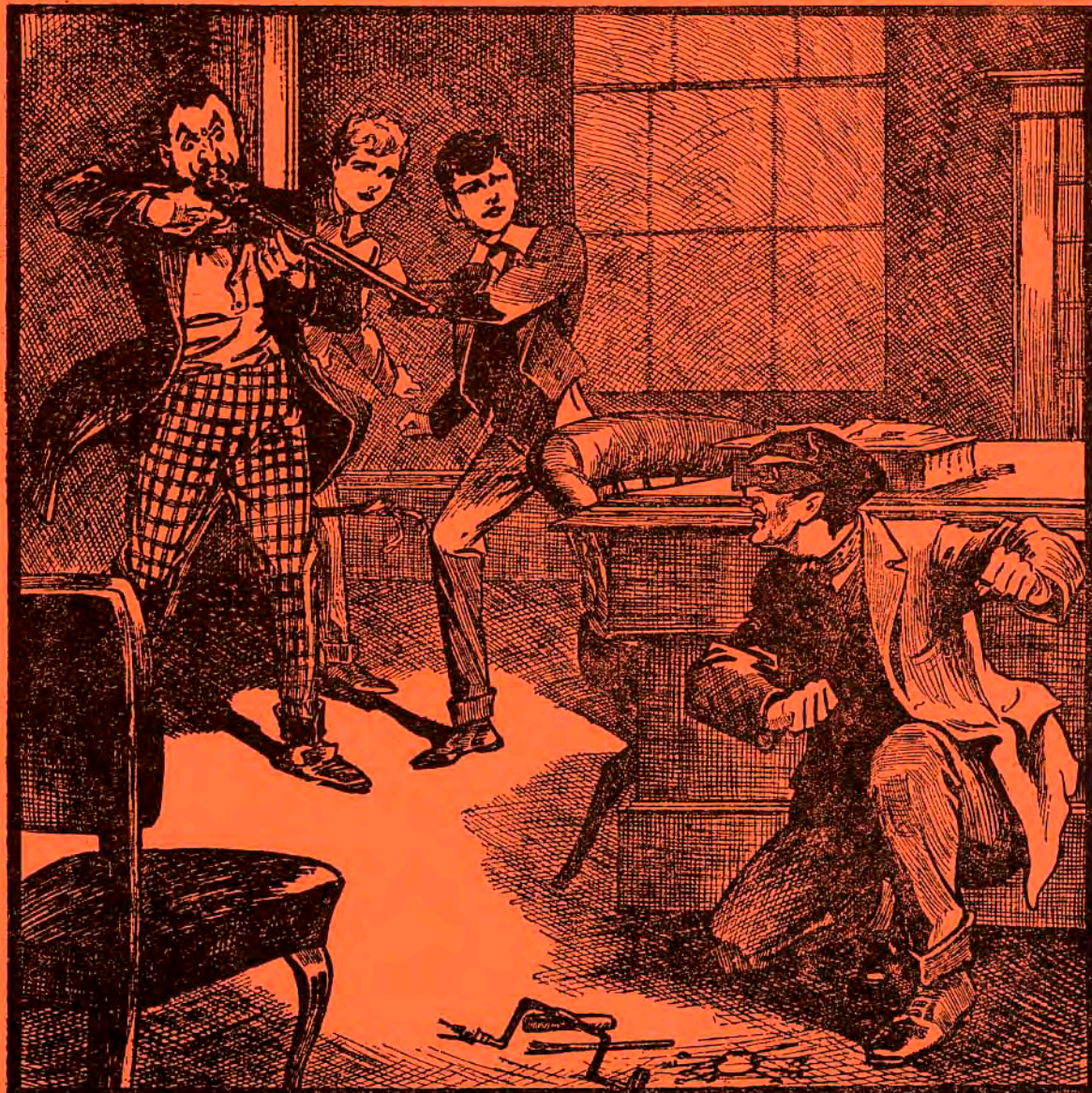


"THE BITER BIT!"

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



CORNERED BY THE FRENCH MASTER!

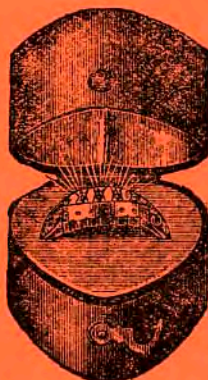
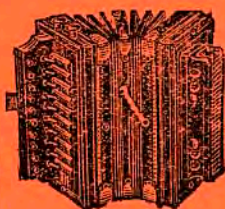
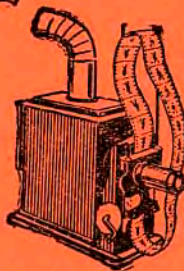
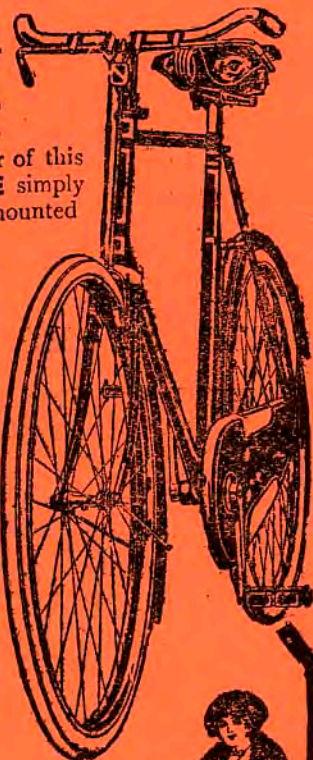
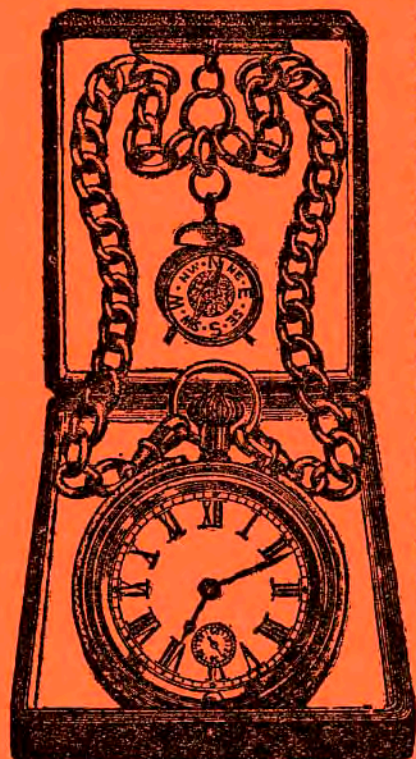
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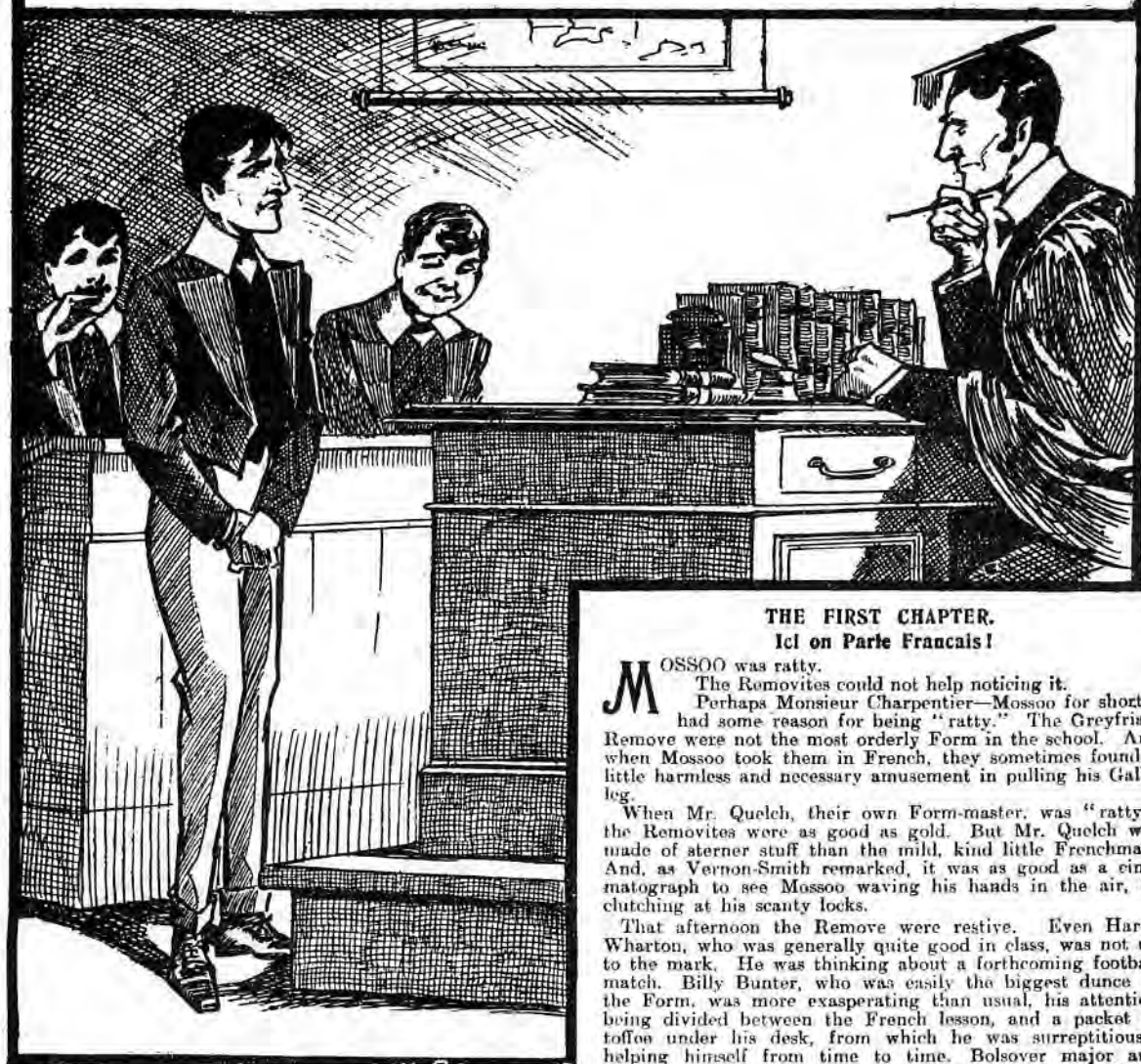


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The Biter Bit!

A Grand, New, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. and Fisher T. Fish at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Ici on Parle Français!

MOSSOO was ratty. The Removites could not help noticing it. Perhaps Monsieur Charpentier—Mossoo for short—had some reason for being "ratty." The Greyfriars Remove were not the most orderly Form in the school. And when Mossoo took them in French, they sometimes found a little harmless and necessary amusement in pulling his Gallie leg.

When Mr. Quelch, their own Form-master, was "ratty," the Removites were as good as gold. But Mr. Quelch was made of sterner stuff than the mild, kind little Frenchman. And, as Vernon-Smith remarked, it was as good as a cinematograph to see Mossoo waving his hands in the air, or clutching at his scanty locks.

That afternoon the Remove were restive. Even Harry Wharton, who was generally quite good in class, was not up to the mark. He was thinking about a forthcoming football match. Billy Bunter, who was easily the biggest dunce in the Form, was more exasperating than usual, his attention being divided between the French lesson, and a packet of toffee under his desk, from which he was surreptitiously helping himself from time to time. Bolsover major and Skinner were holding a conversation which they only interrupted when the French master glared at them. Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, was deeply interested in a paper opened on his knees under the desk. When Mossoo turned his back to the class, to chalk up something on the blackboard,

Mr. Quelch's eyes seemed to bulge out of his head at the sight of the handcuffs, and he glared at Fish speechlessly. "I guess I've been spoofed and left by a gang of slab-sided jays, sir," said Fish dolorously. (See Chapter 8.)

Bob Cherry and Nugent and Johnny Bull tossed paper pellets to one another. It was unfortunate that one of the missiles, missing its aim, caught Monsieur Charpentier in the back of the neck.

The French master jumped as if a wasp had stung him. He whirled round towards the class with an excited face.

"Ciel! Zis class is ze vairy vorst class in ze school!" he exclaimed. "Is it zat you pelt me viz zings, zen?"

"Sorry, sir!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Is it zat you throw zat at me, Sherry?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Zen vy you zay zat you are sorry?"

"I'm sorry it hit you, sir."

Monsieur Charpentier looked at him suspiciously. Bob Cherry's face was innocent and guileless.

"You did not throw zat, Sherry?"

"Ahem! Yes, sir!"

"Zen you have told vun untroot, Sherry, ven you zay zat you did not throw him."

"I said I didn't throw it at you, sir," said Bob Cherry meekly. "That was quite true, sir. I threw it at Nugent."

The Remove giggled.

"Silence!" exclaimed the French master. "Taisez-vous. I command zat you sall not laugh. Sherry, you are a bad boy."

"So sorry, sir."

"You vill write out a hundred lines of ze Henriade, Sherry."

"Zank you, sir," said Bob demurely.

The imitation of Mossoo's beautiful accent made the Removites shriek.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Monsieur Charpentier waved his hands in the air. He felt that the Remove were almost too much for him. There was a cane on the Form-master's desk, and that was really the only argument that would appeal at all strongly to the young rascals. But Mossoo was so tender-hearted that he did not like using the cane. He preferred to influence by mildness and kindness; but schoolboys are sometimes thoughtless, and an enormous amount of Mossoo's kindness was quite wasted. "Silence in ze class! Sherry, you vill take two hundred lines."

"Many zanks, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You make fun of your master, Sherry, who do all zat he can for you!" exclaimed the unhappy Monsieur Charpentier. "I seek to be kind vis you, and you make fun of me. Zat is not good, Sherry. It is not vat you call ze cricket."

Bob's heart smote him at once.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir!" he exclaimed. "We know you're jolly good to us, sir. I'm sorry I played the giddy ox, sir—ahem!—I mean, I apologise!"

Monsieur Charpentier's face cleared at once.

"I forgive you, Sherry," he said. "But it is necessary zat you sall be more zoughtful. You sould zink before zat you speak, isn't it? Since zat you are sorry, you sall not do all ze lines; you sall do only fifty of him."

The "fifty of him" nearly made Bob explode, but he contrived with a heroic effort to maintain his gravity. He was really sorry for having pulled the leg of the good little man.

"Thank you so much, sir," he said.

"Ve have take ze verb entendre," resumed Monsieur Charpentier. "I have written zat sentence zat you see zere. Sherry, you vill read zat sentence."

"Le discours que ja'i entend etait tres interessant," read out Bob dutifully.

"You vill translate him, Bulstrode."

"The discourse that I have heard was very interesting," said Bulstrode cheerfully.

"Good! You vill repeat him in French, Buntair, and please try to speak vizout ze horrible accent zat you always use."

Bunter blinked indignantly through his big spectacles. "I've been told that my French accent is very good, sir,"

he said warmly. "People who know say that I speak with the true Parisian accent."

"Buntair—"

"Le discours que jay ongtongdoo etty tres interessong," read out Bunter triumphantly.

Monsieur Charpentier put his fingers to his ears. It gave him a pain there to hear Bunter pronounce French.

"Oh, mon Dieu! I never succeed in to teach you, Buntair. It is dreadful."

"Perhaps you don't know the real Parisian accent, sir?" Bunter suggested.

"Vat!"

"You see, sir, I know my accent's all right, so—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Buntair, if you speak again I sall cane you. Now repeat after me—"

"How can I repeat after you without speaking again, sir?" asked Bunter.

"Silence! Say 'entendu.'"

"Ongtongdoo!" said Bunter cheerfully.

"Horrible! Try vunce more."

"Ongtongdoo!"

"It is not ongtongdoo!" shrieked Mossoo. "Zere is no 'g' in ze vord at all. You sall say entendu."

"Oh," said Bunter, listening carefully. "Is that the way you do it, sir? Angtangdoo! But I fancy ongtongdoo sounds better, sir—more Parisian."

"It is not angtangdoo!" groaned Monsieur Charpentier, clutching at his hair. "Have you not ze ears? Have you not ze tongue? Have you not ze sense?"

"Well, I knew it wasn't angtangdoo," said Bunter sulkily. "I said ongtongdoo all along."

"Zat I be patient!" murmured Monsieur Charpentier. "Buntair, you are more as enoff to turn ze hair blank." Monsieur Charpentier probably meant white. "I give you a rest. I cannot hear you speak French vizout I shuddair in ze marrow of my bones."

Bunter grunted. He was quite satisfied with his French accent; indeed, he thought it was distinctly good. According to William George Bunter, the French language was made up almost entirely of ongs and bongs.

"Feesh!"

Fisher T. Fish did not reply. He had not heard a word for some time, all his attention being taken up by the paper he was reading. The paper was called "Police Bits," and there was a picture on the cover of a policeman struggling with a masked burglar. It was the kind of "fodder" provided for the delectation of American youths by enterprising publishers in New York.

"Feesh!"

No reply.

Johnny Bull reached out his foot, and kicked Fisher T. Fish to draw his attention. The Yankee junior gave a sudden jump.

"Gee-whiz! What—"

"Feesh!" thundered Monsieur Charpentier.

"Oh, yep!" said Fish.

"You have been reading vile zat I give lesson!"

"Oh, nope!"

"Vat is it zat you have zere?"

"Oh, that—that's a paper, sir," said Fish. "I was just glancing at it. Had it sent to me from New York, sir. Some thing like a paper—nothing like it on this side. Would you like to see it, sir?"

Fish proudly handed the paper to Monsieur Charpentier. The French master took it, and looked at it, and frowned angrily.

"Are you so silly, Feesh, zat you read zis horrible rubbish?" he demanded.

Fisher T. Fish looked astonished.

"Rubbish, sir!" he exclaimed. "Why, that's juvenile literature in the best American style, sir. Look at the picture—policeman being garrotted by a burglar. You never see pictures like that in boys' papers in England. Look at the stories—'Handsome Mika, the Boy Police Spy,' 'Red Jim the Boy Burglar,' 'The Boy Chief of the Frying-pan Indians,' 'The Boy Cannibal—'"

"Feesh!"

"And Hank Hogback the Boy Detective!" went on Fish enthusiastically. "Gee-whiz! What are you doing with my paper, sir?"

Monsieur Charpentier had torn the paper across, and he now placed the halves together, and tore them across again. Then he tossed the pieces into the waste-paper basket, the Yankee junior watching him with indignation and dismay.

"I sall report you to your Form-master zat you read zis vicked rubbish, Feesh. And I sall cane you for reading him in ze lesson. Hold out ze hand viz you."

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"Pass him into touch!" grinned Bulstrode. The grinning footballers dribbled Fisher T. Fish over the touchline, and left him there gasping for breath and considerably muddy. (See Chapter 4.)

"Holy smoke! I guess—"
"Ze hand!" shouted Mossou.
Swish!
"Yawp!"

Fisher T. Fish sat down, and squeezed his damaged hand in the other, and glowered. Then he had the pleasure of listening to flowing French and English, mixed, from Mossou, for the space of ten minutes or so. Mossou was very eloquent, and his opinion of Fish and Fish's brains seemed to be most disparaging. When he had exhausted his breath and his eloquence, he pointed to the blackboard.

"Now read him out!" he said.

Fish sucked his damaged hand, and blinked at the sentence on the blackboard, and winked one eye at the Removites, the eye that was furthest from Monsieur Charpentier.

"Le discours que ja'i entendu n'était pas tres interessant!" said Fish calmly, putting the statement into the negative.

There was a joyous chuckle from the Removites. Fish's rendering of the sentence made it refer to the lecture Monsieur Charpentier had just given him, and the juniors thought it funny, too. But the unfortunate thing was that Monsieur Charpentier did not seem to think it funny. He came towards Fish with the pointer, and Fish's other hand was soon in the same painful state as the first. And for the rest of that lesson Fish was not funny.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Detective Fish!

I SAY, you fellows—"
Harry Wharton & Co. were chatting in the passage after lessons, when Billy Bunter rolled up, full of news. The fat junior had a copy of the local paper in his hand, and his eyes were gleaming with excitement behind his spectacles.

"Seen the news?" he demanded.

"No," said Bob Cherry, with interest. "Have Manchester United won?"

Bunter sniffed.

"Blow Manchester United! I'm not talking about football news. There's been another burglary, this time at old Popper's place."

"Oh, blow the burglary, and blow old Popper!" said Bob.

"But I say, you fellows, it's jolly interesting," said Billy Bunter. "Suppose the burglar were to come to Greystriars, you know?"

"And steal one of your postal-orders?" grinned Frank Nugent. "That would be awful!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Speaking of postal-orders, I'm expecting one this evening," said Bunter. "One of my titled relations has promised to send me a tip. I suppose one of you fellows couldn't lend me ten bob till it comes?"

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"I know I couldn't," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Same here!" said Nugent.

"The sameness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Could you, Johnny Bull?"

Johnny Bull nodded.

"Certainly!" he said.

"Good egg! Hand it over!" said Bunter.

"Hand what over?"

"The ten bob, of course."

"No fear!"

"You said you could!" howled Bunter.

"So I could," said Bull calmly. "I could, but I'm not going to."

"You—you rotter! Ow! Leggo my ear! Ow!"

"What did you call me?"

"I meant to say my old pal!" said Bunter. "Ow!" He jerked his fat ear away from Johnny Bull's finger and thumb. "Ow! I don't mind a little joke, Johnny, but if you had done that on purpose—"

"I did do it on purpose," said Bull.

"It's jolly interesting about the burglar," went on Bunter, apparently not hearing Johnny Bull's remark. "This is the fourth burglary in the neighbourhood. There was the burglary at Snook's office in Friedale, and then the one at the Anchor Inn at Pegg, then one at Highcliffe School, and now another at old Popper's. Old Popper has had his silver plate taken. The paper says it was worth a thousand pounds. The Greyfriars silver is worth something, you know, quite as much as old Popper's, I should think. And nobody knows who the burglar is, or where he comes from. But he's supposed to be a Frenchman."

