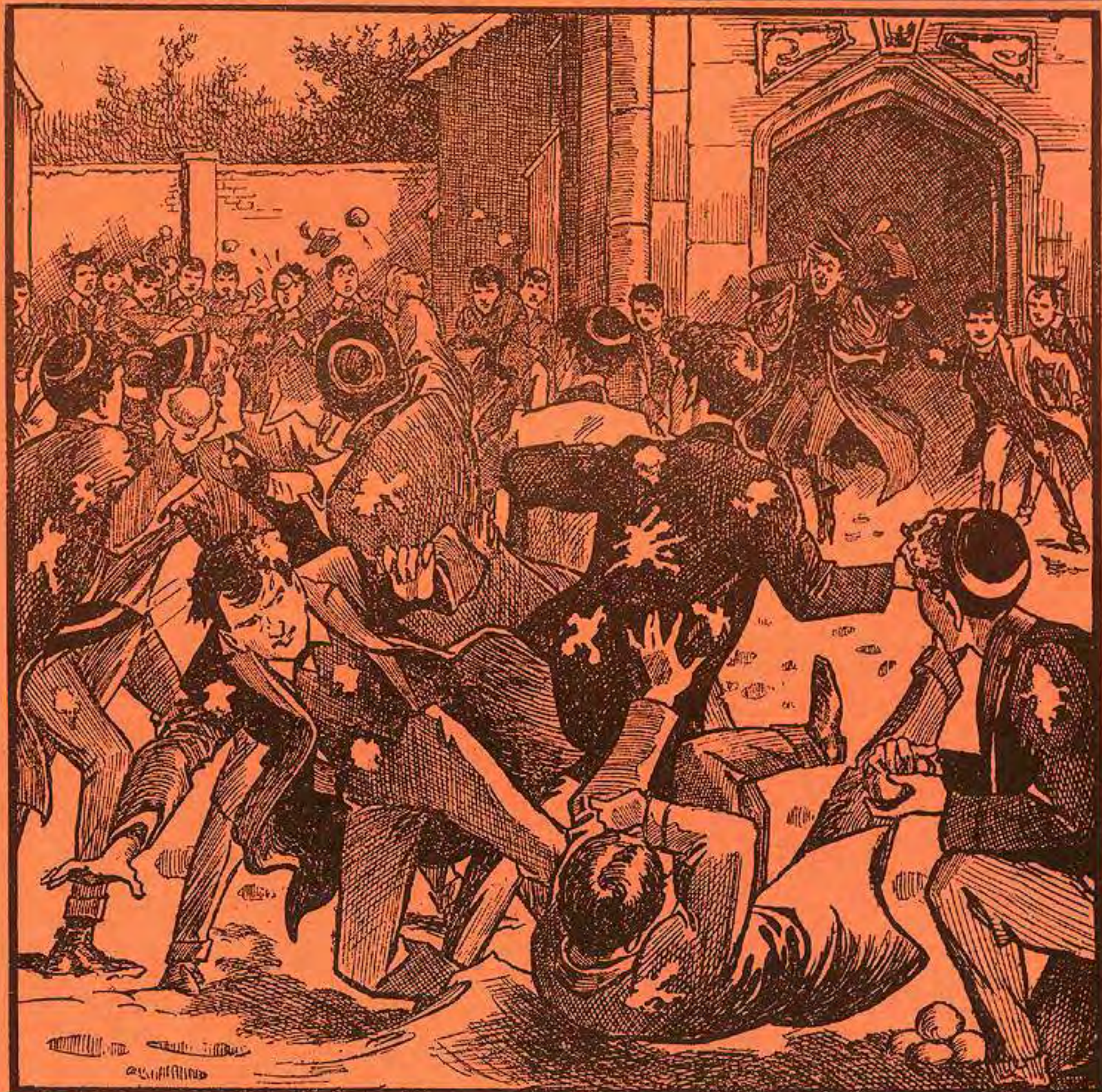


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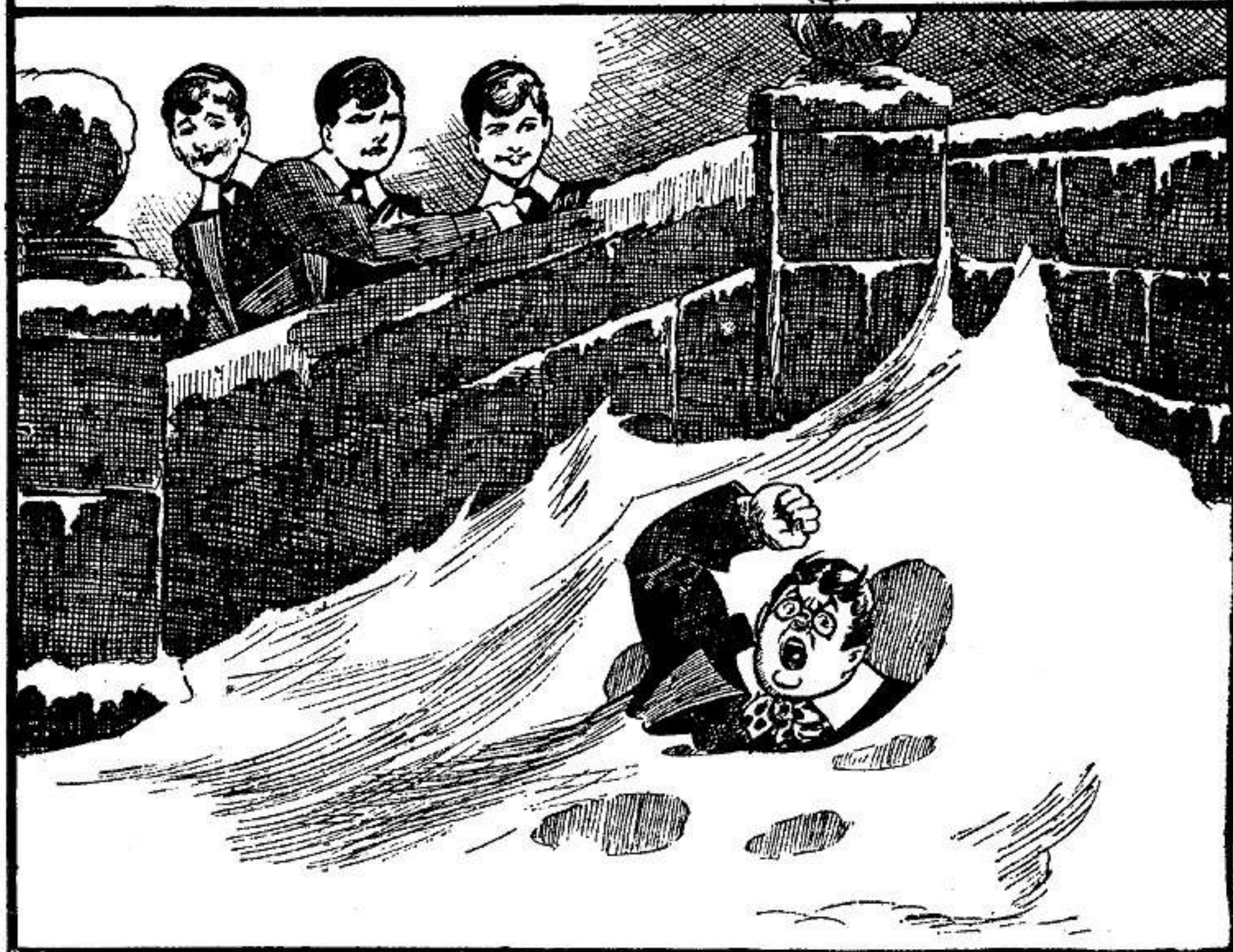
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Trouble with Highcliffe !



Johnny Bull whirled Bunter off his feet, and tossed him off the schoolhouse steps. Billy Bunter disappeared into the snowdrift beside the steps. The next moment a fat face and a pair of spectacles came into view, and Bunter roared for help. "Ow! Yow! Gimme a hand! Hellup!" (See Chapter I.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Buried Alive!

"COMING down, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry.

It was indeed coming down!

During morning-lessons, the snow had begun to fall; and by the time the Greyfriars fellows came out of the Form-rooms, the old Close was carpeted with white, and the leafless branches of the old elms gleamed with ridges of snow.

Harry Wharton & Co., the chums of the Remove, looked out of the open doorway of the School House; and said things. There was a form match due that afternoon, with the Upper Fourth; but there was not much prospect of foot-ball now.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Indian junior, remarked that the weatherfulness was terrific; and the chums of the Remove agreed with him. The wind from the sea had drifted the snow against the house, and beside the School House steps it was banked up four or five feet deep.

"What are we going to do this afternoon?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Might get up a snow fight."

"Or a row with the Highcliffe chaps!" suggested Johnny Bull.

Wharton shook his head.

"No go! The Head's down on that, since Mobbs came over and complained last time about our ragging Ponsonby & Co!"

"They jolly well ragged me yesterday!" said Johnny Bull indignantly. "Five of them at once, and I had to run for it. I don't see why not!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes the postman," said Bob Cherry. "He's late to-day!"

