended to supply a want of proper stamps—really a "makeshift."

The term "specialist" is given to a collector who forms a collection of stamps consisting of the stamps of one, or a small group of particular countries, giving in his album a complete history of each stamp.

A "strip" is three or four unsevered stamps in the same horizontal or vertical line.

"Watermark" is a design on a stamp which can only be seen by holding the specimen up to a light. It is made by thinning the paper, by a special process, during manufacture.

Now for a few words on "specialising," or limiting a collection as it is sometimes called.

A collector may specialise in many ways. He can collect stamps printed by one firm only, or his group may be of geographical boundaries or political. It may be large or small. It is well to start on a large group at first, as in most cases each group is liable to subdivision. Take, for instance, a European collection. This in time will be divided into groups of the German States, Balkan States, etc., which in time may dwindle down to smaller divisions in each of these States, which in themselves will provide ample amusement and instruction. An American collection is a good one to start with, also, but is rather "overcrowded." The more Southern States, however, offer practically fresh ground.

Specialising in the stamps of the various islands in the Pacific, such as the British, French, etc., offers a great attraction. "Specialising," though most interesting, especially to the more advanced philatelist, usually involves extra expense, and for this reason the young collector would do well to continue with a "general" until he has sufficient capital to start "specialising."

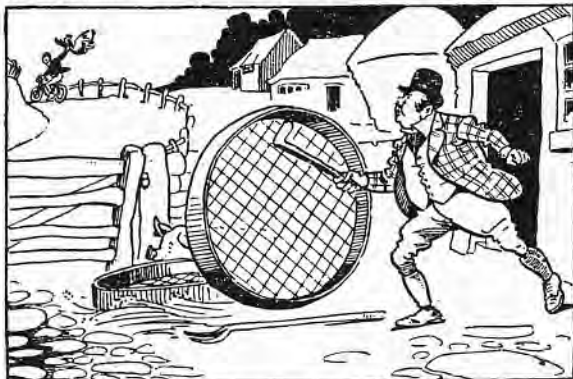
THE EDITOR.

OUR SPLENDID NEW FEATURE!

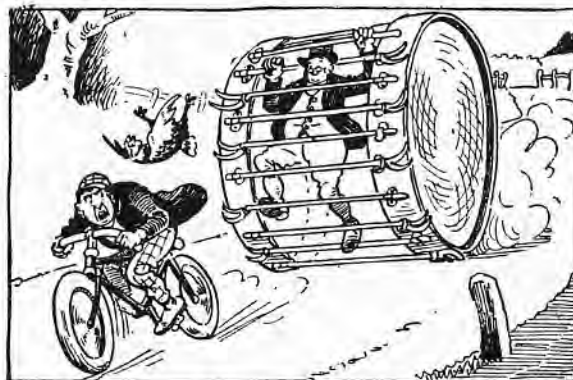
Look out for Our Enlarged Comic Supplement in next Monday's **GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.**

SPECIAL COMIC SUPPLEMENT.**A 'FOUL' JOKE.**

1. "What-ho!" chortled Teddy, the tramp. "A fine fat fowl will do me nicely to-night, and, on me merry motor-bike, I can out-distance all pursuers. Ha, ha!"



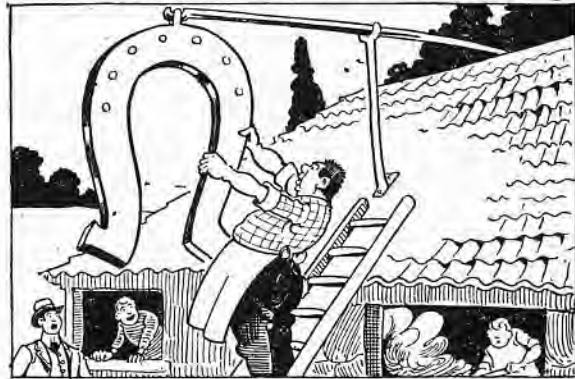
2. However, the farmer came out as our friend was getting well away with the chickens—picked up some sieves and pitchforks, and—



3. Very soon caught the wayward one up, and got his chickens back like a fine old English gentleman.

A LUCKY SIGN!

1. "The shafts are broken, and I must get to Fiddleddees this afternoon," said Alphonse, the traveller. "Mend them, and I'll put ninepence in your post-office savings bank!"



2. The village blacksmith was well on earning an extra bit of overtime, so he pulled down his sign—



3. And they made an excellent pair of shafts. Then Alphonse, the traveller, was soon running along to Fiddleddees in grand style.

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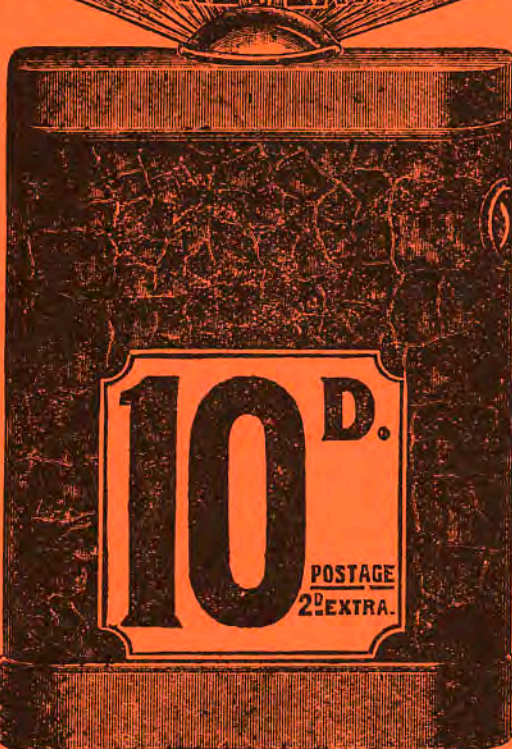
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