The juniors were interested.

In the quiet corner of the country where Greyfriars was situated few things happened out of the normal run of events. An occasional storm and shipwreck on the coast was the most exciting happening, as a rule. And the fact that a professional cracksmen had chosen the district for a professional visit was rather exciting. The local police and the county police were very much on the alert, and whenever a burglary happened they were prompt in appearing on the spot afterwards, and making voluminous notes, and informing the reporters that they had clues. The clues, however, did not seem to lead to very much, as the cracksmen remained at large, and in pursuit of his peculiar avocation.

It was quite possible that the unknown marauder had Greyfriars down on his list, as the school had valuable possessions in the way of silver plate, and the thought of a visit from him was enough to excite the juniors.

"So they think he's a Frenchman, do they?" said Bob Cherry. "Last time I read about him in the paper he was supposed to be a ticket-of-leave man."

"They've found out that much," said Bunter. "One of the keepers on Sir Hilton Popper's estate caught sight of him leaving the house soon after midnight. The burglar called out to his pal in French, and they bumped the keeper over and scooted. Here it is in the paper. The man called out 'A moi! That means 'Help!' or 'Come here!' or something of the sort."

"It means 'To me!'" said Nugent. "Same thing. So he's a giddy frog-eater. That ought to be a clue."

"I guess it is a clue!"

It was the voice of Fisher T. Fish that broke in. Fish had been out on his cycle, and he had just come in. He had an immense bundle of newspapers under his arm.

"My hat!" said Harry Wharton, staring at the bundle. "What on earth are you doing now? Is it another business scheme? Starting a newsagent's shop?"

"Nope!"

"Then what do you want with all those papers?"

"I guess I'm studying the case."

"What case?"

"This hyer case!" said Fisher T. Fish importantly. "I say, did you ever read about Hank Hogback, the Boy Detective?"

"Ha, ha! No."

"Well, I guess he was some detective," said Fish impressively. "And I guess I could follow his lay, just a few. I guess I'm taking up this case; going to investigate it. You galoots may have noticed that I've got more brains than any other chap in the Remove, than all the Form put together, as a matter of fact."

"Can't say I've noticed it," said Harry Wharton. "You've always seemed to be about seven or eight different kinds of a duffer."

"Well, I guess you don't know a really smart johnny when you see him. I'm going to figure this thing out, and spot the cracksmen."

"Oh, crumbs!"

The chums of the Remove stared blankly at Fisher T. Fish. They were used to all sorts of wonderful ideas from the THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

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American junior. He had started all kinds of weird "wheezes" in the Remove—as a moneylender and a pawnbroker, and his enterprises had ended in disaster. Fisher T. Fish was ready to undertake anything, and to prove that he could do it in a really slick style, and constant failures were far from discouraging him. His exalted opinion of himself was never diminished. But that Fisher T. Fish should think of starting as a detective took the fellows' breath away. It was the limit!

"You're going to look for the cracksmen!" ejaculated Nugent.

"Correct!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And I guess I shall sort him out!" said Fish confidently.

"I'm going to read up all that's known about the case. I've been keeping myself posted, you know. I've worked it out pretty well. Just you follow my lay-out—"

"Your what?"

"My lay-out. Listen while I explain, I mean. Burglaries have been going on for a fortnight—still going on. What does that prove?"

"That proves that there's a burglar at work," said Johnny Bull, after some moments of deep reflection.

Fisher T. Fish sniffed.

"It proves that the cracksmen is staying in the neighbourhood, looking round for cribs to crack, and living here right under the eyes of your sleepy old police," he said. "Of course, they can't spot him. Police are like everything else in this old island—fast asleep. Hank Hogback would have had the jay in the stone jug long ago. Now it comes out that the cracksmen is a Frenchy. Figure that out. There ain't many Frenchmen staying about hyer, I guess."

"Don't often meet them," agreed Wharton.

"Well, if I was the johnny in charge of this case I should make up a list of all the Frenchmen living in this part of the county, and look into their antecedents," said Fish. "That's how I should spot the galoot. I guess it's a johnny who's keeping up a respectable appearance in the daytime, and going out of a night doing the burgling. He can't be in hiding all the time. He must be living somewhere. Question: Where is he living?"

Fish rubbed his long, thin nose thoughtfully.

"It might be anybody," he said. "Some French tourist chap staying at Pegg—or the French photographer in Courtfield—or a French master in a school—perhaps our French master, old Charpontiay!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better let Mossos hear you suggest that!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I'm only saying that it's possible. A real detective suspects everybody till he finds the right man," said Fish. "We know it's a Frenchman. We know he can't be in hiding behind a tree all this time. Therefore, he's living somewhere. He can't have a brass plate on his door, with his name and profession on it, I reckon. Therefore, he's pretending to be something else. In disguise, very likely. I hear that Sir Hilton Popper is going to offer a reward for the recovery of his silver plate. Gentlemen, I guess I'm the antelope that's going to rope in that reward!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle as much as you like; you wait till I've worried this out," said Fish. "I'm going to my study now to read up all the reports on the case in all the papers up to date. Then I shall figure it out. You watch out for me!" And Fisher T. Fish stalked away with his newspapers. He left the juniors almost in hysterics.

Fish the moneylender, Fish the pawnbroker, and Fish the shopkeeper, had been very funny; but Fish the detective promised to be funnier! And the juniors were very curious to hear how Fish would get on when he had fairly developed his case, and started on the track of the unknown cracksmen.

When Johnny Bull went up to his study to do his preparation, he found the table covered with newspapers and newspaper cuttings, most of them marked with red and black ink in places, according to the importance of the details they gave. There were sheets of impot, paper sprawling over the table, too, with jottings, notes, and sketched-out theories. Fisher T. Fish was evidently not doing the thing by halves. He gave Johnny Bull a worried look as the sturdy junior came into the study.

"Don't interrupt!" he rapped out.

"I want to do my prep.!" said Bull.

"I guess I shall have to ask you to do it in the Form-room. I can't have my papers shifted; I'm right in the middle of it!"

"I guess you can ask," said Johnny Bull; "but I guess I sha'n't do my prep. in the Form-room while you play the giddy goat in the study. And I guess that if you don't make room for me, I can make room for myself—some!"

"Look here, Bull—" "Clear that rubbish off, you ass!" "You let my papers alone! I tell you—" "Are you going to give me room on that table?" roared Johnny Bull. "Nope!" "Righto! Here goes!" With a sweep of his hand, Johnny Bull scattered notes, theories, extracts, and jottings to the four corners of the study. Then he sat down to his preparation. "I guess I'll pulverise you for that, you jay!" yelled Fish furiously. "Pulverise away!" "Ahem!" I guess I can't waste time on you now. I guess—" "Shurrup! This isn't a guessing competition!" growled Johnny Bull. "I've got my work to do!" "I guess—" "Shut up!" roared Bull, grasping a ruler. And Fisher T. Fish growled and shut up; but he laboured away at his theories on one side of the table, while Johnny Bull worked on the other side. Johnny Bull gave him an inquiring look when he had finished. "Aren't you going to do any prep.?" he asked. "Nope! No time for that, I guess!" "Queelch will want to know about it in the morning!" growled Bull. "Blow Queelch!" And Fisher T. Fish didn't do any preparation; and the next morning he had quite a painful explanation with Mr. Queelch on the subject, which made him wish that he had not been quite so keen to understand Hank Hogback, the Boy Detective.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. A Strange Encounter!

BANG! "Oh, my blessed tyre!" "What rotten luck!" Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry stopped, and jumped off their machines. Bob's tyre had burst with a sharp report. The juniors gazed down at it in the thick dusk in dismay.

They were ten miles from Greyfriars. Ten miles on bicycles were not very much to two active youths; but on foot—

The chums of the Remove had ridden over to Latchford, a considerable distance from Greyfriars, to see a football match. Newcastle United had been playing there that afternoon, and the Removites had been very keen to watch them. There is much to be learned by watching good play by a fine team, and Wharton and Bob had undertaken the long ride to watch Newcastle. They had enjoyed the afternoon immensely, and, after tea in Latchford, they started out to ride back to Greyfriars. They had leave to miss calling-over, but they had to get in before bedtime.

And the unfortunate thing was that they had no repairing outfit with them. It was very careless of them, certainly, and, like all carelessness, it had to be paid for.

Bob Cherry simply glared at the offending tyre. It was, as Wharton said, rotten luck.

It was the most unfortunate thing that could have happened. They were some miles away from Latchford now, cutting across country to get home. They were far from any place where repair would have been possible, or repairing materials possible to obtain. And they had nearly ten miles between them and the school. And the hole in the tyre was a big one—a regular burst. It was already as flat as a pancake.

"Can't ride the beast!" said Bob.

"How rotten!"

"What an ass I was not to put my bag on!"

"So you were!" agreed Wharton. "And I was another ass!"

"Oh, blow it!"

"The blowfulness is terrific, as Inky would say; but it can't be helped."

And the juniors considered. They were a good distance from any railway station, and to get to one meant a long walk with the bikes. There was another consideration, too—the fares home would require money, and cash was at a low ebb. They had spent their funds on quite a royal tea at Latchford after the match, and there was very little left in the exchequer.

"Fairly dished!" said Bob. "You'd better ride on; I shall have to tramp."

Wharton shook his head.

"I'll tramp, too," he said.

"It's a rotten long walk!"

"No worse for me than for you," said Harry. "Never mind; it's all in the day's work. Worse things have happened than a burst tyre and a long tramp!"

"We sha'n't be in time for bed."

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"We can explain about the puncture. It's big enough to speak for itself, for that matter. Come on!"

And, making up their minds to it, the two juniors started off, wheeling the bikes. It was a dark November evening, and a mist had drifted inland from the sea. Round them leafless trees rose gaunt and grim in the mist and darkness. Not a light gleamed from the gloom of the surrounding lanes and fields.

They chatted over the footer match for the first two or three miles, and then their voices dropped away, and they saved their breath for walking. Bob Cherry's lamp gave a little splutter and went out. The lamps had been filled amply for the return journey, mounted; but they were exhausted now. Wharton's lamp was burning very low.

"Never mind; we don't need lamps when we're walking the jiggers," said Wharton cheerfully. "Mr. Tozer couldn't run us in!"

They came out on the broad turnpike road that ran to Courtfield, and tramped on steadily.

Bob Cherry's bike bumped and jerked with its flat tyre. Bob varied the monotony of the march with remarks upon his own and Wharton's fatheadedness in forgetting their repair outfit. Wharton's lamp spluttered out, and they walked on in the gloom.

Courtfield at last. Half-past ten chimed out from the church as they walked through the old town.

The mist was settling down more thickly.

"Only another mile or so," said Harry, as they left Courtfield behind. "We shall find everybody in bed. We can take the short cut; we sha'n't miss it!"

The short cut ran past the palings of Hardinge House, the dwelling of a rich manufacturer in the district. The bikes glided softly over the damp grass. On one side of the juniors were the palings, with the wide park beyond; on the other side the unfenced wood. It was dark and lonely and eerie in the mist; but Wharton and Bob Cherry were not troubled with nerves.

Suddenly a light gleamed out of the dark ahead.

"Hallo—hallo—hallo! Here's somebody, anyway," said Bob.

The light went out.

It was evidently a light that had been struck, and the red gleam of a lighted cigar followed. The red gleam showed in the darkness motionless. Whoever was smoking the cigar was leaning against the park palings, and not walking down the path.

The two juniors could not help being surprised.

That any man should choose such a cold, raw, misty night for leaning on the park palings and smoking a cigar was surprising. A cold, cutting wind whistled past the juniors. They were warm enough walking, but it must have been decidedly cold for anyone standing still.

The red gleam of the cigar grew clearer as they came on, their feet and the wheels making no sound on the soft, damp grass of the path.

"Mon Dieu! Mais il fait froid!"

The two juniors halted simultaneously.

The muttering voice, in shivering tones, came to their ears from the smoker, as yet hidden from their eyes by the mist. Only the red gleam of the cigar showed where he was standing.

The exclamation, "It is cold," had been made in French, which would alone have attracted their notice, for foreigners were not common in the neighbourhood. But that was not all. They knew the voice.

It was the voice of Monsieur Charpentier, the French-master of Greyfriars.

"Well, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"My only aunt!" muttered Wharton.

They exchanged a glance of amazement.

What Monsieur Charpentier could be doing there at that time of night was a mystery. The little Frenchman usually went to bed before that time. To find Mossoo hanging about the park palings of Hardinge House at close upon eleven o'clock on a raw cold November night was amazing.

"Well, this beats it!" said Bob Cherry. "What's the little game?"

"Better say good-night to him!" said Harry.

They went on. The form of the little Frenchman, muffled up in a heavy coat, was visible for a moment, but as he caught sight of the dim figures of the juniors through the mist, the Frenchman suddenly darted away.

In an instant he had disappeared into the darkness.

The juniors gazed after him open-mouthed.

Their surprise at finding Monsieur Charpentier there at all was as nothing to their amazement at his sudden flight.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Bob, at last. "What the dickens—"

"He's cleared off!" said Harry.

"What for?"
 "Goodness knows! He can't have recognised us, either; we couldn't have recognised him till we were nearer, in this mist. He doesn't want anybody to see him here!"
 "Why not?"

"Must be potty, I suppose. Come on!"
 They tramped on—seeing and hearing nothing again of the little Frenchman. They reached the gates of Greyfriars at last, and rang up Gosling. The school-porter came grumbling down to the gates to let them in.

"You got to go in to Mr. Quelch," he said grimly, "and wot I says is this 'ere—"

But the juniors did not wait for Gosling's opinion. They put the bikes up in the shed, and made their way to Mr. Quelch's study. The Remove-master's face was very stern when they presented themselves; but it cleared when they explained, and he was even sympathetic.

"Well, you could not help it, I suppose," he said. "I have been anxious about you. Go to your dormitory."

And the juniors, thoroughly tired out, went up to the Remove dormitory, where they found the Removites all fast asleep. But one or two of them woke up as Wharton and Bob came in and put on the light.

"Hallo!" yawned Nugent. "Have you got back? Where have you been?"

"Puncture!" explained Bob.
 "Why didn't you mend it?"
 "Left my outfit behind."

"Well, you must be an ass," said Nugent comfortingly.
 "Hadden't you any outfit, Wharton?"

"Some silly ass borrowed it, and I didn't notice it when I started!"

"My hat! I remember now, I borrowed it!" chuckled Nugent. "Have you walked back?"

"Do you think we flew?" snorted Bob Cherry.
 "Poor beasts!" said Johnny Bull sympathetically. "What was the match like?"

"Like a footer match!" growled Bob. "Do you think it was like a lucifer match, or a safety match?"

"Don't growl—I didn't puncture your tyre," said Johnny Bull pacifically. "Don't drop your boots when you take them off; all the people in Friardale are in bed now, and it would be a shame to wake them up."

Bob Cherry's boots were certainly a large size, but as Friardale was nearly a mile away, there was really no danger of his awakening the Friardale folk even if he had dropped his boots. He did drop them—on Johnny Bull—and Bull roared.

"Ow! You ass!"
 "Don't you be funny at this time of night!" grunted Bob Cherry, as he turned in. Harry Wharton put out the light.

The juniors settled down to sleep again. But both the adventurers were thinking of that strange encounter with Monsieur Charpentier, and presently Bob Cherry spoke:

"I say, Harry—"
 "Hallo!" came Wharton's sleepy voice.

"It was jolly queer about Mossoo, wasn't it?"
 "Yes, rather queer."

"What on earth was he hanging about Hardinge House for at this time of night?"

"Gee-whiz! What's that about Mossoo?" came a sharp, inquiring voice from Fisher T. Fish's bed. The Yankee junior was evidently awake.

"You awake, you fathead?" growled Bob. He had not intended to let Fish know anything about that meeting with Mossoo. It was a curious thing, but the chums of the Remove did not want to start chatter on the subject among the fellows.

"Yep—I guess I'm awake," said Fish. "You were saying—"

"Rats!"
 "About Mossoo—"

"Good-night!"
 "Look here, I guess I want to know—"

Snore!
 "Bob Cherry, you silly jay, you're not asleep. Look here—"

Snore!
 "I say, Wharton, what's that about Mossoo—"

Snore!
 And Fisher T. Fish gave it up.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Fisher T. Fish Wants to Know!

"I GUESS it's high time I started in!"
 Thus Fisher T. Fish.

Harry Wharton & Co. were coming out of the House, with coats and mufflers on over their football garb, it being a half-holiday, when Fisher T. Fish spoke.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
 Every Wednesday.

Fish had just come in, with another paper in his hand. Fish was doing quite a great deal for the circulation of the "Evening News."

"Well, what's the news now?" asked Nugent. "More burglaries and things?"

"Yep!"
 "By Jove, that's quite interesting! Where is it now?"

"Hardinge House!"
 "What!" Wharton and Bob Cherry uttered the exclamation together. "Hardinge House."

"Yep. You fellows passed it last night, coming in!" said Fish. "You must have passed it just before eleven. The burglary took place before twelve, so they say in the paper; the burglars were heard, and they cleared off, but they took the swag with them. No trace of them left excepting a busted window—the police have clues, as usual—and the clues won't lead to anything, also as usual."

"Same giddy burglar?" asked Tom Brown.

"I guess so. French chap—one of the menservants heard them calling to one another, and says one of them called out 'Vite.' Manservant didn't know what 'vite' meant, but told Mr. Hardinge. It means quick."

"Go hon!" murmured Nugent.

"So, you see, it's the same gang—two of them, it seems, and one a Frenchy, same as before. I guess this is growing warm."

"And I guess I'm growing cold," said Johnny Bull. "Let's get down to the footer, and Fishy can fish for burglar news as long as he likes."

And the juniors walked away towards the football-ground. Fisher T. Fish caught Wharton by the sleeve of his coat.

"I guess I want a word with you!" he said emphatically.
 "I guess you won't get it, then; I'm going to play footer."

"This is important—"

"The match with the Shell is slightly important, too," Wharton suggested sarcastically.

"Oh, blow your old footer! This is serious. Now, I want to know—"

"Clear off!"
 "You're going to tell me—"

"Leggo!"
 "Just you explain—I say—yaroo!"

Bob Cherry gently knocked Fish's legs from under him, and the Yankee junior sat down on the hard, unsympathetic ground. He gasped, and the juniors walked away to the footer-field. Fisher T. Fish picked himself up and dashed after them. Hobson & Co., of the Shell, were already on the ground, waiting for the Remove team, and Harry Wharton and his merry men lost no time in tossing off their coats and going on.

Fisher T. Fish was not to be balked. He ran on the field while Wharton and Hobson were tossing for choice of ends.

"I say, Wharton, I want—ow—ow—yow!"
 Biff!

Bob Cherry lifter the footer with his toe, and it sailed upon Fisher T. Fish, and smote him fairly upon his long, thin nose. The Yankee junior staggered back and sat down for the second time.

"Clear off!" shouted Hobson.

"Grooh! I guess—"

"Pass him into touch!" grinned Bulstrode.

"Yow—ow—ow! Yaroo!"

The grinning footballers dribbled Fisher T. Fish over the touchline, and left him there gasping for breath, and considerably muddled. Then the teams lined up. Fish staggered up, and blinked wrathfully at the players, but he did not venture upon the football-field again. He had to resign himself to waiting until the match was over.

"Talk about fiddling while Athens is burning," Fisher T. Fish growled to Skinner, who was looking on.

Skinner chuckled.

"Wasn't it Rome that was burning?" he inquired.

"I don't care a Continental red cent whether it was Rome or Athens. Might have been Jericho for all I care. But Julius Caesar was fiddling away while it was burning, and—"

"Nero!" yelled Skinner.

"Was it? Well, anyway, he was fiddling away while Rome was burning—if it was Rome—instead of ringing up the fire-brigade," said Fish. "And that's just what those jays are doing—playing football and letting awfully important matters stand over. I guess I'm on the track now, and I only want a little information— And there they go, playing about with a leather ball!"

And Fisher T. Fish gave a snort of utter contempt and disgust.

"What may you happen to be talking about?" inquired Skinner.

But Fisher T. Fish, on reflection, decided not to confide in



Fish glared at Bunter as if he could eat him, but there was no help for it! "I guess the bob is in my waistcoat pocket," he said, grinding his teeth. "Take it out, and then unlock these handcuffs, quick!" (See Chapter 7.)

Skinner. Skinner was just the kind of fellow to forestall him and collar his triumphant exposure of the burglar if he could. So Fish shook his head sagely and walked away, without replying to Harold Skinner's question. Skinner glanced at Bolsover major, and tapped his forehead significantly.

"Balmy!" he remarked laconically.

And, indeed, Fisher T. Fish's manners and customs that afternoon were so odd, that Skinner had some grounds for supposing that he was balmy.

The Yankee junior was on tenterhooks of curiosity and impatience. His theory about the unknown crackman had taken startling shape. He wanted to know about that meeting with Monsieur Charpentier by Hardinge House, and he wanted to know it all, and to know it at once. It was simply exasperating that he should have to wait, with all his energies as an amateur detective bottled up, so to speak, until the Remove had finished playing a footer match with the Shell. Nero fiddling while Rome was burning was simply nothing to it.

Harry Wharton & Co. forgot Fisher T. Fish, Monsieur Charpentier, and Hardinge House, and everything else for the next forty-five minutes.

Hobson & Co. of the Shell were playing up hard, and the Remove had plenty to do to hold their own, without worrying about Fisher T. Fish.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE SCAPECOAT!"

But when the whistle went for the interval, they were reminded of the existence of the enterprising American. Wharton was sucking a lemon, when he felt a particularly bony forefinger dig him in the ribs.

"I guess—" began Fish's voice.

Wharton gave a howl.

"Don't puncture me, you ass! Clear off!"

"You've got five minutes now," urged Fish. "I guess I want to know—"

"Ass! Haven't you been watching the match?"

"Yep."

"Then you know how the score is without asking me."

"You—you jay!" said Fish, in measured tones. "Do you think I'm asking you about silly goals? I want to know about Mossos—"

"Go and ask him."

"I guess he would boot me out!" grinned Fish.

"And I guess I shall do the same if you try to puncture me again!" growled Wharton. "Get off the grass! Clear out! Travel! Bunk!"

"The bunkfulness should be terrific, my worthy and idiotic Fish," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh gently.

"I guess I want to know—"

"Kill him, somebody!" said Wharton appealingly.

"But I guess—"

Bob Cherry grasped the inquisitive American, and Wharton

A Splendid Complete Tale of Harry
Wharton & Co. Order Early!



squeezed the lemon down the back of his neck. Then the whistle went, and the match was resumed, and Fisher T. Fish wriggled away in a very bad temper.

He hovered about the football field, however, waiting for another chance. The match was very keen and exciting, but it did not excite Fish. He was only anxious for it to end.

It ended at last, with the Remove a goal up. And when they were putting on their coats and mufflers, to return to the School House, Fish bore down upon them again.

"Wharton, old man, I guess—"

The footballers walked into Fisher T. Fish, and he was rolled over, and they walked over him. He sat up and gazed after them as they marched away towards the House, rather dazedly.

"Gee-whiz!" he murmured. "The jays! The slab-sided scallywags! I'll have that information out of them if I have to screw it out, by gum!"

And Fish dusted himself down and hurried into the School House.

After changing in the dormitory, the chums of the Remove came down, and Wharton, Nugent, and Bob Cherry went into Study No. 1 to tea. They had scarcely sat down at the table when the door opened and Fisher T. Fish presented himself.

The chums of the Remove glared at him.

"Don't they knock at door before coming in in the slum you were brought up in, Fishy?" Nugent wanted to know.

"I guess you might have locked the door, and I'm not taking any chances. I've got to have a bit of a palaver with you. Now, I guess—"

"Oh, buzz off!" said Wharton. "You make me tired!"

"I reckon you've got some information to give me."

"Quite a mistake. I haven't."

Fish closed the door, and lowered his voice.

"Now, look here," he said, "this is important. I told you I was taking up amateur detective work, and I'm going to look for the cracksmen, on the lines of Hank Hogback the Boy Detective. I guess you've got something to tell me. I want information, and I want the straight goods, mind. I heard what you said in the dorm. last night. You saw Mossoo hanging about Hardinge House as you came home. Now, I guess I want to know all the particulars."

"What for?"

"Can't you see? There's a mysterious cracksmen at work—man known to speak French, evidently keeping up respectable appearance in the daytime, and living about here somewhere, unsuspected by the police. You find Mossoo—man who fits in to that description—hanging about a place late at night, and the next morning we hear that there's been a burglary there. Can't you see how it works out?"

"I can see that you're a silly ass," said Bob Cherry.

"Give me all the particulars. You fellows thought it queer—you said so. Since we know about the burglary it looks very queer indeed. Now, I want to know—"

Wharton rose to his feet and opened the study door.

"Will you go out on your feet or on your neck?" he demanded.

"Look here," roared Fish, "I want to know! Do you mean to say that you're not going to tell me anything?"

"Exactly."

"Why not?"

"Don't approve of prying," explained Wharton. "You can call it being an amateur detective if you like—I call it spying and prying. Get out!"

"I guess—"

"On your feet or on your neck?" demanded Wharton.

"I'm not going—"

"Your mistake. You are."

"Look here—Yarrah! Hands off! I guess—I'll about pulverise you—I'll simply smash you if you get my mind up! I'll—Yah!"

And Fisher T. Fish left the study—on his neck.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Wharton Does His Best!

HARRY WHARTON closed the study door, and returned to the tea-table. He was looking a little flushed, and somewhat worried. Nugent glanced at him curiously.

Wharton and Bob Cherry had not mentioned even to Nugent that curious meeting with the French master the previous night. They did not want to have it talked about at all, and the least said meant the soonest mended. But for Fisher T. Fish having overheard Bob's remark in the dormitory, the matter would have been buried in oblivion so far as they were concerned. But there was plainly little chance of oblivion now.

"What on earth was Fishy talking about?" asked Nugent.

"I suppose all the Remove will be talking about it soon?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
Every Wednesday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

said Wharton savagely. "Well, it can't be helped now. We weren't going to say a word."

"Least said soonest mended," said Bob sententiously.

"Oh, all serene!" said Frank, a little huffily. "Keep your blessed secrets, and pass the sardines!"

"We're going to tell you now, of course," said Harry. "It's jolly queer, and since Fish has been talking his rot it makes me feel rather odd, about Mossoo. We saw him as we came home last night."

"He must have been out late, then," said Nugent. "He generally goes to bed before eleven."

"Yes; but there he was, smoking a cigar, leaning against the palings of Hardinge House. We knew it was Mossoo, because we heard him muttering about the cold, and we knew his toot, but we didn't see him clearly. He didn't see us, either; but as soon as he spotted us coming he bolted."

"Bolted!" ejaculated Nugent, in astonishment.

"Simply bolted off," said Bob Cherry. "He just spotted us in the mist, you know, but he couldn't have recognised us. He cleared off on the instant."

"My hat!"

"It's jolly odd!" said Wharton. "I'm pretty certain he didn't know us. I suppose he saw that we were boys, and that was all—the mist was pretty thick. The curious thing is that the burglary took place there less than an hour afterwards. Why should Mossoo bolt if he was doing no harm there? There was no reason why he should be afraid to be seen."

Nugent looked very thoughtful.

"Well, it's queer," he said. "But surely you don't think that Mossoo could possibly have had anything to do with the burglary?"

"No; it's impossible. Only it happens that one of the burglars speaks French. Burglars who speak French aren't common in England, I suppose?"

"Yes, that's queer."

"But I couldn't possibly think for a second that Mossoo isn't as good as gold," went on Wharton. "It's impossible he could be dishonest. He's one of the best little asses going."

"Certainly he is," said Nugent. "But Fishy suspects—"

"Oh, Fishy's a crass idiot!"

"It's odd about the burglar staying about here so long without being discovered," Nugent remarked thoughtfully. "More than a fortnight, and the police looking for him all the time. He may be living somewhere under a respectable appearance."

"Yes; that's another of Fish's precious theories. More likely he's a low beast, living in some low pub. in Court-field."

"Hold on!" murmured Bob Cherry, rising suddenly and silently to his feet. He stepped quickly to the door and threw it open.

Fisher T. Fish fell forward into the study.

"You rotter!" shouted Wharton, leaping up. "You've been listening!"

"Ow!"

"You cad—"

Fisher T. Fish picked himself up rather dazedly.

"I—I guess I was bound to get information from you," he said. "This kind of thing has to be done by detectives, you know."

"It's never done by anybody with a rag of decency, detective or not, you silly chump!"

"I guess I'm posted now. I was bound to get on to what you knew. And I guess it's pretty clear against Mossoo now."

"You ass—"

"So he bolted when he saw somebody coming by, did he?" chuckled Fisher T. Fish. "What for—eh? I want to know."

"Ask him!"

"Ha, ha! Not likely. Mossoo isn't going to know that he's suspected until I've got the proofs complete," grinned Fisher T. Fish.

"Idiot!"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

Fish shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"I guess we shall see what we shall see," he remarked.

"I'm willing to take you chaps into the biz, if you like, and whack out the reward with you—one quarter to be divided among you, and three-quarters for me. You can help me with the shadowing. I want Mossoo watched, and I want to intercept his letters—"

"What!"

"And as you're a good French scholar, Wharton, you could help me read them—"

Wharton jumped.

"Read his letters!" he gasped.
 "Yep! That's the way to get proof."
 "You scoundrel!" yelled Wharton indignantly.
 "What!" said Fish, in surprise. "Hyer, don't you call me names, you know. Detectives have to read letters, you know—they get proofs that way."
 "They'd get hidings, if they got what they deserved, if they read other people's letters!" snorted Wharton. "You—you worm! I suppose you're a bigger idiot than anything else. Don't talk to me. You make me ill!"
 "But I guess—"
 "If I find you meddling with Mossoo's letters," said Wharton, "I'll go direct to Mr. Quelch, and report you. Understand that? You shan't play any dirty tricks if I can stop you."
 "Oh, I guess you don't understand business! Detectives have to do all sorts of things in the way of business," said Fish. "Same as in war-time—don't they employ spies and things—it's all in the game?"
 "Rot! I wouldn't touch a spy with a pair of tongs—war-time or any other time! And you're not a detective, either; you're only a silly ass, playing the goat! And if you don't stop it, you'll get hurt."
 "I guess I'm following up this case till I've got my man," said Fish. "I'm willing to let you help me if you like. I want my man watched—"
 "Rats!"
 "And his letters must be read. And as they're in French—"
 "Rotter!"
 "It's all in the way of business. I guess—"
 "Look here, Fish, you've got to stop this. You'll get into trouble, and you are acting in a beastly, rotten way. For your own good, we're going to persuade you to stop it."
 "I guess I should want a lot of persuading," chuckled Fish.
 "We're willing to persuade you to any extent. Collar him!"
 "Hyer, I guess— Hands off! Ow!"
 Bob Cherry and Nugent seized the enterprising detective, and Wharton picked up a ruler. It dawned upon Fish that the methods of persuasion were likely also to be methods of barbarism, and he struggled wildly. But Nugent and Cherry jammed his face downwards on the hearthrug, and Wharton raised the ruler.
 "Now, Fishy, are you going to chuck it?"
 "Nope!" gasped Fish.
 "Will you promise not to meddle with Mossoo's letters?"
 "Nope!"
 "Whack, whack, whack!"
 "Yaroo! Help! Gee-whiz! Jumping Jehosophat!"
 "Going to chuck it?"
 "Nope!" shrieked Fish. "Leggo!"
 "Whack, whack!"
 "Yaroo! I guess I'll simply smash you! You watch out! I'm a terror when my mad's up! Ow! You jay, leave off! Yah! Leggo!"
 "Whack, whack!"
 Fisher T. Fish made a desperate effort, and tore himself out of the juniors' clutches. He made a wild spring for the door, knocking over a couple of chairs, and rolled headlong into the passage. He picked himself up, and fled before the juniors could get near him again.
 Harry Wharton laughed as he tossed down the ruler.
 "Well, we've done our best," he said. "We can't do more. If he makes a fool of himself now, he can't say we didn't do our best to stop him."
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 And to was finished in No. 1 Study without any further interruptions from Fisher T. Fish.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Shadowed!

FISHER T. FISH had intended to keep his own counsel, which would certainly have been a wise thing for an amateur detective to do, and quite in accordance with the manners and customs of Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake, and Hank Hogback, and other famous detectives. But the desire to talk, especially about himself, was too strong for Fish.
 He was somewhat at a disadvantage as a detective, in comparison with the famous characters mentioned. Sherlock Holmes always had the faithful Watson to talk to, and Watson could be depended upon to let him do all the talking, only ejaculating "Wonderful!" from time to time. Sexton Blake could always talk to Tinker, and run on to any length.
 Fisher T. Fish had no faithful follower of that kind. He felt sorely the need of a Tinker or a Dr. Watson, but such were not forthcoming in the Greyfriars Remove. Hence THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

NEXT MONDAY—

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

Fish, who never could keep silent for long, had no recourse but to confide his plans, his intentions, and his theories, to any fellow who would listen to them.

The result was that, in the course of a day or two, all the Remove knew that Fish had started in business once more, this time as an amateur detective; and that he had set out to accomplish no less an object than the capture of the mysterious crackman who was worrying and alarming the whole countryside.

And the fellows chuckled over it joyously; but they simply yelled over the additional information that Fish suspected the French master of being a member of the nefarious gang.

That really seemed too rich, even for Fishy.

It grew to be a favourite amusement in the Remove to draw Fishy out, and make him explain his clues and his theories. The fellows would listen to him, only interrupting him with roars of laughter.

But Fish did not mind the laughter, so long as he could find listeners. He was in the limelight, and that was all he cared for.

Besides, as he told them dozens of times, he guessed they would laugh on the other side of their mouths when he proved that he was right.

He was on the track.

Shadowing criminals was a favourite amusement of detectives, he remembered, so he had started shadowing Monsieur Charpentier.

He would follow him at a distance across the Close, watch him tirelessly while he read his Paris newspaper under a tree, and dog his footsteps when he walked over to Courtfield to buy his paper, or to call at the tobacconist's.

By this means Fish accumulated quite a large stock of information about the manners and customs of Monsieur Henri Charpentier.

He learned, for instance, that he was a regular reader of the "Figaro"; that he had it supplied to him by a news-agent in Courtfield. He learned that Mossoo smoked Partagas cigars, and that he bought them at Jones's, in Courtfield, and that he generally smoked two a day. He learned that Mossoo walked two hours every day for exercise, and that he visited Dr. Pillbury, in Friardale, occasionally to play a game of chess.

The only drawback was, that all this information was of no value whatever.

Fisher T. Fish was in hopes of seeing a black mask drop some day from Mossoo's pocket when he pulled out his handkerchief, or of observing the butt of a revolver sticking out under his tight frock-coat.

But, keenly as he watched, there was never a sign of a revolver or a mask about the little Frenchman.

He devoted a great deal of time to observation of Mossoo's correspondence.

And there he felt that he was in better luck. Mossoo received letters with the blue 25-centime stamp of France upon them, but even Fish could find nothing suspicious in Mossoo getting letters from his own country. But he received also letters with the local postmark.

Fisher T. Fish pounced upon that discovery with avidity.

There was no doubt about it. Mossoo received quite a number of letters from someone in the neighbourhood.

Fish managed to see the letters close at hand before they were taken to Monsieur Charpentier, though he never had a chance of collaring them.

Sometimes the postmark was Courtfield, but occasionally it was Friardale or Pegg; but always somewhere near Greyfriars.

Who was the unknown correspondent?

Why should anybody living in the neighbourhood write to Mossoo, where it would have been so easy to come and see him, or to receive visits from him? One or two letters, certainly, would have been natural; but a voluminous correspondence from someone only half a mile away? It was a suspicious circumstance.

What could the letters be about?

Were they evidently not letters from other members of the burglarious gang, keeping up constant communication with the leader?

An additional, suspicious circumstance was that the handwriting seemed to Fish to be of a feminine variety. That, of course, was adopted for a purpose of disguising. Perhaps the real handwriting of the rascals being known to the police.

"I guess I've got to see those letters," Fisher T. Fish said to himself, again and again; but the opportunity did not arise.

For—another suspicious circumstance—Mossoo was very keen about his letters. Sometimes he would meet the postman at the door, or at the gate, and take the letters direct from him, always under the eye of the ubiquitous Fish. Once

A Splendid Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. Order Early!

Fish had the great good fortune to observe him open a letter, and to catch the top line:

"Cher Henri!"

Evidently the letter was in French, and from an intimate acquaintance. And Fisher T. Fish would have given a great deal to see the name at the end of that letter, and thus to learn who it was that addressed the French master of Greyfriars as "Dear Henry."

And then, the French master's outgoings and ingoings were suspicious.

Fish discovered one evening that Monsieur Charpentier was out of doors just when the Remove were going to bed; and it was a cold, foggy, winter evening.

Where was he?

Fish eagerly scanned the paper the next day to learn whether there had been a burglary in the neighbourhood overnight.

Unfortunately, there had been none.

But Fish reflected that the villain was probably simply reconnoitring, or consulting with his nefarious pals, on that occasion, and that the burglary would shortly follow.

Fish had it all worked out in his mind. A gang of French criminals were at work, probably desperadoes who had had to fly over the Channel. Mossos was the chief, and from his unsuspected position as French master at Greyfriars, he had been able to obtain all sorts of useful information about the valuables in the neighbourhood.

It was all so clear to Fisher Tarleton Fish that it amazed him that the police did not "tumble" to the secret at once.

But they didn't!

Fish reflected that, after all, everything was in a sleepy state in a played-out old island, and that the police could not be expected to be wider awake than the rest of the population.

But with all his watching, spying, shadowing, listening, the amateur detective had to confess that he was really not getting any "forrarder."

The Remove fellows asked him sometimes whether he had made any arrests, and Fish could only sniff and tell them to wait and see.

Harry Wharton & Co. waited with interest for the inevitable licking that must surely be the outcome of Fish's investigations. For surely, in the course of time, the way his name was being bandied about must come to the knowledge of the French master, and they could imagine what a fury of excitement poor Mossos would be thrown into. He would rush to the Head at once—and then Fish would be called over the coals—and he would receive such a lesson that his detective instincts would most likely be damped for ever.

Fisher T. Fish came rather excitedly into No. 1 Study, a few days after the vain attempt of the Co. to persuade him to give up his new business.

"Caught him?" demanded Nugent.

"Got him under lock and key?" asked Wharton.

Fisher T. Fish snorted.

"I guess that's coming," he said. "I'm working up my case. I expect shortly to have it quite complete against him. You see, I think very likely the next burglary will be at Greyfriars itself, and then I shall nab him. But I want to be prepared. Can one of you chaps lend me five bob? I'm short of money, and I need five bob at once."

"Is it anything to do with this case?" asked Wharton. "If it is, you can go and eat coke!"

"Old Lazarus in Courtfield has a pair of secondhand handcuffs for sale," Fish explained. "They're only five bob—and splendid handcuffs—fasten with a spring, you know. Quite cheap at five bob; and I shall need some handcuffs, so—"

"Ass!"

"I'll let you have the dollar and a quarter back on Saturday!"

Wharton chuckled, and drew the five shillings from his pocket, and handed them to Fisher T. Fish. The Yankee junior departed on his bicycle for Courtfield, and half an hour later came back triumphantly with the coveted handcuffs in his possession. And quite a crowd gathered in the common-room to see Fisher T. Fish displaying them—a little rusty, but quite in working order, and all ready for the wrists of the mysterious cracksmen when Fisher T. Fish had run him down!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. Catching Fish!

CLINK, clink!

"Let's see them, Fishy!"

Fisher T. Fish held up the handcuffs to the admiration of the grinning juniors.

"I guess they'll soon be on the wrists of the cracksmen when I've completed my case!" he said impressively.

"When, when, when, when, when!" sang Bob Cherry softly.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
Every Wednesday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How do they work, Fishy?" asked Wharton, with great interest.

"Look hyer, you put them round your wrists so!"

"No, you jolly well don't," said Wharton, jerking his hands away. "You're not going to try them on me."

Fisher T. Fish smiled.

"I guess I could take them off instantly," he said. "Look here, here's the spring. Can be worked by anybody excepting the chap who's got them on."

"Try 'em on, Bunter," suggested Bob Cherry.

"No fear!" said Billy Bunter promptly.

"Skinner, then."

"Rats!" said Skinner.

"Try 'em on yourself, Fishy," said Wharton.

"I guess I don't mind," said Fish. "Look here. You shove them on me, and you'll see how they hold the wrists. I guess a fellow who once gets these on won't be good for much afterwards. No, sir. He'll get badly left."

And the handcuffs were snapped upon Fish's thin wrists.

He held out his hands, displaying the impossibility of getting them loose, and the juniors all agreed that when Fish had his prisoner fixed like that his prisoner would be quite at the mercy of Detective Fish.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "There's the dinner-bell."

Billy Bunter led the way to the door.

"Hold on! Get these things off me!" called out Fish. "Wharton!"

Wharton was gone. He had calmly walked out of the room after snapping the handcuffs upon the Yankee junior's wrists.

"Take these off, Bob Cherry!"

"Sorry, I'm going to dinner."

"Nugent, old man—"

"Can't be did."

"Bolsover!"

"No fear!"

"Look here, you jays!" shouted Fish in alarm, as the laughing juniors crowded out of the common-room. "Look here, I can't go in to dinner like this. Take these blessed darbies off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Luky, you black bounder—"

"The sorrowfulness is terrific, but I cannot oblige the esteemed and ludicrous Fish," said Hurree James Ram Singh, as he followed the rest of the fellows out of the room.

"Waal, I swow!" ejaculated Fish.

He might "swow" as much as he liked, but there was no possibility of getting the handcuffs off. Fisher T. Fish was demonstrating only too clearly how powerfully they would hold a prisoner. There was simply no chance of getting his wrists free unless someone chose to unfasten the handcuffs, and nobody seemed likely to choose.

Breathing wrath and dismay, Fish walked down the passage, but he dodged quickly round a corner as he saw Mr. Quelch coming. He did not want the Remove-master to see him handcuffed. Mr. Quelch would certainly have inquired where those handcuffs had come from, and would have confiscated them, if he had not caved Fish for having them in his possession. The Form-master was not likely to feel the slightest sympathy with Fish's desire to shine as an amateur detective.

Fish lurked behind the corner till the Remove-master had gone into the dining-room, and then he came out in search of a rescuer. Many fellows were heading for the dining-room, but they were utterly without sympathy for Fish. They only grinned, laughed, and chuckled. It dawned upon Fisher T. Fish that it was a "rag," and that Harry Wharton had fixed it with the fellows to leave him in that predicament as a lesson to him; and now he understood why Wharton had been so willing to lend him the five shillings to purchase the handcuffs at Mr. Lazarus's secondhand shop.

"My hat!" muttered Fish. "The awful spoofers! They've fixed me up like this on purpose, and I guess I've got left! Oh, crumbs!"

Nugent minor of the Second Form, and two or three more fags, came along, and Fish made an eloquent appeal to them.

But Nugent minor & Co. only roared with laughter.

They went into the dining-room, and left Fish stranded. Alonzo Todd of the Remove came up, and Fish gasped with relief. Alonzo was so obliging that he could hardly refuse to perform that little service.

"Alonzo, old man," ejaculated Fish, "help me out of this."

"My dear Fish, I shall be pleased to help you in any way," said Alonzo mildly. "What can I do for you?"

"Take these handcuffs off my wrists!"

Alonzo surveyed the handcuffs in astonishment.

"What an extraordinary thing, Fish. How ever did you come to be in that predicament?"



The form of the little Frenchman, muffled up in a heavy coat, was visible for a moment; but as he caught sight of the two juniors, Monsieur Charpentier suddenly darted away! "My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "What the dickens——" "He's cleared off!" exclaimed Harry Wharton in amazement. (See Chapter 3.)

"I've been left!" groaned Fish. "Take 'em off, quick 'Lonzy, old man!"

"Certainly, my dear Fish. It will give me the greatest pleasure to perform that little service. My Uncle Benjamin would——"

"Never mind your Uncle Ben now!" said Fish, who was on tenterhooks lest someone else should come along and stop the obliging Alonzo. "Just buck up and get them off!"

"With pleasure. I——"

"Let that duffer alone!" roared Peter Todd, dashing up and stopping his cousin in time. "Hands off, you ass!"

"My dear Peter——"

"Fish has been arrested and handcuffed on a charge of playing the spy," Peter Todd exclaimed. "He cannot be released till he has promised to reform."

"Dear me! That is very right and proper," said Alonzo. "I must observe, my dear Fish, that I have very strongly disapproved of your recent conduct. May I beg of you to reconsider your intentions, my dear friend, and——"

"Let me loose, you silly gas-bag!" howled Fish.

"Come in to dinner!" said Peter Todd, and he fastened a grip of iron on Alonzo's arm, and marched him into the dining-room.

Fish gave a groan of dismay. It looked as if he would have to miss his dinner, for he certainly could not venture into the dining-room with those ornaments on his wrists——

to say nothing of the possibility of eating while his hands were fastened together. All the fellows, however, were not yet in the dining-room, and Fish hung about the passage in the hope of encountering some good Samaritan who would release him.

Tom Dutton, the deaf junior came along, and grinned at the sight of the handcuffed Fish. Dutton was evidently in the joke, but Fish tackled him despairingly.

"Let me loose, Dutton, old man!" he pleaded.

"Eh?"

"Will you take these things off my wrists?"

"Can't use your fists?" said Dutton, with a chuckle. "No, I suppose you can't, Fishy, while you're handcuffed. You can't expect to!"

"Will you help me, you ass?"

"Don't you call fellows whelps, while your hands are fastened, Fishy; it isn't safe!" said Tom Dutton warningly.

"Unfasten these blessed handcuffs for me, Dutton!" shrieked Fish. "I guess I want to go in to dinner."

"Well, I don't know about that," said Dutton. "I think you're a rotter, to be spying and prying about, but I don't know about a miserable sinner. Still, I dare say you're right. You know best what you are!"

"I shall miss my dinner!" yelled Fish. "Can't you understand? I don't want to go without my grub!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

A Splendid Complete Tale of Harry
Wharton & Co. Order Early!

"Yes, there's the rub; there's no mistake about that!" said Dutton.

"Grub, idiot! Grub, fathead—grub, you silly ass! I don't want to miss my grub!"

"If your hands weren't fastened, I'd jolly well punch your nose for calling me a cub!" said Dutton. "You'd better shut up!"

"Will you unfasten me?" shrieked Fish, with all the force of his lungs. Tom Dutton heard him at last, and shook his head promptly.

"No fear!" he said. "And don't shout at me like that. I don't like it! I'm not deaf!"

And Dutton disappeared into the dining-room.

Two or three more fellows came by, but they all declined to render first aid. Coker of the Fifth was the last, and he simply roared at the sight of the handcuffed junior, and went gasping into the dining-room. Fish remained fuming in the passage. Dinner proceeded without him, and when it was over, Fish cleared out of the passage, in fear of being discovered in his unhappy state by a master or a prefect. He elinked into the common-room, and Billy Bunter found him there a few minutes later. Bunter came in cautiously, blinking through his big spectacles, and Fish's hopes rose. Bunter was not a specially obliging fellow, but he would have done anything for a few jam-tarts, and Fish thought he saw a chance of bribery and corruption.

"Bunter, old fellow!" he exclaimed, with unaccustomed friendliness.

"I was looking for you, Fishy," grinned Bunter. "Are you getting tired of wearing the bracelets? He, he, he!"

"Yep!" growled Fish. "Take 'em off, Bunter, old man. I shan't get any dinner now!"

"It was a jolly good dinner!" said Bunter. "Irish stew, and apple-pie—"

"Oh, don't!" growled the hungry Fish. "Just you get these things off, and I'll get a snack at the tuckshop. You might oblige a chap, Bunter!"

"You see, it's a rag, to make you give up playing the dotty detective," explained Bunter. "Wharton's given orders that you're not to be let loose until you've promised to stop playing the giddy ox."

"Blow Wharton! You're not bound to obey his orders," said Fish coaxingly. "He's up against your study, anyway. Show him that Study No. 7 doesn't care a Continental red cent for him!"

"Well, I'd like to help you, Fishy," said Bunter, appearing to relent.

"Hyar you are—sharp's the word, before the other jays come in!"

"The fact is," said Bunter, "I'm expecting a postal-order this evening—"

"Never mind that now. Just take these things off—"

"And if my postal-order had come, I'd come to the tuckshop with you and have a snack," added Bunter.

"But it hasn't," said Fish. "Take these rotten things off, Bunter, there's a good chap!"

"Still, I dare say you wouldn't mind lending me a few bobs till my postal-order comes?" suggested Bunter. "Then we can go to the tuckshop together."

"Nope! Take these things off—"

"If you can't oblige a fellow, Fishy—"

"I've only got a bob," said the unhappy Fish, "and I want that to get something for myself, as I've had no dinner!"

"Oh, cooky will give you something, if you explained to her that you hadn't had any dinner," said Bunter. "Cooky's a good sort! Did you say you would lend me a bob?"

"Nope!" yelled Fish furiously.

"Oh, all right! Good-bye!" And Fisher T. Fish glared with almost homicidal fury as the fat junior rolled away towards the door.

"Bunter, old man—"

"Sorry, I'm in a hurry, Fishy! Can't stop!"

"I guess I'll lend you the bob."

"Oh!" Billy Bunter turned back. "Sure you don't mind, Fishy?"

"Nope, I don't mind!" said Fish, between his teeth. "You take these handcuffs off my wrists, and I'll hand out the bob."

"Well, I don't like to doubt your word, Fishy, but a fellow who'd spy and pry and watch people would break his word, wouldn't he?" said Bunter. "I'll have the bob first, if you don't mind!"

"How can I give you the bob when my hands are fastened, you fat duffer?"

"Oh, that's all right, just tell me the pocket it's in, and I'll get it out," said Bunter. "I don't mind taking a little trouble to oblige a chap!"

Fisher T. Fish glared at him as if he could eat him. But there was no help for it; Billy Bunter was his last hope, and

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"THE PENNY POPULAR," Every Friday.

Bunter would not help him unless it was made worth his while.

"I guess the bob is in my waistcoat pocket," said Fish, grinding his teeth. "Take it out, and get me loose! I can hear somebody in the passage."

Bunter speedily extracted the shilling, and it disappeared into his own waistcoat pocket. Then he seemed to hesitate.

"I don't know whether I can find the spring, Fishy—"

"There it is—it's quite simple—as easy as rolling off a log, to any fellow who hadn't got the bracelets on!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you doing with those handcuffs, Bunter?" roared Bob Cherry, appearing in the doorway with a crowd of fellows.

"Ahem! I—I—I—"

"Quick!" panted Fish. "The spring—quick!"

Bob Cherry caught Bunter by the shoulders and spun him away. The Owl of the Remove collapsed upon the floor.

"You're not getting loose just yet, Fishy," chuckled Bob. "Hyar, I say, he's got my bob!" howled Fish, as Bunter made for the doorway. "Make him give me back my bob!"

Bunter fled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "You can lose your bob—serve you right for trying to bribe and corrupt Bunter."

"I guess I'm going to have that bob back!" yelled Fish.

He rushed into the passage after Bunter, his handcuffs clinking. It was easy to overtake the fat, unwieldy Owl of the Remove—but not so easy to deal with him when overtaken. Billy Bunter was not a fighting man; but he was quite capable of dealing with a fellow whose hands were fastened. He faced round at Fish, and put up his fat fists, and Fish staggered back from a drive in the chest, and another on the chin.

"Come on, you rotten spy!" said Bunter valiantly. "I'm not afraid of you! I'll jolly well give you a lesson!"

"Yaroooh! Keep the fat beast off! Ow, my nose!"

Fish dashed back into the common-room. Bunter would have delivered some more punishment, but Bob Cherry introduced his boot into the matter, and Bunter retreated. He rolled away to the school shop, and Fisher T. Fish's last shilling was soon being expended in the form of refreshments liquid and solid.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Prisoner!

I GUESS I'm fed up!" howled Fisher T. Fish, glaring furiously at the crowd of fellows in the Common-room, who were simply howling with laughter. "Are you going to take these things off, or are you not?"

"Not!" said Harry Wharton calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I can't go into class this afternoon with them on."

"Why not? You can ask Mr. Quelch to take them off."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess I own up I've got left," growled Fish. "Don't run a joke right into the ground, you know. Let me loose."

"Only on condition that you promise, honour bright, to give up your new business," said Harry Wharton. "We're fed up with you as a detective."

"The fed-upfulness is terrific, my worthy Fish."

"You've been spying and prying after Mossoo for a week past," said Harry. "It will come out sooner or later, and then you'll get it in the neck. What do you think will happen when Mossoo knows you suspect him?"

"Blow Mossoo!"

"He will complain to Quelch or the Head, and you'll get a flogging."

"I guess I'm taking the risk."

"Then you've guessed wrong; you're not. You're not going to disgrace the Remove by playing the spy. I saw you nosing over the letter-rack this morning, and if Mossoo hadn't taken his letter, you'd have tried to collar it."

"That's my business."

"Ours, too! We're fed up with your dirty tricks. You've got to chuck it. Promise, and we will let you loose."

"I won't!"

"Then you can stay as you are."

"I can't go into class like this!" yelled Fish.

"That's your business."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish expostulated and pleaded in vain. Harry Wharton & Co. had quite made up their minds, and all the other fellows agreed with them. Peter Todd was sometimes in opposition to the Co., but this time he was in hearty accord with them. So was Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. There was no help for Fisher T. Fish. He chose to call his new occupation detective business; the other fellows called it by its right name of spying, and they were

ted up with it. As Peter Todd gently explained to Fish, he had outlived his usefulness as a standing joke, and it was time to chuck it.

But Fisher T. Fish had no intention of chucking it. He was weaving a network of deadly proofs round the unfortunate Mossos—or he thought he was. And he was not going to give up the prospect of a great and glorious triumph to please fellows who had old-fashioned prejudices about spying and prying.

The juniors cleared off, leaving Fisher T. Fish alone in the Common-room. Fish was in a state of excitement and fury, but he was quite determined. Whatever happened, he was not going to give up his business as an amateur detective.

He could not venture out of doors with his hands shackled, and he waited in the Common-room till the bell rang for afternoon classes.

When the Remove went into their Form-room, Fish made a frantic appeal for release; but his appeal was unheeded.

"Will you give your word to chuck up spying?" Wharton asked him. And Fisher T. Fish promptly replied: "Nope!"

"Then you can stick it out."

Fish dodged out of sight as Mr. Quelch came by. He remained in the passage after the Form-master had gone in, wondering what on earth he was to do. Plenty of "cheek" as he had, he could not venture to enter the Form-room with the handcuffs on his wrists. Yet what was to be done? If he stayed for lessons, he would certainly be looked for as a truant.

Indeed, Mr. Quelch, as he glanced over the class, missed him at once.

"Where is Fish?" he asked, addressing Wharton, as head boy of the Form.

Wharton suppressed a chuckle.

"In the passage, I think, sir."

Mr. Quelch frowned, and stepped out into the passage. Fish was there, and the Form-master glanced at him sharply. He did not notice the handcuffs, Fish, holding his hands together as if he had a whim for standing with hands clasped.

"Go into the Form-room at once, Fish," said Mr. Quelch. "What do you mean by being late? You will take fifty lines."

"Yep!" groaned Fish.

Mr. Quelch followed him into the Form-room. Fish went towards his place, his hands still held together. The Remove watched him with suppressed joy, speculating how long it would be before the Form-master observed the handcuffs. It was not long!

"Fish!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

"Ye-e-ep," stammered Fish.

"What are you holding your hands in that ridiculous manner for?"

"M-m-mum-my hands, sir?"

"Yes. What do you mean? What is the matter with you, boy?"

"I—I—I guess—"

"Are your hands fastened?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in astonishment.

"Yep, they are, sir."

"Is this some foolish joke. Come here."

Fisher T. Fish reluctantly approached the annoyed Form-master. Mr. Quelch's eyes seemed to bulge quite out of his head at the sight of the handcuffs. He glared at Fish speechlessly for a moment or two.

"Fish!" he gasped, at last. "You—you are handcuffed! What does this mean?"

"I guess I've been spoofed and left by a gang of slab-sided jays, sir," said Fisher T. Fish dolorously.

"What? What? Cannot you speak English?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch testily. "I do not understand you. Do you mean you are the victim of a practical joke?"

"Correct, sir."

"Where did those handcuffs come from? How is it possible that such things are in the school? Whom do they belong to, Fish?"

"I—I guess they're mine, sir."

"Yours! What, in the name of all that is foolish and stupid, do you want handcuffs for? Explain, you stupid boy."

"I bought them, sir."

"For what?"

"Five shillings, sir."

"I mean for what purpose?" thundered Mr. Quelch. "What could possibly have possessed you to expend money upon the purchase of a pair of handcuffs?"

"I—I wanted them, sir, and—and they were cheap—"

"To purchase such a thing because it is cheap is ridiculous, Fish. An article is not cheap at any price, unless you are really in need of it. I certainly cannot allow any boy in my Form to possess such things as handcuffs. I can only conclude, Fish, that you purchased those articles with the intention of playing some foolish prank—and you seem to have had the prank played upon you. I shall take them away."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

from you and lock them up in my desk. The loss of the money may be a lesson to you to be more sensible. Now take them off at once."

"I can't, sir," groaned Fish. "If I could have taken them off, I reckon I shouldn't have let you spot me with them on."

"Hold out your hands, you silly boy."

Fish held out his hands, and Mr. Quelch unfastened the handcuffs and removed them. Fish watched him, with a long face as he locked the valuable articles up in his desk. Whether he ran down his man or not, he certainly wouldn't be able to handcuff him now. And it was useless to argue the matter out with Mr. Quelch. Fisher T. Fish was only too thankful that his Form-master had not discovered that he was an amateur detective.

"Now go to your place, Fish. Those handcuffs will be given you at the end of the term, to take away from the school, if you wish. Until then they will be locked up in my desk. You are a foolish boy. Go to your place."

And Fisher T. Fish went lugubriously to his place, amid the suppressed chuckles of the Removites.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Complete Letter-writer!

"THE blithering idiot!"

It was Bob Cherry who spoke, and the person he referred to was no less an individual than Fisher Tarleton Fish. It was a couple of days after the adventure of the handcuffs, when Bob Cherry came into Study No. 1 with that remark. Fish had by no means slackened down his efforts as an amateur detective. The network of deadly evidence was being wound round and round the unconscious French master, so to speak, but somehow or other it was not quite fatal yet. Monsieur Charpentier went cheerfully about his avocations in utter unconsciousness of the sword of Damocles that was suspended over his head.

Wharton and Nugent were very busy at their study table when Bob came in. But they suspended their occupation as he made his emphatic remark.

"What's the latest?" asked Frank.

"The howling imbecile!"

"But what—"

"The burbling duffer!" snorted Bob. "What do you think? The blithering cuckoo has found another clue."

"Good old Fishy!"

"He's found that there's a Frenchwoman in Hardinge House—an elderly mademoiselle, who teaches the Hardinge kids French!" said Bob. "You've seen her—most respectable old girl. The howling jabberwock has a theory now that she is an accomplice of Mossos."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton and Nugent roared. They had seen Mademoiselle Finetto Delorme, the French "gouvernante" in Hardinge House. A more estimable and respectable lady of uncertain age it would have been difficult to conceive. That Fish should extend his suspicions from Monsieur Charpentier, the French master at Greyfriars, to Mademoiselle Finetto, the French governess at Hardinge House, was too funny, and the juniors shrieked at the idea.

"I know it was jolly queer Mossos hanging about there that night as he did," said Bob. "But to think he was there for anything dishonest is simply idiotic. It's no business of ours and no business of Fishy's. Now he thinks Mademoiselle Delorme is an accomplice of Mossos. He's seen them talking together very earnestly, he says, outside the post-office in Friardale, that's all. He never knew they were acquainted before. As if Mossos was bound to tell a kid in the Lower Fourth about his acquaintances? Fishy has a theory that Mademoiselle let in Mossos and the other burglars at Hardinge House on the night of the burglary there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm fed up with the crass idiot," said Bob. "I caught him nosing over the letter-rack. There was a letter for Mossos, and he was feeling it over to see if the flap was fastened. I gave him a punch on the nose."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He ought to be stopped," said Bob, frowning. "It's disgraceful!"

"We're just thinking about that," grinned Wharton. "We may be able to rot him into chucking up his silly game. Shut the door and look here."

Bob Cherry closed the door. He looked cautiously at the books and papers on the study table. There were a French

dictionary and several sheets scrawled with specimen sentences in French.

"What on earth are you up to?" demanded Bob, in astonishment. "Have you taken to mugging up French, as poor old Chunjam used to do? What's the little game?"

"Fishy wants one of Mossoo's letters to read," Wharton explained. "It's a long-felt want, and we're going to supply it. He's not going to be disappointed."

"What?"

"You remember how Skinner japed Smithy once—wrote a letter in German that Smithy thought belonged to the German master?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Well, Smithy was taken in, and he's jolly keen, and Fishy isn't keen at all, though he thinks he is. We're going to improve on the scheme. The difficulty is to write a giddy letter in French. Still, if there are any mistakes, Fishy mayn't notice them; he's not well up in French."

Bob Cherry roared.

"Oh, what a wheeze! Good idea! Make a burglar appointment, and get Fishy to start off to watch the French master keep it. Ha, ha, ha! It would serve him right to cool his heels somewhere on a cold night for a couple of hours waiting for Froggy to turn up."

"That's the idea, only a bit better. When Fishy gets hold of the letter he's bound to sneak out and watch for the appointment to be kept. And it's going to be kept."

"What?"

"Two or three masked ruffians will pounce on Fishy, and

he'll be quite fed up with burglar-hunting before he discovers that they belong to the Remove."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"We're well under way with the letter," grinned Wharton. "I think I've got it pretty right—good enough for Fishy, anyway."

"Read it out!" chuckled Bob.

And Wharton read out the concoction upon which he and Frank Nugent had been busy for the past hour with the aid of dictionary and grammar.

"Cher Henri,—Veuillez venir demain soir a onze heures pres du vieux chene foudroye, dans le bois, ou nous serons. Nous allons prendre conseil pour l'affaire de l'ecole. Il n'y a pas de temps a perdre. Il faut finir et filer, parceque les policiers sont sur nos traces. GASTON."

Bob Cherry laughed until he wept.

If Fisher T. Fish found that letter under circumstances that made him believe that it had been addressed to Monsieur Charpentier, he would certainly regard it as proof conclusive. The amateur detective would feel that he held the hidden crackman in the hollow of his hand.

"Onze heures," grinned Bob Cherry. "That means eleven o'clock, so we shall have to break bounds if we're going to be there."

"We can do that for once for the good of the cause."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We shall know whether Fishy goes, as he's in our dorm. We've simply got to stay awake and keep one eye open. If he clears off we clear off after him. We shall find him at the lightning-riven oak—ha, ha, ha!—all serene."

"I suppose a 'vieux chene foudroye' is all right for 'lightning-riven oak'?" said Bob.

"Yes, that's all right. And the dead oak is a well-known landmark. Fishy knows it quite well."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better put the date on the letter, or he won't know it's for to-night."

"Good egg!"

And Wharton wrote "Lundi" at the top of the letter to indicate that it was written on Monday.

Peter Todd came into the study. Peter Todd was in the joke, and he had been out scouting. He had a crumpled envelope in his hand.

"Found one?" asked Wharton eagerly.

"Yes; here it is."

"What's that?" asked Bob, looking curiously at the torn, soiled, and decidedly dirty envelope. It had been through the post, and Peter Todd had evidently rescued it from a waste-paper basket or a dustbin.

"Look at it!" said Peter, and he held it up.

The envelope was addressed to Monsieur Charpentier, at Greyfriars School.

"I tracked Trotter down when he was taking away Mossoo's waste-paper basket," Peter Todd explained. "After he had pitched it into the dustbin I sorted this out. There were two or three of them. Mossoo gets a lot of letters."

Bob Cherry roared.

If Fisher T. Fish found that precious letter inside an envelope addressed to Monsieur Charpentier, and which had evidently been through the post, he would not be likely to entertain any doubts as to its genuineness.

"What about the writing, though?" said Nugent. "The

GOOD TURNS—No. 19.



Two Magnetite chums—an errand-boy and a schoolboy—while walking along a country road are plucky enough to stop a runaway horse, thus doing a good turn to the terrified girl in the trap, who has lost control of her steed.



Fish suddenly felt himself tapped lightly on the shoulder by the French master's cane, and he jumped and stared round at Mossoo with bulging eyes. "Vat for you hide viz yourself, Feesh?" asked Monsieur Charpentier. (See Chapter 14.)

fist in the letter will be different from the fist on the envelope."

"Different member of the gang," Wharton explained.

"Oh, that's all right!" said Peter Todd. "I know Fishy's theory about the handwriting. He thinks Mossoo's letters are directed in a disguised hand, because the real fist may be known to the police. Naturally, the horrid criminal wouldn't take the trouble to disguise his hand in the letter inside. Only Mossoo sees that. Fishy will work this out all right—disguised hand on the envelope, and the genuine article in the letter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only don't let him recognise it as a Remove fist," said Peter.

"That's all right, I think."

Peter Todd looked at the letter and grinned. Wharton had written it in a heavy, rough handwriting very unlike his own. There was not much likelihood of Fish tumbling to the fact that the precious document had been written inside Greyfriars.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

"Now the only thing is to let Fishy find it—under suspicious circumstances," chuckled Nugent. "We must stick it somewhere where he'll get hold of it, and where he can't suspect anybody but Mossoo put it."

"Yes, rather."

"And after lessons one of us will have to bike down to Priardale for some black crape for the masks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Remove roared hilariously over the scheme.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Great Find for Fishy!

MONSIEUR CHARPENTIER took the Remove in French that afternoon.

To see the kind little man pottering about, no one would have suspected that he was a desperate cracksmen leading a double life, and in danger every moment of

being tapped on the shoulder by Police-constable Tozer, from Friardale.

But Fisher T. Fish knew! He guessed that that was only a proof of Mossoo's deep and terrific artfulness.

Even during the French lesson he watched Mossoo, not without hope that a black mask or a revolver might drop out of his pocket on to the floor of the Form-room.

But nothing of the kind happened.

If Monsieur Charpentier had any use for revolvers and masks, he evidently kept them for business hours, and did not carry them about with him all the time.

Fish was devoting so much time and thought to detective work that he had very little attention left for the French language, and Monsieur Charpentier was very sharp with him. Towards the close of the lesson Mossoo was standing over Fisher T. Fish, compelling him to listen while he explained the mysteries of the subjunctive mood. In spite of himself Fish had to absorb the fact that "vouloir" requires a subjunctive to follow. Peter Todd was sitting next to Fisher T. Fish. As Mossoo moved away, leaving Fish almost gasping, Peter's gaze became fixed on the floor under the desk.

Fish observed it, and looked down.

Then he started.

On the floor, in the shadow of the desk, lay an envelope. It was turned face upwards, and Fisher T. Fish caught his breath as he read the address—"Monsieur Charpentier, Greyfriars School." And he knew the hand—that hand which looked like feminine writing, and which he was assured was a disguise adopted by a member of the cracksmen gang. Fisher T. Fish's breath came thick and fast.

Monsieur Charpentier must have dropped that letter without noticing it while he was gesticulating excitedly to Fish. In a moment Fish had stretched out his foot and covered the letter with his boot.

"That letter yours?" asked Peter Todd.

Fisher T. Fish gasped with relief. Todd had evidently seen the letter, but he could not have observed that it was addressed to Monsieur Charpentier, since he asked Fish whether it was his. And that was a great relief to Fish, for he knew that Todd would never have allowed him to take one of Mossoo's letters if he could have prevented it.

"I guess it's mine," said Fish calmly. "Didn't you see me drop it?"

"No, I didn't," said Todd.

"Well, I guess it slipped out of my pocket," said Fish coolly.

And he dropped a pencil, in order to have an excuse for stooping down, and bent under the desk and captured the letter.

He was trembling with excitement as he slipped the letter into his pocket. He had felt a letter inside the envelope, in his fingers, and he was breathless with tremulous joy.

The letter was safe in his pocket. But would Mossoo miss it—would he search—inquire?

Fish watched him anxiously.

Monsieur was feeling in his pocket now, then in another pocket. Fish trembled.

Had he missed the letter?

No; Mossoo's hand came out with a piece of chalk in it; that was evidently all he was searching for. Fish breathed again.

Fisher T. Fish was on tenterhooks while the lesson dragged on. Never had it seemed so wearisome to him. But it was over at last, and Mossoo left the Form-room, without any sign that he was aware of having lost a letter.

Fisher T. Fish would have given dollars untold to get out of the Form-room and read the letter. But Mr. Quelch returned for last lesson, and he had to stay in his place until the finish.

Fish was so absent-minded that Mr. Quelch was down upon him more than once before he escaped. He was thinking about the precious letter in his pocket. If it should be searched for before he had had a chance of reading it—if Mossoo should spot him as the person who had picked it up—if he should have to part with it unread! Those worrying possibilities drove all other thoughts from Fish's mind, and he was in an agony of impatience to be gone.

Naturally, he answered vaguely and almost idiotically when Mr. Quelch spoke to him, and he was the richer by a hundred lines when the Remove were finally dismissed.

But Fish didn't care for lines. What were a hundred lines to him, when he held the secret of the hidden cracksmen in the hollow of his hand?

Harry Wharton & Co. gave Peter Todd inquiring glances as they came out of the Form-room. Peter smiled, and closed one eye.

Fisher T. Fish hurried away, but Wharton caught his arm.

"Not in a hurry, Fishy?" he asked pleasantly.

"I guess not," said Fish, who did not want to awaken suspicion.

He knew only too well that if the Co. discovered that he had one of Mossoo's letters about him, they would very quickly deprive him of it.

"Come along and have a ginger-pop!" said Wharton cordially.

"I guess not, thanks—not in this cold weather!"

"Then we'll have some of Mrs. Mimbles hot home-made lemonade."

"Yes; come, Fishy!" said Bob Cherry, taking the Yankee junior's other arm. "You can tell us all about your theories while we're there."

Fisher T. Fish could have bitten them, so annoyed did he feel; but he dared not refuse. He was a very careful fellow with his money, and was never known to refuse a treat, and if he refused one now, it would certainly excite remark.

He walked away to the school shop with the chums of the Remove, and they discussed Mrs. Mimbles home-made lemonade and Fish's prospects of nabbing the cracksmen.

"I guess I shall have him soon," Fish could not help saying. "I've got a clue—a clue the police would give their blessed ears to get."

"What is it?" asked Peter Todd innocently.

"I guess I'm not telling you that yet," said Fish. "You wait till I've got the jay right under my thumb, and then you'll see something!"

"Still think it's Mossoo—hey?" asked Nugent.

"Yep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle now," said Fish. "I guess the cackle will be on my side when I've got that galoot right into the stone jug—just a few. Well, I must hump it—I've got a lot of lines to do."

And Fisher T. Fish quitted the tuckshop. The juniors looked at one another, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"He's taken the bait!" murmured Nugent.

"And swallowed it whole, hook and all!" chuckled Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Fishy! What a night he's going to have!" murmured Bob Cherry.

And the juniors roared again.

Fisher T. Fish, unconscious of the merriment of which he was the cause, hurried away to the study. He was feverishly anxious to read that letter. But Fate was against him. It was really as if the fellows knew he was anxious to be alone, and persisted in showing him friendliness just when it exasperated him to a pitch of fury. Johnny Bull joined him in the Remove passage.

"Coming into the gym, Fishy?" he asked.

"Nope. I've got lines to do."

"Yes; so you have. Going to do them now?" asked Johnny sympathetically.

"Yep!"

"Then I'll come and help you," said the generous junior. "After all, we're in the same study, and it's up to me to lend a hand."

Fisher T. Fish gave Johnny Bull a look that was not at all grateful; in fact, it was positively murderous. Johnny's kindness at that inopportune moment was not at all appreciated. But Fish was caught in his own trap—he could not disclaim his intention of doing the lines, or refuse Johnny's assistance, without exciting suspicion. So he suppressed his fury, and went into No. 14 with Johnny Bull, and they sat down together to do the lines.

Johnny Bull did not, as a rule, like doing lines, but he enjoyed those. He was, of course, in the plot of the Co., and it was very funny, from his point of view, to keep Fish sitting there, unable to read the precious letter that was almost burning a hole in his pocket.

Fish was in an agony—at any time Mossoo might miss that letter and begin inquiring for it. And as soon as the juniors heard that Mossoo had lost a letter and couldn't find it, wouldn't they guess at once that the amateur detective had carried out his plan of purloining the French-master's correspondence, and if they guessed that, they would collar him and recover the letter—unread? Never had Fish's pen raced over the lines as it raced now; but the impot was finished at last.

"Now for tea," said Johnny Bull. "They've got a good spread in No. 1. Will you come there with me, Fishy?"

"They haven't asked me," murmured Fish.

ANSWERS

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"Oh, that's all right—I can take a friend if I like."
"No; I don't think I'll come, thanks, all the same!" said Fish. "You go—don't waste any time. They may be waiting for you."

"You're going to have your tea here alone?" asked Johnny.

"Yep!"

"Oh, no; I can't have that! I'll stay with you," said Bull kindly.

Fish ground his teeth.

"Don't do anything of the sort," he said. "You run along and have your tea in No. 1. I don't want to keep you away."

"I don't mind a bit," said Johnny Bull. "I'll have tea here with you, Fishy. I want you to tell me about your latest clues, too."

Fisher T. Fish would have given a great deal to be able to drop Johnny Bull out of the study window. But that was not feasible; and, as there seemed no way of getting rid of him, he decided that he might as well share the spread in No. 1 Study.

"I guess I'll come with you," he said.

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull.

And he marched Fisher T. Fish off to No. 1 Study. Harry Wharton & Co. were there, and they were very hospitable to Fish, and Fish would have enjoyed himself very much if he had not been thinking all the time about the valuable letter in his pocket. But his anxiety to read it, and his terror of losing it unread, spoiled everything. He hardly noticed what he ate, and he answered remarks at random. The juniors chuckled as they saw him help himself to jam and sardines at the same time, in his worry and confusion of mind.

Fisher T. Fish rose at last, determined to escape even at the risk of being suspected.

"I guess I'll get along!" he remarked. "Thanks awfully for the letter—I mean the feed! So-long!"

And he fairly ran out of the study.

The juniors chuckled loud and long. They felt that Fisher T. Fish had been sufficiently put to the torture, and they let him go, and finished their tea in high spirits, greatly cheered by the thought of the Yankee junior, secluded in some corner, spelling out that letter written in French, and chortling over his find.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Right on the Track!

FISHER T. FISH fairly gasped with relief as he escaped at last from the over-kindness of the chums of the Remové.

He ran down the passage, and stopped in his study to catch up a French dictionary and grammar, and ran on. He knew that the letter would be in French, and he wanted to be ready for any difficulties that cropped up in reading it. He dashed into the box-room, and locked the door behind him, and sat down on an empty trunk, gasping.

"Gosh," he murmured, "I've got away from the jays at last! Almost enough to make a chap suspect they knew I'd got the letter, and wanted to keep me from reading it—only they'd have taken it off me if they'd known—the silly jays! Now for it!"

He drew the letter from his pocket with fingers that fairly trembled.

Yes; there it was—the envelope addressed in the hand he had come to know very well; crumpled and soiled, perhaps through being carried about in Monsieur Charpentier's pocket. And the postmark—it was the previous night's. Then this was the letter that Monsieur Charpentier had received by the first post that morning! Fish had seen it in his hand, and longed to read it. Now he had the chance.

He felt no scruples as he drew the letter inside from the envelope. Hank Hoggback would have felt no scruples, so why should Detective Fish? The letter was on a paper that did not match the envelope—a plain, cheap cream-coloured notepaper. Fish nodded as he realised that the rascals would naturally use a kind of paper that was in common use, and could never possibly afford a clue to the police.

And the handwriting on the letter—it was quite different from that on the envelope. Fish nodded again at that. It bore out his theory that the envelopes were addressed to Monsieur Charpentier in a disguised hand.

And the letter itself! Fisher T. Fish, with all his wonderful gifts, was not a brilliant French scholar, and the letter offered difficulties. He read it through with gleaming eyes, however. He understood enough of it at the first reading to know that it said just what he had expected. It was proof—proof positive at last! What would not the county police have given to have hold of the letter, which ran:

"Cher Henri.—Veuillez venir demain soir a onze heures pres du vieux chene foudroye, dans le bois, ou nous serons. Nous allons prendre conseil pour l'affaire de l'ecole. Il n'y a pas de temps a perdre. Il faut finir et filer, parceque les policiers sont sur nos traces."
GASTON.

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"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

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Fish's eyes glittered.

"Oh, isn't it ripping?" he murmured aloud. "Isn't it topping? Don't it fairly put the lid on—just a few? What would those galoots say now, I wonder?"

And he chuckled joyously.

The expressions that escaped him, he soon hunted out in the dictionary. Then he made a translation of the letter.

The translation ran:

"Dear Henri.—Will you come to-morrow evening at eleven o'clock to the old lightning-riven oak in the wood, where we shall be? We shall discuss the affair of the school. There is no time to lose. It is necessary to finish and clear off, because the detectives are on our track."
GASTON.

"Oh, gee-whiz and jumping Jehoshaphat!" grinned Fish. "My only hat! Haven't I spotted the jay? Ha, ha, ha!"

Well enough he knew the old lightning-riven oak in the wood—it was a well-known landmark in the vicinity. And it was in a very lonely spot, where nobody went after dark.

Just the place, of course, that these scoundrels would choose for a secret meeting to discuss their nefarious enterprises.

And what were they going to discuss?"

L'affaire de l'ecole—the affair of the school! That, of course, meant the burglary of Greyfriars. True, it might mean Highcliffe School, or even Cliff House. Anyway, it meant the burglary of some school, probably Greyfriars. Fish felt a great elation at the idea of being the means of preventing a bold bad burglary at Greyfriars. All the school would have to acknowledge that he had done it—that he had saved the school silver, worth two thousand pounds, at least. Visions of being publicly thanked by the Head, before an assembled and admiring school, floated before his dazzled eyes. And he would not reap merely glory. If he saved the school such a tremendous loss, he would have a right to ask for a cash commission on the transaction. Fisher T. Fish was not burglar-hunting for his health, as he would have expressed it in the American language. Certainly he would be within his rights in requesting a commission of, say, two-and-a-half per cent. on the value of the property saved.

And this was the last chance of catching the cracksmen who was haunting the neighbourhood. The letter said plainly enough, "il faut finir et filer," that is to say, it was necessary to get done and escape. "Les policiers sur nos traces"—the detectives on the trail! But the policemen would be a little too late. Fisher T. Fish would be before them. He chuckled joyously at the thought.

And the letter was dated "lundi," which meant Monday. "Demain," to-morrow, was, therefore, Tuesday, to-day, and it was this night that the villainous Charpentier was to meet Gaston and the rest at the lightning-riven oak in the wood.

Fisher T. Fish was greatly impressed with the lightning-riven oak. It gave a real melodramatic touch to the affair.

And now the question was, what was to be done? Take the letter as it was to the police-station? Fish shook his head at that idea. They simply wouldn't believe him. If they took the trouble to communicate with Greyfriars about it, the Head would answer for the respectability and integrity of Monsieur Charpentier. Fish would be suspected of having made up that letter himself, and he would be caned—and the criminal, of course, would be put on his guard. He could not prove that the letter was Monsieur Charpentier's, and, of course, the French master would deny all knowledge of it. No, that would not do. He must have clearer proof before he called in the aid of the police.

And that clearer proof would be easy enough to get.

At eleven o'clock that night the criminals were meeting under the lightning-riven oak, to discuss the plans for their next robbery.

What was easier than to get there earlier, and conceal himself in the thicket, and overhear their conversation, and learn the whole of their plans from beginning to end? Certainly they would talk in French—it was undoubtedly a French gang he had to deal with. And Lower-Fourth French was not quite equal to the strain of conversation. But he would hear enough to inform him of their intentions. He would understand enough for that.

Besides, it was quite probable that as the criminals were working in England, there would be one or two English members of the gang, and in that case part of the talk, at least, would be in English.

At all events, it was evidently the business of a keen detective, furnished with such a clue as this, to be present at the meeting, and make notes of the plans of the scoundrels when they took counsel together.

Fisher T. Fish carefully folded up the letter, and placed it in his pocket.

"I guess I'm going to be there!" he said to himself. "Once I've heard 'em jaw over their plans, and I shall know the whole game—and exactly when and where the next robbery is to take place. And then I'll fix it up with the police to lay

a trap for them, and they'll walk right into it. Gee-whiz! The fellows will stare when they know all about this—just a few!"

And Fisher T. Fish left the box-room in a mood of great satisfaction and contentment.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

In Deadly Peril!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. observed Fisher T. Fish curiously when the Remove went to bed that night.

Fish did not take all his things off, and the chums of the Remove noted it, and smiled. When he turned out at half-past ten he wanted to dress as quickly as possible, and get out of the dormitory, in case any of the other fellows should awake.

Wingate of the Sixth saw lights out, without observing anything suspicious. Fisher T. Fish did not take part in the usual chat after lights out. He affected to sleep. One by one the juniors dropped into slumber, and by ten o'clock the voices had all died away in the Remove dormitory.

But not all the juniors were asleep.

Wharton and Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent were awake. The chums of the Remove had agreed that the matter was to be left to the trio. It would be risky for a crowd to try to get out of the dormitory, though otherwise the whole Co. would have been glad to keep that appointment under the lightning-riven oak in Friardale Wood.

Silence reigned in the dormitory.

But at a quarter past ten Fisher T. Fish sat up in bed.

Three keen pairs of ears heard him move, and three faces smiled in the darkness.

"You jays all asleep?"

Fish asked the question in a low voice.

There was no reply—only a sound of steady breathing, and a deep bass snore from Billy Bunter. Fisher T. Fish grinned, and stopped quietly out of bed. He dressed quickly in the darkness, and, taking his boots in his hands, stole silently out of the dormitory. He had provided himself with a pair of rubber boots, partly because they were quiet, and partly because Hank Hogback was always so provided. The dormitory door closed softly behind him.

Then three juniors sat up in bed.

"The blithering ass has gone!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"The burbling jossier is on the track!" yawned Nugent.

"And we're going on the track, too," said Wharton.

"We'll give him a quarter of an hour to get clear. No hurry for us, even if we're late for the appointment. The silly ass will wait under the giddy lightning-riven oak."

And the juniors chuckled.

It was half-past ten when the three Removes slipped out of bed, and dressed themselves, pulling on overcoats, partly for warmth, and partly for concealment. The black crape masks were put in the pockets ready for use. They slipped quietly from the dormitory as Fisher T. Fish had done, leaving pillows and bolsters arranged in the beds to resemble sleepers, in case any inquisitive prefect should look into the dormitory in their absence.

Meanwhile, Fisher T. Fish had slipped from the window of the box-room, upon an outhouse roof, dropped to the ground, and scudded away.

It was dark and misty in the Close, and the lights from the windows of the rooms that were yet lighted gleamed pale and yellow.

Fisher T. Fish clambered over the school wall, and dropped into the road.

His heart was beating fast with excitement.

He realised that there was some danger in his enterprise. True, the ruffians could not possibly suspect that their meeting would be watched. And in the misty night, in the thickets, the spy's escape should be easy, even if somehow they discovered his presence. Still, there was danger, and that was a part of the business that Fish did not wholly like. But it could not be helped, and he tried to comfort himself with the reflection that the celebrated Hank Hogback went into danger every day of his life—in fact, in every number of "Police Bits."

He scudded along the road, half-past ten striking as he left the school. It would not take him more than a quarter of an hour, he calculated, to reach the rendezvous. He would be in ample time—hidden in the thickets before the villains arrived by the lightning-riven oak in the wood.

Dark and gloomy the wood looked as he plunged into it. The deep, black shadows under the trees, the wreaths of seaweed clinging round the leafless branches, struck him with a chill.

What if the ruffians should be early for the appointment? What if he should run right into the grasp of some masked, lurking criminal in the black darkness of the wood?

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He shivered at the thought—but he kept on. After all, if they spotted him, they would not know why he was there. They could not suppose that a schoolboy was on their track. They were more likely to avoid him than to interfere with him.

The lightning-riven oak at last—and not a quarter to eleven yet. A glimmer of starlight fell upon the old shattered oak. The other trees were at a little distance from it—but close to it was a tangled thicket, and into that thicket Fisher T. Fish promptly plunged.

The leafless twigs crackled round him, and the sound seemed alarmingly loud in the dead silence of the wood.

But Fisher stopped quite still as soon as he was hidden in the thickets, and the branches crackled no more.

He settled down to wait.

He heard the three quarters chime out from Friardale Church. A quarter of an hour yet to wait for the rascals—and no sign of them yet. He was in good time. He began to shiver a little, in spite of his overcoat. It was a very cold night, and too cold to remain still with comfort. He shifted his position a little, and the twigs crackled. It was necessary to remain quite still. And the cold from the damp earth penetrated his boots, and crept up his bones.

Eleven!

He heard the chime, and the striking of the hour. The rascals could not be very long now.

Five weary minutes passed, and then there was a sound of footsteps.

Fish set his teeth.

He was almost shuddering with cold; but if he shuddered or moved, he knew that the dry twigs would crackle and betray him.

He had to grin and bear it—or bear it at least, even if he could not grin. His chattering jaws were very far from grinning just then.

A low, muttering voice came through the silence.

"C'est vous, Gastong?"

"It is you, Gaston?"

Fisher T. Fish heard the words quite plainly. It did not sound like Monsieur Charpentier's voice—but it was evidently one of the gang—for Gaston had been the name signed upon the famous letter.

"C'est moi!"

"Mais Henri n'est pas ici!"

"Il vient toute suite, je crois."

Fisher T. Fish understood it all. It is I—Henri is not here—he comes immediately, I think! It was all simple—in fact, mere schoolboy French. If it all went on like this, Fisher T. Fish would not have the slightest difficulty in understanding every word.

"Ciel! Il fait froid!" went on the muttering voice.

Fish knew that—it was very cold, and Fish had been feeling it for some time. He shivered involuntarily, and the twigs crackled.

There was a chuckle.

Had they heard him?

He knew the next moment. Three figures plunged into the thicket, and before Fish could make a movement to escape, he was grasped and hauled out of the hiding-place, and bumped down on the damp grass by the lightning-riven oak.

One of his assailants knelt on his chest, and pinned him down.

Fish was so taken by surprise, and so paralysed with terror, that he could only stammer confusedly.

"Le couteau, Gastong!" said the ruffian who was kneeling on him.

Fish could see, in the dim starlight, that his face was masked, and that the rest of him was hidden by a coat and a heavy cap.

The Yankee junior knew that "couteau" was French for "knife," and he shuddered more violently than with the cold.

"Ow!" he panted. "Don't! Yow! Mercy!"

"Who are you?" demanded his captor, in English, in a deep, stern voice that seemed to be fetched from the depths of his chest.

"Ow! I—I—"

"C'est un espion!" said another voice.

"I ain't!" howled Fish. "I ain't a spy! I'm a school-boy!"

"C'est un policier!"

Fisher T. Fish would have been very pleased at being taken for a "policier" at any other time. But, under the present circumstances, it was not gratifying. He was in the hands of a murderous gang, and at every moment he expected to see the gleam of the deadly "couteau."

"I ain't a detective!" he groaned. "I'm a Greyfriars chap. Ow! Leggo! Mercy! Keep that knife away from me! You'll be hung, I guess! Ow!"

"What are you doing here?"

"I guess I came to poach rabbits," said Fish glibly.
"Vous montez!" said the ruffian, who was kneeling on him. "Or, as you say in ze English, zat is a lie!"

"Donnez un coup de couteau, Gastong!"
"Tuez-le!"
"La mort! La mort!"
The three ruffians kept it up like a kind of horrid chorus. And Fisher T. Fish knew enough to know that they were saying, "Give him a blow with the knife! Kill him. Death! Death!"

"You'll be hung, you know!" shrieked Fish. "I guess I didn't mean any harm. Ow! Leggo! Yow! Lemmie alone! Yuh!"

"You did not come here to spy upon us?"

"Nope! Nope! Nope!"

"Qu'est-ce que il dit?" demanded one of the ruffians.

"Nope—zat is not an English word."

"I guess I'm an American," groaned Fish.

"Zen you are a policier—a detective?"

"Nope. I'm a schoolboy."

"You did not come here to spy?"

"Nope!"

"Swear zat you reveal nozzing!"

"I guess I'll swear to anything you like," stammered Fish.

"Any old thing?"

"By ze bones of the Pilgrim Fathers, by the hatchet of George Washington, and by the tinned horses of Chicago!"

said the deep, stern voice.

"Yep! Yep!"

"Zen swear!"

"I swear!" groaned the unfortunate detective of Greyfriars. "I swear! I guess—"

"Repeat ze oath!"

"I'll repeat anything. Take your knee off my chest!"

Ow!"

"Repeat ze oath!"

Fisher T. Fish repeated the oath—he would have repeated anything just then.

"I swear, by the bones of the Pilgrim Fathers, by the hatchet of George Washington, and by the tinned horses of Chicago!" he mumbled.

"C'est bien! Zen you sall live!"

Fish gasped with relief.

"Ve vill rob him, Gastong," said another voice. "Take off his coat and his watch and chain, also his cap, and his collar and tie."

"Oui, oui!"

Even in his state of terror, Fisher T. Fish could not help wondering what the ruffians wanted with his collar and tie.

But he never thought of resisting. His coat and cap were taken off, then his watch and chain, and then his collar and tie. Then the knee was removed from his chest.

"Lie zere!" said the deep voice. "Zat you do not move for quinze minutes—a quarter of ze hour. Comprennez?"

"Yep, I comprong!" gasped Fish.

"If you sall move before zat ze clock strike quarter-past eleven, ze blood sall flow upon ze deadly couteau!"

"I swear—"

"Zat vill do! Lie zere, zen! Filez, mes camarades!"

And the ruffians "filezed."

Fisher T. Fish lay gasping as they disappeared into the thicket. He did not dare to move.

That Monsieur Charpentier would come to the rendezvous now he did not hope. The ruffians would undoubtedly meet him on the way and stop him. The discussion would be held somewhere else, and he would not hear it. His expedition that night had been a failure. But he was too glad to escape with his life to think about failure. He did not venture to move. For all he knew, a masked ruffian with a dreadful couteau might be lurking in the shadows near him, waiting for him to move. Not till the quarter-past eleven had rung out from distant Friardale did he venture even to raise his head.

The wood was silent and still.

He was shivering with cold. He slowly gained his feet, and peered about him fearfully into the shadows.

The ruffians were gone.

Fish started from the glade, and gained the road—and once in the road, he ran as if for his life. He did not pause to take breath until he was under the walls of Greyfriars.

He clambered in, and with thumping heart made his stealthy way back to the Remove dormitory.

All was dark and silent in the dorm. as he stole in, and crept dolefully into bed. Even the keen amateur detective of Greyfriars had had enough burglar-hunting for that night.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Very Funny!

"SLEPT well?"

Fisher T. Fish opened his eyes to the sound of the rising-bell clanging through the clear winter morning.

Bob Cherry was standing by his bed, with a grin on his face, and he had asked the question. Fish rubbed his

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

NEXT MONDAY—

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

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sleepy eyes. He was feeling the effects of the loss of a night's rest.

"Yep! I guess so!" he mumbled.

"Not disturbed at all in the night?" asked Bob blandly.

"Nope."

"Slept like a top ever since you went to bed—ch?"

"Yep."

Fisher T. Fish had no intention of confessing his miserable failure. He was surprised by the roar of laughter that greeted his reply. All the Removites were up, or were sitting up in bed, and they were all laughing. Fish sat up in bed, too, and blinked round him in surprise. He did not see the cause of the laughter.

"What's the joke?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are!" explained Harry Wharton.

And there was a fresh burst of laughter.

"Have you lost your watch and chain, Fishy?" inquired Nugent.

"Nope."

"Or your coat?"

"My coat? Nope."

"Or your collar and tie?"

Fish stared at him blankly, too amazed to answer. The questions showed him that the Remove fellows must know something of his previous night's adventure; though how they knew was a mystery to him.

"Quite sure you didn't lose them in the wood last night?" howled Johnny Bull.

"What?"

"Well, if he did, somebody's brought them home for him," grinned Bob Cherry.

Fish gaped in astonishment.

There, beside his bed, lay the articles of which the masked ruffians had deprived him the night before, by the lightning-riven oak in Friardale Wood. His coat, his cap, his collar and tie, and his watch and chain! It was astounding. Fisher T. Fish stared at them with his eyes bulging from his head, and the expression of his face made the juniors shriek.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say, how did those things get here?" stammered Fish.

"They were brought here by three masked ruffians," Wharton explained.

"Gee-whiz!"

"They'd taken off their masks before they came in, though," said Bob Cherry. "You see, you can't go to bed in a mask."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish's eyes looked as if they would really leave his head entirely as Bob Cherry held up three black craps masks for inspection.

The Yankee junior began to understand.

"You—you jays!" he yelled. "It was you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Us!" grinned Wharton. "C'était nous! How did you like our Lower Fourth French? Lucky you didn't get the business end of the couteau, wasn't it?"

"Oh, you jays! You slab-sided mugs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Swear!" yelled Bob Cherry. "By the hatchet of George Washington, and the tinned horses of Chicago—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites.

Fisher T. Fish shook a bony fist at the hilarious juniors.

"You jays! You sillery scallywags! Do you know what you've done?" he shrieked.

"Yes, rather. We've made a bigger fool of you than you were born!" said Bob Cherry. "And that's saying a great deal."

"The foolfulness of the worthy Fish is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Singh. "But he is very fortunate not to be slaughtered couteaufully."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've helped the cracksmen gang to escape, you blithering jays! Do you know what I was there for, you mugwumps? I was there to see Mossos consulting with the rest of the gang!" roared Fish. "You've spoiled it all!"

"At onze heures, wasn't it?" gasped Bob Cherry. "Close by the vieux chene foudroye."

"Wha-a-at!"

"Il faut finir et filer!" shrieked Nugent.

"Parceque les policiers sont sur nos traces!" roared Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fish gazed at them in stupefaction. How did they know about the letter—that priceless letter that had never left the inmost recess of his pocket? Yet they certainly knew—they were repeating it word for word.

"Did they settle the affair de l'ecole?" howled Johnny Bull.

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"Did they aller to prendre conseil?" roared Peter Todd.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Gee-whiz! You've been reading my letter, you—"
 "More than that," grinned Wharton—"we've been writing it!"
 "Wha-a-t!"
 "Next time you want a clue, you've only got to mention it," said Wharton. "I don't mind writing another letter, and Todd will get another old envelope out of the dustbin, and drop it under your desk in the Form-room."
 "Certainly!" said Peter. "With pleasure, Fishy!"
 "My hat! Oh, gee-whiz!" groaned Fish. "You—you villains! You plotted that letter on me! Do you mean to say that it wasn't sent to Mossoo at all?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites were almost in convulsions. They roared and howled with laughter as they dressed themselves. Fisher T. Fish crawled out of bed, feeling as if life were not worth living for an amateur detective in the midst of unsympathetic scoffers.

And he was not allowed to forget the matter, either. The joke was too good to keep, and the Removites told it to fellows in the other Forms. The fags caught it, and they chanted at Fish in the Close after breakfast:

"Il faut filer!"
 "Les policiers sont sur nos traces!"
 "Meet me at onze heures by the lightning-riven chene!"
 "Mercy! Mercy!"
 "By the hatchet of George Washington and the tinned horses of Chicago!"

There was no escape from it. Before the fellows allowed the matter to drop, Fisher T. Fish was wishing heartily that he had never dreamed of becoming an amateur detective, and tracking the French-master down to his doom.

When he took his place in the Form-room he found scrawled across his exercise book: "Il faut filer!"

When he opened his Latin grammar there was a sheet inserted between the leaves that caught his eye at once: "Nous allons prendre conseil!"

Fisher T. Fish was more than fed up. But that evening, when grinning juniors asked him if he had given up the amateur detective business, he shook his head obstinately.

"I guess I'm going to put her through," he said.
 "Il faut finir!" said Bob Cherry.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish snorted, and walked away. He was the laughing-stock of the Lower School at present; and only one thing could save his face—the proof that his theories were correct, and the arrest of the unfortunate Monsieur Charpentier. But exactly how that was to be brought about Fisher T. Fish had to confess to himself that he did not quite know.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Fish Discovers the Secret!

MONSIEUR CHARPENTIER came out of the School House a day or two later, arrayed in his best. His frock-coat was open to show all the glories of a fancy waistcoat that would have put Joseph's celebrated coat quite into the shade. The silk hat on his well-oiled locks gleamed as if it would outshine the sun. There was an orchid in his coat. There was a gold-headed cane—rolled-gold-headed, as a matter of fact. There was a happy smile upon his face.

Monsieur Charpentier was evidently in high feather. Even Fisher T. Fish, as he spotted the French-master coming out, could not believe that he was going to keep a burglarious appointment, arrayed as he was like Solomon in all his glory.

But he fell into the French-master's wake as he strutted away towards the gates. It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and Harry Wharton & Co. were playing footer; so the amateur detective had no interference to look for at their hands. Fisher T. Fish intended to shadow Monsieur Charpentier. In spite of himself, his suspicions were waning. And yet Mossoo's mysterious conduct at Hardinge House had never been explained. Even Harry Wharton & Co., while they laughed at his theories concerning Mossoo, had never been able to explain why Mossoo was hanging round Hardinge House the night before the burglary there, and why he had bolted when they came along. So long as that was not explained, Fish felt that he was quite right to keep Cher Henri under surveillance. He was sure that that was just what Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake, or Hank Hogback would have done.

Monsieur Charpentier certainly looked as if he were going to meet a friend—and very probably a lady friend, to judge by the orchid. But it might only be his extremely deep

artfulness, to divert suspicion. And Fisher Tarleton Fish was not to be taken in—not he!

Mossoo did not seem to have the slightest suspicion that he was being shadowed. For a desperate criminal leading a double life he was remarkably unsuspicious.

He walked down the lane with an airy strut, and on his track went Fisher T. Fish. At the cross-roads monsieur halted, and glanced about him; and then he could not help seeing Fish in the lane. Fish dodged behind a tree at once. But the French-master had seen him, and he could still see one of Fish's boots.

Mossoo looked puzzled.

He came back along the lane towards the tree by the roadside, where the understudy of Hank Hogback had taken cover. Fish was wondering whether he had stopped looking back, when he was tapped lightly on the shoulder by the French-master's cane. He jumped, and stared round at Mossoo with bulging eyes.

"Vat for you hide viz yourself?" asked Monsieur Charpentier.

"Hide, sir?" stammered Fish.

"Oui, oui! You hide behind zat tree!"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Fish, regaining his confidence. "I guess I was looking for caterpillars, sir. I—I've taken up the study of natural history, Monsieur Charpentier."

"You are not out of bounds, hein?" asked Mossoo suspiciously. "You did not hide behind zat tree because zat I see you."

"Nope, sir."

"It is not zat you are detain?"

"Oh, nope!"

"Zen you are a very queer garcon," said Monsieur Charpentier. "It is not zat you follow me, hein?"

"Follow you, sir! Certainly not."

"It would be a very silly zing to do," said Monsieur Charpentier. "Vell, if you say zat you not follow me, I say no more; I take your word, isn't it?"

And with a nod Monsieur Charpentier walked away. Fish's heart smote him for a moment. He did not like telling falsehoods; but he comforted himself with the reflection that Hank Hogback, in "Police Bits," never hesitated at the biggest whoppers when he was on the track of a desperado. He stood in the lane until Monsieur Charpentier had turned into the cross-road and disappeared from sight.

After all, why should Mossoo suspect him of following him—unless he had a secret to keep? That reflection cheered Fisher T. Fish. He decided at once upon his plan of action. He made his way through a gap in the hedge, and cut across the field adjoining the cross-road. There was a hedge along that road, too, and from that hedge Fish meant to spot the French-master again without showing himself.

But Mossoo was suspicious now. Fisher T. Fish had no sooner put his head through the hedge into the cross road than it was spotted by the Frenchman, who was looking about him.

Mossoo made a rapid stride towards him, caught him by the ear, and jerked him out into the lane.

"You vicked boy!"

"Ow!" gasped Fish.

"It is zat you are follow me!"

"I, sir?" groaned Fish. "Leggo my ear! I—I was looking—for newts, sir, for my collection."

"Zat is vun story!" said Monsieur Charpentier angrily. "I do not know xy you follow me, but it is zat you do follow me viz yourself, isn't it?"

"Ow!"

Monsieur compressed his finger and thumb until Fisher T. Fish felt that his ear was in a vice, and yelled with anguish.

"Now you run away viz yourself," said the French-master, shaking his cane at the unfortunate junior. "You are vicked to play ze spy. You vish to make a joke viz ze ozzers about your master, n'est-ce-pas, you bad boy? Go away!"

Fisher T. Fish was only too glad to go.

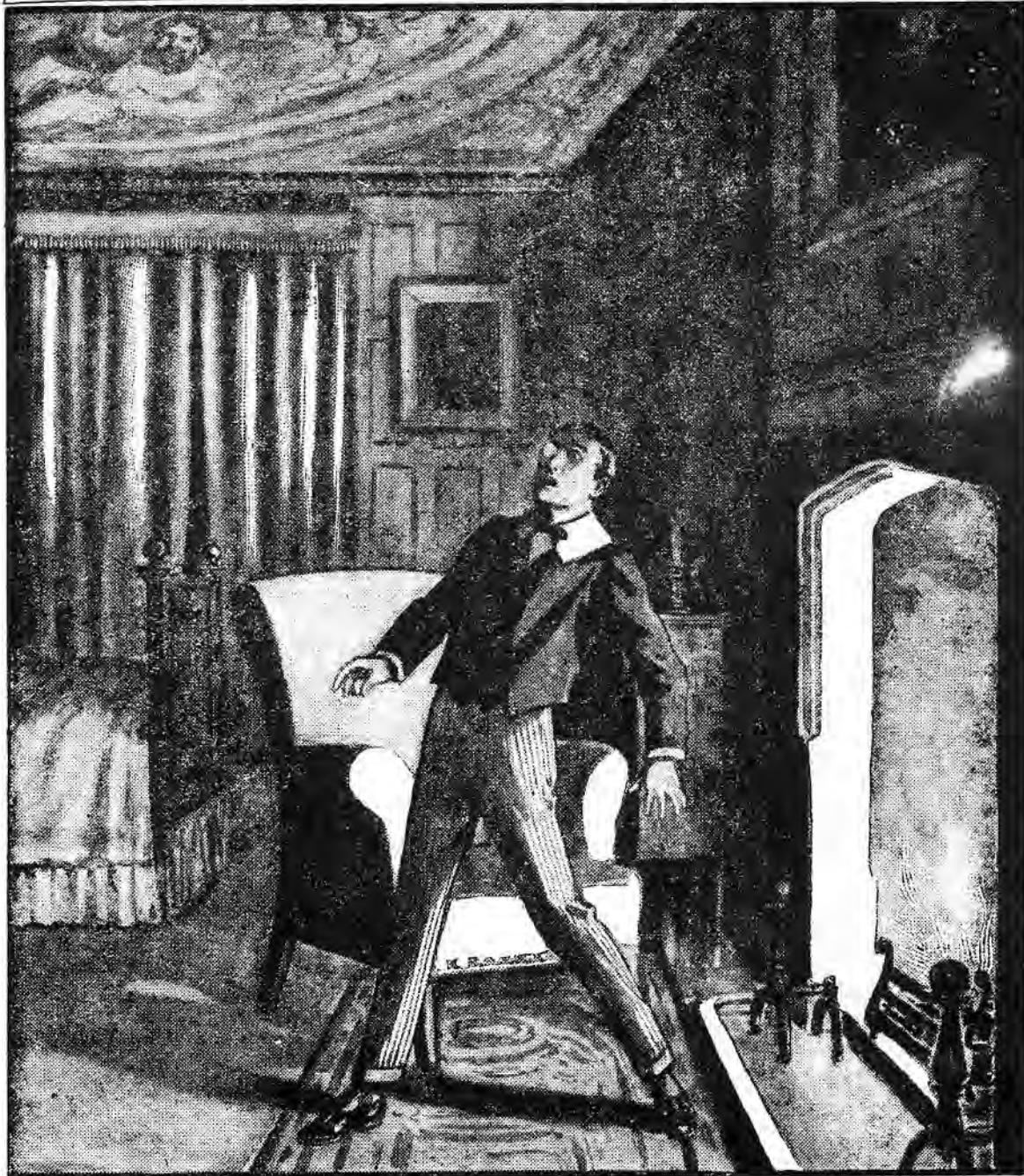
But he did not go far.

He halted in the cover of the hedge, and stood there rubbing his ear ruefully. His ear felt as if it were scorching. But while he rubbed it, he watched through the hedge to see which direction the French-master took.

Monsieur Charpentier turned into a footpath through the wood, and a little later left the footpath, and followed a track among the leafless trees.

Fish dodged about among the trees after him.

He could guess now where the Frenchman was going, and he did not need to keep him in sight. That track through the wood led to the lightning-riven oak, the scene of his unfortunate adventure with the masked ruffians. Monsieur Charpentier was going to the oak, and he could only have one possible motive for going there—he was going to keep an appointment.



ALONE IN THE PAINTED ROOM! (This picture is a reproduction of the cover-illustration of this Wednesday's Grand Winter Number of "THE GEM" LIBRARY, which contains a 50,000-word long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., by Martin Clifford, as well as many special features of particular interest. No "Magnet" reader should miss this special issue of "THE GEM" LIBRARY. Out on Wednesday. Price Twopence.)

With whom?

Not with masked ruffians, certainly, in the broad daylight, but doubtless with some member of the cracksmen gang. Fisher T. Fish made a detour through the wood, to keep out of sight, and arrived near the stricken oak on the opposite side of the glade. He peered into the glade.

Yes, there was Mossoo!

He was standing by the dead oak, and looking at his watch. Evidently he was there to keep an appointment, and the other party was late. Fisher T. Fish rubbed his hands and grinned with satisfaction. There was Mossoo himself, waiting at the rendezvous—for whom? Fish was soon to know.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

The Frenchman gave a sudden start, and a beatific smile overspread his face.

A female form was advancing through the trees towards the dead oak.

It was Mademoiselle Finette, the governess from Hardinge House. Fisher T. Fish knew her by sight, and his eyes gleamed. Already he suspected mademoiselle of being an accomplice of the French-master in his nefarious schemes. And if his suspicion was not well founded, what did this mysterious meeting mean at the dead oak?

Monsieur Charpentier raised his shining silk topper with Parisian grace as mademoiselle came up the glade.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

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The lady greeted him with a charming smile, and extended a gloved hand, which Mossoo promptly carried to his lips.

"He knows her, anyway!" muttered Fish. "Nothing's been said at Greyfriars about his knowing her; he's kept it a secret." It did not occur to Fish for the moment that Monsieur Charpentier was really not likely to take the Lower Fourth Form into his confidence on the subject. "Very likely she writes ~~him~~ those letters; I spotted that they were in a female fist. Y'n getting to the facts at last."

He was—although they were not precisely the facts he surmised.

"Mon ange!" murmured Monsieur Charpentier. "At last I see you! And it is zat you are completely recover?"

"Oui, oui, mon cher Henri!"

"I have been so anxious about my leetle loff!" said monsieur, with a sigh. "While zat my Finette have ze cruel cold I am on ze tenterhooks."

"Pauvre Henri!"

"I zink of my darling—zat she suffair—zat she sneeze viz ze cold!" said Monsieur Charpentier pathetically. "While zat is it so, I come to see ze light in ze vindow of my darling; I vatch him for long time."

"Foolish, Henri!" murmured mademoiselle.

"Ven zat ve are in lofe ve are all foolish, isn't it?" said monsieur. "I come to Hardinge House every evening—I vatch ze light in my darling's vindow. I zink—zero is my Finette—perhaps at zis moment she sneeze viz ze cruel cold, and I suffair."

The lady smiled, and replied in French. Fisher T. Fish did not catch it all, for mademoiselle, like most Frenchwomen, spoke at express speed. But he understood the drift of her remarks, to the effect that she hoped that Mossoo had not been observed lurking about looking at the light in her window, as her employer at Hardinge House would certainly not be pleased if he should hear of it.

But Mossoo shook his head.

"Is it zat I risk zat my Finette sall be talk about?" he exclaimed. "Nevair! I keep out of sight all ze time, and if somevun come along I run—I run!"

"Cher Henri!"

"Chere Finette!"

And Monsieur Charpentier, remembering that he was not in Greyfriars now, and forced to speak a barbarous language, dropped his English and plunged into rapid French—comparing Mademoiselle Finette to an angel, her eyes to stars, and her lips to cherries, at a faster rate than the quickest shorthand writer could possibly have taken down.

Fisher T. Fish felt inclined to kick himself.

The mystery was explained.

Monsieur Charpentier had been hanging about Hardinge House, the night when Wharton and Bob Cherry had seen him, simply because his lady-love had a cold, and could not come out to see him. Monsieur Charpentier was not without romance, simply because he was a middle-aged gentleman teaching French in a school. He had his little romance—and Mademoiselle Finette was the heroine of it. He had hung about Hardinge House looking for the light in her window, and when the light went out he smoked his cigar and dreamed dreams of La Belle France, and Mademoiselle Finette, and a little house in the suburbs of Paris. Fisher T. Fish understood now, and he became almost green with disappointment.

Mademoiselle Finette suddenly interrupted the effusive outpourings of Monsieur Charpentier. She was looking suspiciously towards the thicket where the eavesdropper was hidden. She spoke rapidly to Mossoo in French, and the little Frenchman, with a frowning brow, made a sudden rush into the thicket. He almost stumbled over the crouching Fish.

"Ah, zen it is you again!" shouted monsieur.

"I—I guess—"

"Come out viz you!"

With his grasp upon Fish's collar, monsieur yanked the amateur detective out of the thicket, and landed him in the grass. Then he flourished his cane.

"Pig of a boy!" he exclaimed. "Rascal! You spy on me isn't it? You vish zat you make a joke viz ze ozzers! Imbecile! I thrash you, n'est-ce-pas!"

And Monsieur Charpentier suited the action to the word.

He was really angry; and he had reason to be, supposing that Fish had watched him for the sake of spying on his meeting with mademoiselle. His cane rose and fell rapidly, and Fisher T. Fish squirmed and howled under the lashes.

"Ow, ow, ow! Yow! Let up! Leave off! I won't do it any more!" yelled the unhappy detective. "Yaroo! Ow, oh!"

"Beast! Spy!"

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroo! Help!"

Mademoiselle Finette looked on cheerfully. It was evidently her opinion also that Fisher T. Fish deserved a thrashing for playing the spy. The little Frenchman did not leave off till he was tired. Then he pointed with the cane.

"Alloz vous en! Get out, wretch—bad boy—mauvais garcon! Go!"

And Fisher T. Fish was only too glad to go. He picked himself up and limped away, and simply crawled down the lane to Greyfriars.

And he did not shadow Monsieur Charpentier any more.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mossoo the Hero!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. met Fish as he came in at the school gates.

Wharton was frowning, but at the sight of the limping, dusty junior his brow relaxed.

Fish had evidently been "through" it, and did not want any more.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What have you done with Mossoo?"

Fisher T. Fish groaned.

"I guess you'd better ask what he's done with me. Ow!"

"Ogilvie saw you sneaking out after Mossoo," said Wharton sternly. "If we hadn't been playing footer we'd have followed you and ducked you. We were going to give you a bumping when you came in—"

"You needn't trouble," groaned Fish. "I've had enough already. I never knew Froggy was such an athlete. The way he laid into me with that cane was a miracle. I never knew he had it in him, and I wish he hadn't. Ow!"

"He's licked you?" grinned the juniors.

"Ow! Yep!"

"Did he catch you spying?" asked Frank Nugent.

"He found me pursuing my investigations, I guess."

"Same thing! Serve you jolly well right."

"Ow, ow!" groaned Fish. "All the same, I'm going to nab him some day. I've found out that he's making love to the old French girl at Hardinge House, and he goes around watching the light in her window of a night when she's got a cold in the nose."



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"My hat! That's what he was doing when we spotted him the night we walked back from Latchford, then!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Yep. But that doesn't clear him. I guess it's up against him, and I'm going to—"

"Rats!"

Fish limped away into the School House. He was feeling very downhearted. Not only had he been discovered in the midst of his investigations and thrashed by the object of his suspicion, but his theory itself had received a very rude shock. It was, in fact, only sheer obstinacy that made Fish cling to the theory that Monsieur Charpentier had anything to do with the burglaries. All his clues had been explained away, and he had nothing left to build theories upon. But Fisher T. Fish would not admit that he was beaten. He clung, as it were, to a lingering hope that Mossoo might prove to be a desperado.

For some days nothing had been heard of the cracksmen who had been troubling the neighbourhood. The folk on the countryside were hoping that the county police, even if they could not catch them, had succeeded in frightening them away.

So far the police clues had led to nothing. The burglar, or burglars, had not been discovered, and the loot had not been traced.

The police, like Fisher T. Fish, were looking for a cracksmen who spoke French: and with a clue like that they should have had a good chance of tracking him down, if he was still in the neighbourhood. But they had no luck.

Under the circumstances, extra precautions were now taken at Greyfriars of a night. There was a great deal of valuable silver in the school, and articles in the school museum worth a large sum of money. Every night a mastiff was turned loose in the Close, and all doors and windows were carefully examined by a master. It was quite possible that the cracksmen might come that way. Greyfriars offered him a rich booty if he succeeded in "cracking the crib."

According to Fisher T. Fish's lingering belief, the cracksmen already had his quarters inside the school, and only needed to admit his associates. Fish thought of staying awake at night, and keeping watch, in case Mossoo broke out. But that was scarcely possible. He could not very well remain awake twenty-four hours a day, and certainly he could not sleep in the daytime. More than ever Fisher T. Fish felt the need of a Dr. Watson or a faithful Tinker.

While the burglar scare lasted some of the fellows dropped into the habit of taking cricket-stumps into the dormitories of a night, though it was not really likely that the burglar, if he came, would try to burgle a dormitory. He would not make a very rich haul if he came after trousers and jackets, as Peter Todd pointed out. But the fellows felt safer with a cricket-stump or bat or an Indian club near at hand. Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, who was a great sportsman, was seen cleaning his guns with great energy. Guns and hunting trophies galore adorned the walls of Mr. Prout's study, and he often showed favoured pupils the rifle with which he shot a grizzly bear in the Rocky Mountains in '85, and explained to them how he had done it. He hadn't the bear's skin, the animal having fallen over the cliff after being shot. Potter of the Fifth was privately of opinion that the bear had jumped over the cliff, and that Mr. Prout hadn't shot it at all, and some of the Fifth-Formers averred that it wasn't Mr. Prout's gun but Mr. Prout's face that had made the bear jump over the cliff. But, of course, they did not say that to Mr. Prout. Mr. Prout was really in hopes that the cracksmen would come to Greyfriars. He confided to Mr. Quelch, with quite a bloodthirsty look, that he had never had an opportunity of "winging" a man. He had winged, potted, and drilled various animals, of all sorts, but never a biped of the human species. He was not going to kill the cracksmen—if he came—but to "wing" him, and then hand him over to the police. That was the idea! And Mr. Prout was with difficulty persuaded from keeping his arsenal ready loaded. But even Mr. Prout admitted that firearms had better be kept unloaded, one day when he found Billy Bunter looking down the barrel of his rifle, to see whether it was loaded or not.

Considering how ready the whole school was for him, it was really a pity that the cracksmen did not come. Mr. Prout remarked with an air of disappointment that he was afraid the rascal had left the neighbourhood. Fisher T. Fish was beginning to think so, too, though he still kept a suspicious eye upon Monsieur Charpentier.

It was some days after Fish's adventure with Mossoo in the wood, when one dark, windy night Harry Wharton awoke suddenly in the Remove dormitory. The wind from the sea was growling and groaning round the old roofs and chimney-stacks of Greyfriars, and windows were rattling, and the leafless branches in the Close groaned and creaked. But through the clamour of the wind Wharton heard the loud, sharp bark of the mastiff in the Close.

He started up in bed.

There was another sharp bark, and then silence—silence so far as the dog was concerned. The wind howled on, but there was no sound from the mastiff borne upon it.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

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Wharton shivered a little, and drew the blankets round him. The night was very cold.

The dog did not bark again, though he listened for ten minutes or more.

He wondered! Had the dog barked at some shadow, and gone to sleep again? Or had the faithful animal been silenced by some cruel blow? Did it mean that the cracksmen had come at last?

In the dead darkness and eeriness of midnight, it seemed only too likely. Wharton reached out his hand instinctively for the cricket-stump beside his bed.

Should he get up and call the fellows because the dog had barked? If it turned out to be a false alarm it would lead to trouble. The Head was not likely to be pleased at the Removees turning out of their dormitory in the middle of the night.

Wharton hesitated some time, but the thought that the cracksmen might even then be creeping upon his plunder decided him. He slipped out of bed, and put on his clothes, and mounted on a chair to look out of the window. There was a gleam of cold starlight in the Close, and he could see the bare branches of the trees swaying in the wind. But nothing else was stirring. Had the dog gone back to his kennel? Was it nothing after all? It was only too likely, but—

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a sleepy voice from Bob Cherry's bed. "What's up?"

"I am," said Harry. "I say, Bob, I can't help thinking there's something wrong. Caesar was barking, and he suddenly left off, and he hasn't made a sound since."

Bob yawned.

"Might have spotted Loder coming back from a night out," he murmured.

"He wouldn't bark at Loder."

Bob Cherry groaned.

"I know what you mean. You want me to get up, and it's c-c-cold," he mumbled. "Well, here goes."

Bob turned out of bed, and dressed quickly.

"We can go down and have a look round," said Wharton, in a whisper. "It won't do any harm. Bring your bat. The safe is in the Head's study, and we'll just take a squint at it. At the study, I mean. The door's locked of a night, so we can't get in."

"Right-ho!"

The two juniors left the dormitory quietly without awakening the other fellows. They tiptoed downstairs. It was an hour past midnight, and the whole school was wrapped in slumber. But as they passed the French master's room the juniors thought they heard a sound. Was monsieur stirring? They paused. In spite of themselves, Fisher T. Fish's suspicions of the French master rushed into their minds at that moment. Yes, he was stirring, there was no doubt about that. They heard a queer clicking in his room, and they knew that it was Mossoo's teeth chattering with cold.

Bob Cherry caught his comrade's arm.

"He's up!" murmured Bob.

"Might have heard the mastiff, same as I did!" whispered Wharton.

"Of course," Bob Cherry gave a sigh of relief. "Of course, that's it."

"Come on!"

They descended the stairs quietly. As they came into the passage upon which the Head's study opened, Wharton caught his breath.

Under the door was a glimmer of light.

That Dr. Locke had gone to bed long ago, they knew. What did the light in his study mean; that faint glimmer, just enough to show a cracksmen to his work? Was the man there?

"M-m-my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "I—I say—"

"He must be there, Bob."

"Head might have left his light burning."

"He never does."

"True enough."

They stood in the darkness of the passage, staring in a fascinated way at the glimmer of light under the door.

For some moments they did not move, and then Wharton stole silently forward, straining his ears to listen. From within the study came a low, faint, grinding sound. Then he could have no further doubt. The cracksmen was there, and he was at work upon the safe.

Harry Wharton's heart beat hard. He knew that the cracksmen was desperate. One of Sir Hilton Popper's game-keepers had been badly hurt in trying to seize him. Wharton was not afraid, but it would be a serious matter to come upon a ruffian armed with a jemmy or some still deadlier weapon. He stole back along the passage to where Bob was waiting.

It was pitchy dark in the passage, and he had to grope his way, and he bumped against Bob in the dark. There

was a slight sound; but, slight as it was, it was sufficient to reach the keen ears of the man in the study. The grinding instantly ceased, and the light that glimmered under the door vanished.

Wharton's heart thumped.

"He's heard us, Bob!"

They heard the study door stealthily open. In the black darkness, someone was straining his eyes in their direction—they knew it—and their hearts beat so hard they were afraid the man would hear them. He made no sound. Was he creeping towards them in the dark?

Wharton's hand had groped to a switch of the electric light. With a touch of his finger he could flood the passage with light, and he was tempted to do it to end the horrible suspense.

There was a sound in the darkness—the sound of hurried, suppressed breathing—and it was close. The man was stealing down the passage to investigate—probably with some weapon in his hand—the weapon that had silenced the mastiff. And if they moved he would hear them, and the blow would come.

Wharton could stand no more.

He pressed the switch, and the electric light blazed out suddenly in the passage. The juniors grasped the stump and bat tightly to defend themselves. Within six feet of them, blinking in the sudden light, was a burly man, with a jemmy in his hand, and a band of crape swathed over his face to mask it.

He stared at the two juniors, blinking. They stared at him in horrible fascination. For a single, tense moment there was no sound, save the wail of the wind outside.

Then he sprang forward.

His movement broke the spell.

"Help!" shouted Wharton.

"Help!" roared Bob Cherry.

Then a familiar voice rang behind him:

"Stand back, you zief! Anozzer step, and I pull ze trigger!"

The ruffian halted in his rush.

"Stand aside, mes garçons!"

It was Monsieur Charpentier.

Wharton and Bob Cherry swung half round, in amazement and relief. Monsieur Charpentier, half-dressed, wild-eyed with excitement, but brave as a lion, stood there; and Mr. Prout's gun was at his shoulder, the muzzle bearing full upon the broad chest of the burglar.

The man's eyes blazed with rage, but he halted. The muzzle of the gun was within seven feet of his breast; and Mossoo, wildly excited as he was, did not tremble; his hand was firm, and his eye gleamed steadily along the levelled barrel.

"Zief and rascal," went on Mossoo, "drop zat zing—zat shemmy! At vunce, or I blow out ze brains, isn't it?"

Clang!

The steel jemmy rang on the floor. The cracksmen backed away, evidently intending to flee; but the French master's voice rang out again in sharp command:

"Stand still! If you run, I pull ze trigger!"

And the man halted.

By this time there were footsteps and voices on all sides. The juniors' shouts had alarmed the whole school. Fellows poured downstairs, calling to one another, and the passage was soon crowded. The cracksmen cast a furious glance round him. Some of the fellows were in the passage behind him, and his retreat was cut off, even if he could have escaped the threatening rifle.

"Seize ze ruffian!" exclaimed Monsieur Charpentier.

"Seize him, zen! Tie his hands viz somezing!"

Wingate of the Sixth and several other seniors collared the cracksmen. As Mossoo could not have fired now without risk of hitting them, the man began to struggle; but he had no chance. The sturdy seniors had him down in a twinkling, and fellows brought cords and ropes on all sides. Fisher T. Fish, who was down with the rest, was struck with a brilliant

idea, and he dashed away to the Remove room, and brought back the handcuffs that had reposed so long inside Mr. Quelch's desk.

"I guess I'll put the bracelets on him," said Fish importantly.

And the handcuffs clicked upon the burglar's wrists.

The mask was taken from his face, disclosing a dark, bearded face convulsed with fury. With the handcuffs on, and something like twenty yards of rope bound round him, the cracksmen lay helpless on the floor.

Monsieur Charpentier dropped the butt of the rifle to the floor. He was gasping and shaking now with the reaction, after the thrilling excitement of the capture. Dr. Locke had come down in his dressing-gown, and he caught the French master's hand and squeezed it.

"Monsieur Charpentier, many thanks for your courage! This is the man who has been terrorising the neighbourhood; and, thanks to you, sir, he is caught!"

"Gee-whiz!" murmured Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I was on the wrong track, somehow! This lets me out!"

"I am zankful zat I come down!" gasped Monsieur Charpentier. "Zese juniors give ze alarm, too. I find zem down here—"

"We found the burglar, sir," said Harry Wharton, with a shiver. "But I don't know what would have happened if Mossoo hadn't come with Mr. Prout's gun!"

"Zat is so!" said Mossoo, with a tremulous smile. "And I myself, I do not know vat would have happen if ze burglar have known zat ze gun was not loaded!"

There was a yell.

"Not loaded!"

"Non," confessed Mossoo. "I do not know how to load ze gun; and, besides, zere vas no time. I seize ze gun, and rush here—zat is all. But ze burglar, he do not know zat he is not loaded, so zat is vat you call all serene—a bit of all right, as you say in English!"

"Oh, monsieur," exclaimed the Head, greatly moved, "you have faced that ruffian with an unloaded gun! What might have happened?"

"But he did not happen, sir, so zat is all right. n'est-cepas?"

"Three cheers for Mossoo, the giddy hero!" yelled Bob Cherry.

And the silent house was awakened to its last echo by the cheers.

Mossoo was a hero from that night.

But the good little man bore his blushing honours thick upon him with becoming modesty.

The cracksmen he had captured, when handed over to the police, was identified as a well-known and dangerous criminal, and a great part of the proceeds of his various robberies was recovered. There was some surprise that he did not turn out to be a Frenchman; but that was soon explained. He had had no companions in his depredations, and to call out a pretended warning to them in French was a trick to throw the police off his track.

His French exclamations were faithfully reported to the detectives by those who heard them, and gave the police the same impression that they had given to the amateur detective of Greyfriars—that they had a French criminal to deal with. It was a cunning trick, and it had served his purpose; but his trickery was at an end now for the next seven years.

While Mossoo was made much of, Fisher T. Fish was mercilessly chipped by the Remove.

He had suspected Mossoo of being the cracksmen, and Mossoo had captured the cracksmen!

It was the completest answer that could have been given to Fish's amazing theories, and for some days even the bumptious Fish "sang small." But he soon recovered his bumptiousness, and his good opinion of himself was not in the least diminished—only he gave up his new business as a detective. From that night forward nothing more was heard of Detective Fish!



Our Grand Serial Story!

MYSTERIA



By SIDNEY DREW, Prince of Adventure Story-tellers.

READ THIS FIRST.

Ferrers Lord, the famous multi-millionaire, is surrounded in his magnificent London residence by his friends Ching-Lung, Barry O'Rooney, Gan-Waga, the Eskimo, and Prout & Co.—the stalwarts of the millionaire's famous submarine, the Lord of the Deep. After a period of inaction there is a rumour afloat that Ferrers Lord is about to start upon one of his great expeditions again. Meantime, the millionaire himself is devoting all his attention to a curiously carved narwhal's tusk which he has picked up in an East-End curio-dealer's shop. The tusk proved to be hollow, and to contain some gold coins and a small wad of parchment, which bears a strange message from the sea. This tells of a mysterious floating island inhabited by strange monsters, which Ferrers Lord determines to go in search of. Thurston immediately christens the phantom island "Mysteria" in advance. All hands board the Lord of the Deep, and the adventurers at last catch sight of "Mysteria." The mysterious island—bare and ghostly-looking—appears to be floating in the sky. It is a mirage, but, as Ferrers Lord points out, there can never be a mirage without a substance. The millionaire determines to start in pursuit of the floating island at once, but a terrific volcanic eruption occurs, in the course of which a blazing fireball falls on the Lord of the Deep, passing through her from deck to keel. The millionaire runs the submarine aground in the bay of the nearest island, and sends Ching Lung and Thurston with a party of men in the launch to cut some logs. On landing the party are confronted by a curious figure in a red tam-o'-shanter, who warns them that the island belongs to Germany. They ignore the warning, and Redcap—by name Julius Faber—returns with a party of ragged-looking ruffians, and forces them to leave the island by swimming, under cover of the fog. Subsequently, Ferrers Lord leads a night expedition on to the island, and succeeds in recapturing the launch. By dint of his unparalleled ingenuity and hard work, Hal Honour, the engineer, succeeds in repairing the Lord of the Deep sufficiently to allow her to leave her dangerous situation in the island harbour. As they are steaming along one day the bank of fog ahead suddenly parts, and there, not a league away, appears Mysteria—the weird island. A continuous booming, caused by the cracking of shrivelled weeds, comes from the floating island, which also gives forth a disagreeable odour. Before sunrise the next morning, a move is made to explore Mysteria. The submarine is manoeuvred close to the island, then the launch is lowered, and axes gleam in the searchlights as the men in her hack out their passage through the floating weeds.

(Now go on with the story.)

On Mysteria at last!

Ching-Lung and Rupert pulled on their wading-boots and stumped on deck.

"He's comin', by hokey!" said Prout, glancing at the whitening east. "And it looks like being as 'ot as the hinside of a hoven!"

"Harrk at ut," grinned Barry O'Rooney. "Harrk at ut and wape. 'As 'ot as the hinside of a hoven.' That's phwat the spalpeen calls spakin' English. Oi wonder where he went to school, bedad Oi do! For shame, Tom—for shame twice!"

Prout, however, was not in a resentful mood, so he allowed Barry's remarks to pass unheeded. The sun rose, showing Mysteria still wrapped in her misty winding-sheet. The launch backed out of the channel.

"Is all clear there?" Ferrers Lord called.

"You can land wi' a plank easy enough, sir," answered the bo'sun; "but the sides is as rotten as ould Stilton cheese—souse me!—till you get under water level. Wi' a plank or two from the launch it'll be safe, sir."

"Get a couple of planks, then, and drive a couple of spikes through their ends," said Ferrers Lord.

Joe obeyed smartly, but still there was a delay. They waited for twenty minutes before the mist showed any signs of clearing. At last it broke away reluctantly from the lower portions of the island, but it still clung to the queerly-shaped hills and rising ground, as if eager to fall again and hide the secrets of the floating isle.

Ching-Lung swung the strap of his camera over his shoulder, and took a pole shod with an iron point from Gan-Waga.

"Blubberbiter," he laughed, "farewell! I go to put salt The MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

upon the tail of the bobbiehunk bird, who lives in the smelly flabflab forest. Be a good boy, Gan-Wagtail, and don't worry that dear cook and poor old Joe. Bless you, my fat child! If I don't return you may keep my shamama hat with the polony blossoms on it."

"Now, slowcoach!" cried Rupert.

"Oh, I'm coming!" said Ching-Lung. "You seem in a full-sized hurry to get into that beastly glue factory!"

The launch wormed up the winding creek for a hundred yards. Prout tested the bank with a boat-hook, and found it spongy and rotten near the edges. The planks, however, were long enough to reach firmer ground. Rifle in hand, the millionaire ran lightly across them, the first to land.

"Steady, there," said Ching-Lung. "Walk on your tiptoes and hold your breath, or you may sink in the blessed thing. Now, Barry, age before honesty. Skip along! Whoa!"

Ching-Lung dragged the Irishman back in time to save him from a wetting. Several yards of the treacherous bank collapsed.

"Try farther along," said Ferrers Lord.

At the second attempt, Barry, Prout, Ching-Lung, and Rupert Thurston disembarked in safety. Before them the weird trees of the submarine forest—submarina no longer—held up distorted arms against the honest blue of the sky. What mysteries lay concealed in those dim, reeking recesses? What were the secrets of those forests so strangely transported from another world?

"Test your lamps," said Ferrers Lord.

All the electric lamps were in perfect order. Ferrers Lord waved his hand, and a hearty cheer came from the deck of the submarine.

"Forward!"

A Splendid Complete Tale of Harry
Wharton & Co. Order Early!

In the Cavern of Wonder and Terror.

The light grew faint as they advanced into the grey aisle. Snaky creepers hampered the way, and set traps for their feet, and there was a harsh, salty smell. Each man carried a keen-edged axe at his belt, and it was not long before it became necessary to bring these into service.

"It will be clearer when we get in deeper, lads," said Ferrers Lord. "Land forests and sea forests appear alike in that respect, though I hardly understand it; for with the sea forests the battle for light cannot go on. Still, I have noticed that the taller and the stronger the big weeds are, the fewer and weaker are the small ones. Slash that away, Prout!"

Prout grasped a thick, damp tendril of weed, but jumped back with a yell, blowing at his fingers.

"What's the fuss? Does it sting, Tommy?" asked Ching-Lung.

"It's red-ot, by hokey!" growled Prout. "It gave me an electric shock enough to kill a bullock!"

"Pshaw! Who are yez throyin' to kid?" said Barry O'Rooney. "Git out o' the way, yez great big baby, and lit—Ow! Murther! Foire! Thaves! Oi've struck a whoite-hot aithquake! Ooh! Why didn't yez till me, blay-guard? Ow, ow, ooh!"

The Irishman tucked his left hand under his right armpit, and bowed and bobbed and danced with pain. Ferrers Lord slashed the queer creeper through and through with his axe.

"Something that knows how to generate electricity," he said. "Look well at it, so that you will recognise it again. The sea is permeated and saturated with electricity. We must watch for this unpleasant customer. Was it a violent shock, Prout?"

"I don't want another like it, sir," answered Prout. "By hokey, I'm tinglin' from the soles of my socks to the tips of my ears!"

"Bedad, and Oi'm electrocuted intairoly!" groaned Barry. "Wloy didn't the woid baste till me ut was hot?"

"I did, you potted donkey!"

Barry examined his tingling fingers mournfully. They were red and inflamed.

"Pepper is hot, Oi know, and that's a vigitable," he said: "and chillies is also mighty hot; but, by the bones of my Uncle Dinnis's dapple-green mare, that's the warmest plant Oi ever got howld of! D'yer think there's any chanst of foinding an oice-three in here, bekase this poor choild wud loike to cloimb up an oice-three and cool down?"

"Forward!" repeated the quiet voice of the millionaire.

"Keep your pipes going, for it does not smell too sweet."

Great oar-shaped leaves, parched by the sun, formed a matted roof overhead that shut out the light. The stench, however, was not powerful. It was round the edges of the island that decay had set in. This solitude was damp and cool enough as yet. Here and there lay pools of water so intensely rich and salt that the shining crystals lay thick where the water had evaporated.

"I might as well have left the camera at home, for all the good it will do us," said Ching-Lung. "It would need a jolly long exposure to take a photograph here. I'm beginning to think this place is a fraud, and to want my entrance-money back. Where's the binkey bang-bang bird and the slimy slonkeydoodle? Mysteria is a frost, with a big F!"

"Oi wish ut was, troth, Oi do," said Barry O'Rooney feelingly. "Oi cud cool down a bit thin!"

"Does it still tingle, Irish?"

"Loike rid-hot pins and needles jabbin' into me, sor. Howld on, for mercy's sake! That's another of the spoiteful bastes!"

Ferrers Lord trod the creeper down contemptuously. The ground was much clearer, as he had anticipated; but Mysteria was losing all the little charm and fascination it had ever possessed in the eyes of the island hunters.

They had become used to the array of distorted tree-stems and colourless verdure. The forest was not even abhorrent to them, but merely tame and uninteresting, and silent and lifeless.

They had not seen a vestige of anything except vegetable life—not even an anemone, a mollusc, or a sea-worm.

"I think," said Thurston, after a silence, "that Mysteria—to use a Yankeeism—is a big, slow, disappointing bluff!"

"In what respect, Thurston?"

"In many respects," answered Thurston. "Undeniably it floats, for we sailed right underneath it; but that appears to be its one and only genuine quality. Where are the wild creatures we were going to find—the dreadful monsters those fellows talked about?"

Thurston spoke in such an injured and aggrieved tone that Ching-Lung burst out laughing.

"My dear fellow," said the millionaire, shrugging his shoulders, "the Magnet Library.—No. 302.

shoulders, "as I did not make Mysteria, do not hold me responsible for its shortcomings."

"He wants a drink!" grinned Ching-Lung. "A drink will do the dear boy good. Hev, presto! Abracadabra! Allez!" he added, gazing into the barrel of his rifle. "It's down here somewhere, unless the mice have taken it. Ah, here it was!"

Prout and Barry laughed as Ching-Lung presented Thurston with a bottle of champagne about an inch tall.

"Beg your puddin'; I've made a mistake, and given you the puppy!" said his Highness. "What-ho! That's more like it!"

Where it came from only the prince could tell; but there it was, balanced on Ching-Lung's palm—a quart bottle of the best champagne. And Prout and Barry laughed louder than ever. The cork popped, and a creaming glass was held under Rupert's nose.

"Drink, puppy—drink!" said Ching-Lung. "And don't bark, please, 'cos we can't find any slimy slonkeydoodles and sich. Har, har! Look at the greedy gleam in his offside eye. He drinks—no, he mops it. Gently, there! You needn't swallow the glass. Dear, dear! I see four more greedy gleams in four other eyes. Lord?"

"None for me," said the millionaire, shaking his head.

"And none for you, either, I s'pose, Barry of Ballybunion?"

"Oi niver dhrink ut as a rule whin Oi'm aslape, sor," answered Barry. "But as this happens to be the anniversary of the day Oi found a threepenny-bit in my last year's summer weskit, Oi'll take wan dhrop. A-a-a-ah! Ut was splendid!"

Barry grinned his appreciation of Ching-Lung's gift, and said it made him feel "loike a young gazelle."

He looked anything but a young gazelle as he swung his axe in defiance of all the electricity-charged plants that ever grew a hundred fathoms deep.

"We must be nearly across the island, Lord," said Thurston.

"Not nearly," said Ferrers Lord. "We have been zig-zagging a great deal. I don't know, though; you may be right!"

"And we ain't come to thim 'ills as we seed, by hokey!" remarked Prout, respectfully touching the glazed peak of his yachting-cap. "Seems to me we're cruising along the bottom of 'em. We ought to 'ave reached 'em!"

The millionaire consulted his pocket compass. As nearly as he could he had kept a north-easterly course. They certainly ought to have gained the lower slopes of the hills. He uttered a laugh.

"I see it," he said. "The compass has been telling the truth, but we have not taken into account the little tricks an island like this can play. Mysteria has swung round to the west."

"Then we've been wasting our time?"

"A little of it, Ching," replied the millionaire. "Let us strike out more to the left!"

"Look there, sorr!" cried Barry.

They had stumbled upon their own path again, where they had cut away the weeds. A compass was an untrustworthy guide to use in exploring an island with such vagaries as Mysteria possessed when landmarks were invisible.

"You might walk about here all day and get no forrader," said Ching-Lung.

"We'll have to put some signposts up, Barry from Ballybunion. To the left, I think you said, sir. So mote it be. What a nice place to have a home! I don't mind the silly thing turning round a bit, but if it turns over, or stands on its head, or sinks while I'm here, I shall be most angry indeed! Lead on, MacParritch! Perhaps the most sensible plan would be to walk backwards!"

The millionaire hacked a path for them.

"Ah, we are going up at last, lads!" he said.

The ground began to incline sharply. It was rougher, too, and masses of lime jutted through the spongy bed beneath their feet. The air grew warmer and damper, for the tropical sun was pouring its fierce rays down on the roof of leaves high above them.

"A lake!" said Thurston, pointing through the stems.

A stretch of black, silent water shone like a sheet of polished ebony in front of them. It was too small to be dignified with the name of lake, being probably merely an acre in area. Shrouded by the gloom, the black pit looked loathsome and terrible. They halted on its brink.

"Anybody like a bathe?" asked Ching-Lung.

The suggestion made Thurston and the Irishman shiver.

"Av Oi had nowhere else to wash in bar that, troth, Oi'd give up washin' for the rist of my loife!" said Barry. "Let's barrel the horrid stuff, and set up in the writing-ink and black doie business. Did yez iver see the loike? Bad luck to the ugly pit of darkness, say Oi! Sure ut's enough to sicken my ould grandmother's blaind pig!"

Prout started, dropping his axe and pole, and snatched his

EVERY
MONDAY,

The "Magnet"
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ONE
PENNY.

head under the strap of his rifle. A jet of inky water leapt into the air and fell back, causing oily circles to roll sluggishly over the pond.

"Phwat did that, bedad?" muttered Barry O'Rooney.

"There's something alive in there, Rupert!" said Ferrers Lord. "Possibly Mystera is not such a hollow fraud, after all. Throw something in!"

Ching-Lung discovered a large piece of limestone, and pitched it forward. It fell with a deep splash, and again the black, oily ripples circled over the pond. But the inhabitant of this weird fastness refused to show himself.

"Very like it's only a porpoise," said Thomas Prout.

"If that's the case, Tommy, we'll soon see him," said Ching-Lung, "for porpoises have to come up to blow. But I don't quite see how a porpoise could have got here, and no respectable porpoise would care to live in that tub of best boot-polish. It's certainly something that squirts, for—"

"Look—look—look!" screamed Thurston.

The ebony water in the centre of the pit seemed to pile

itself together in a mass. The mass broke asunder into two waves that rolled across the pond in a hissing swirl.

Two gleaming eyes of green shone malignantly above the surface, and a hoarse roar rumbled through the forest.

Two great, grey arms lashed high in the air, and beat the water into a smother of froth. Then the awful vision was gone, and the tossing waves slowly subsided.

"That," said Ching-Lung, "must be the slimy slonkey-doodle!"

"My stars!" gasped Rupert, with a long, subdued whistle. "What was it?"

"Oi give it up," said Barry, whose eyes were starting out of his head. "Oi know wan thing. Oi don't loike ut—not me!"

None of them had seen the tenant of the dark pool distinctly, for the turmoil it had caused in the water had concealed its shape.

Obviously, it was a creature of vast size, this unknown inhabitant of the lonely pool. At least, they had seen its eyes—two huge, glaring, green circles, horrible to look at.

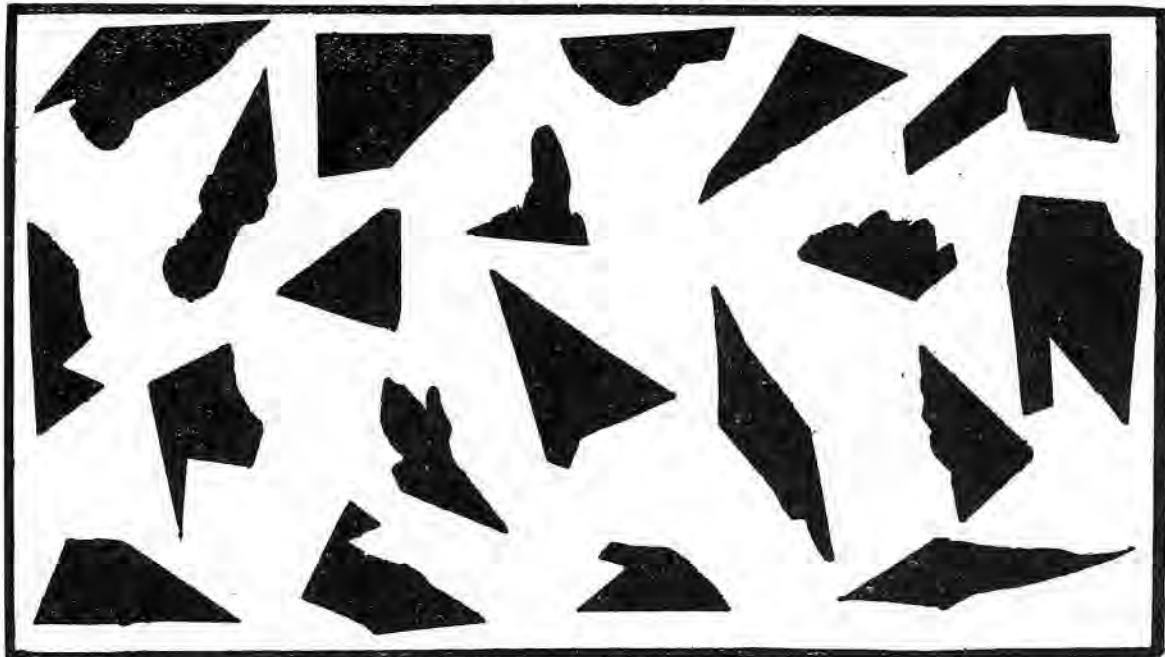
(This thrilling adventure story will be continued in next Monday's issue of The "MAGNET" Library. Please order your copy in advance. Price 1d.)

GRAND NEW FEATURE. No. 5.

OUR WINTER EVENING PROBLEM CORNER.

Here is another little picture-puzzle for my ingenious chums. The whole picture-puzzle should be pasted on to a piece of thin cardboard, and the black pieces carefully cut out; correctly pieced together they will form the silhouette figure of a well-known character at Greyfriars School. Any of my chums who find they are unable to tackle this test of skill successfully will find the correct solution published on this page next Monday.

No. 6 PROBLEM NEXT WEEK.



KEY TO LAST WEEK'S PROBLEM.

Readers were set the task of finding how many hidden faces there were in this picture. My chums will see that all the hidden faces have been circled up. There were sixteen altogether.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 302.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

A Splendid Complete Tale of Harry
Wharton & Co. Order Early!



My Readers' Page

WHOM TO WRITE TO :
EDITOR,
"THE GEM" LIBRARY.
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OUR TWO COMPANION PAPERS
"THE GEM" LIBRARY.
 EVERY WEDNESDAY
"THE PENNY POPULAR"
 EVERY FRIDAY.

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his Chums, at home or abroad.

FOR NEXT MONDAY:

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"
 BY FRANK RICHARDS.

Our next splendid tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School, deals with the troubles and difficulties which beset Hazeldene of the Remove, entirely owing to his own weakness and folly. The foolish junior deserves little sympathy in his trouble; but he has a sister, Marjorie Hazeldene looks to Harry Wharton to help her brother in his time of trouble, and Harry does not fail her. As

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

he takes the wretched Hazel's load of trouble upon his own shoulders, with his usual generosity, and, thanks to him, the affair "blows over" without any very serious consequences. All my "Magnetite" chums, and all their chums, will revel in

"THE SCAPEGOAT!"

THE GRAND WINTER NUMBER OF THE "GEM" LIBRARY

will make its appearance this Wednesday, and a grand surprise it will prove for all my chums. To begin with,

A MAGNIFICENT COLOURED COVER,

superbly printed on the best plate paper, will adorn the outside of this splendid number, a new departure for "The Gem" Library. First in the list of contents will come

"THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM,"

a glorious 50,000-word long, complete tale of the famous chums of St. Jim's, by Martin Clifford. This talented author has excelled himself with a vengeance in this magnificent story, which deals with a mysterious affair that occurs at Eastwood House, the home of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, where a jolly holiday party of St. Jim's boys are being entertained.

Tom Merry & Co. are very prominent, of course, while Wally D'Arcy, the scamp of the Third Form, also takes a good deal of credit in connection with the clearing up of the strange mystery. One of the most powerfully interesting yarns ever penned by Martin Clifford.

"THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED ROOM,"

will be a rare treat for every reader.

In addition to a

SECOND LONG, COMPLETE STORY,

entitled, "The Showman's Double," a grand tale of circus life, a

SPLENDID NEW GAME,

specially designed and printed, at great expense, for my "Gemite" chums, will be given away in this grand number. This game is something quite novel, and is entitled:

"THE RACE TO THE TUCKSHOP!"

beautifully illustrated. This special "Gem" Library game is bound to prove an enormous attraction for the winter evenings.

In addition to these special features, extra space will be allotted to the

FREE COLONIAL CORRESPONDENCE EXCHANGE,

and to the great sporting serial.

"THE CORINTHIAN,"

while such popular features as

OUR WEEKLY PRIZE PAGE

and the Chat page will not be forgotten. The price of this wonderful budget of good things will be twopence, but my readers may rest assured that they have never before been offered such amazingly good value for this outlay as will be represented by this Wednesday's

GRAND WINTER NUMBER OF THE "GEM" LIBRARY.

A WORD OF THANKS!

I owe a word of special thanks to all those of my readers who obliged me by filling up the forms recently provided, with the names and addresses of non-reader friends.

I have a big pile of the forms, and am gradually getting complimentary copies sent off to all those whose names are on the forms.

It goes without saying that this involves a tremendous amount of clerical labour, and some little indulgence must be craved in despatching such a great number of copies.

LIFE AS A WIRELESS OPERATOR.—No. 2.

When Instruments are not in Tune.

An operator who cannot get his instrument into tune quickly, especially when a man-of-war is calling up a station, may get a severe "talking to" from the commander of the vessel.

A little while ago an operator at a wireless station at Bermuda was being signalled for over a quarter of an hour by an English man-of-war before he could get his instrument into tune with the instrument on board the ship. When he did so, the message that came through was the following: "Is there a monkey playing with the instrument?" "Sorry for the delay, sir," answered the operator. "Well, you ought to be at home playing at marbles; you are not fit to be in charge of anything but a perambulator. I shall report you to your company." After this little prelude the message itself came through, and the luckless operator was in terror lest his instrument should get out of tune again before the man-of-war had done speaking.

After an operator has been on duty for six months at any station he takes up the regular work of receiving and transmitting messages, but it takes him at least a couple of years to become a rapid and efficient worker.

At many wireless stations it is necessary for the operator to wear a telephonic headgear, which is connected with the receiving instrument; the incoming signals are tapped out in the Morse code, but the operator could not hear them unless he wore the telephonic headgear. Sitting listening for signals in this way is very tedious, dull, and uninteresting work, but an operator is not usually kept at it for more than a few hours at a stretch.

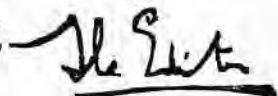
The Future for the Operator.

The prospects of promotion in the wireless service are good. There is a large demand for capable experts in the various departments of wireless service, and an operator who makes himself thoroughly efficient in one special branch of his work is sure of advancement.

Though the working of the wireless system has been improved during the past few years, the instruments are of a very delicate character, and are apt at times to behave in a manner that startles and bewilders the novice, but simply amuses the older hand.

Strange, weird tapplings come through the receiver which an inexperienced operator is apt to mistake for real messages, and he makes frantic, and, of course, futile, efforts to tune the instrument to some other. Often messages are intercepted in the most extraordinary and highly confusing manner to the operator as the result of atmospheric disturbances.

(Another of this interesting series of Special Articles next Monday.)



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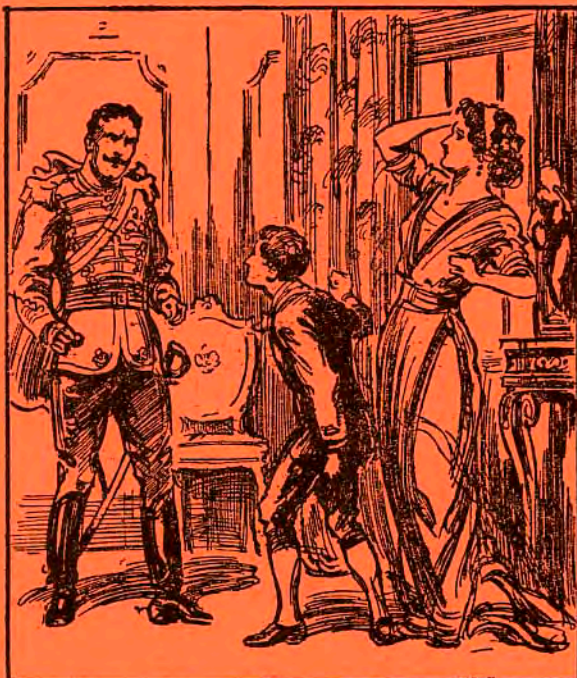
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