The village postman was ploughing his way through the snow across the Close. The juniors hailed him all at once.

"Anything for me, Cripps?"

The postman came up the snowy steps. There was a grin on his red face—a grin the juniors did not understand for the moment.



"Yes, Master Wharton, 'ere's a postcard for you," he replied.

"Oh! Only a postcard?"

"Yes; a picture one!" grinned Cripps.

"Hand it over. What are you grinning at?"

"Nothin', Master Wharton."

Cripps fumbled in his bag, and produced the picture postcard, and handed it to Harry Wharton, and then went round the house to deliver the letters. Wharton glanced at the card. It was addressed to him in an elegant hand—a hand he knew—that of Ponsonby of the Fourth Form of Highcliffe School.

"It's from Highcliffe," he said.

"What have these rotters got to say?" growled Bob Cherry. Feeling was not friendly between the Highcliffians and the Greyfriars juniors.

Wharton turned the card over.

Then he frowned.

It was, as Cripps had said, a picture postcard. But it was a home-made picture card, the picture evidently having been drawn by one of the Highcliffe fellows of an artistic tendency.

Wharton held it up in silence for the other fellows to see. There was an exclamation of angry indignation from the Removites.

The picture represented a junior in a Greyfriars cap tearing at full speed down the road, with several fellows in Highcliffe caps in full chase. The Greyfriars junior was using his legs to the best advantage. Underneath the picture was a sentence in Latin: "Crura puerumque cano!"

"The rotters!" growled Johnny Bull, his face crimson with wrath. "That's meant for me, of course. I had to bolt—there were five of them. I gave Ponsonby a thick ear; but I couldn't handle five at once."

"Of course you couldn't," said Wharton soothingly. "That's all right."

"What on earth does that rot mean?" asked Frank Nugent, pointing to the Latin sentence.

Wharton grinned.

"It's rather funny," he remarked.

"Rotten cheek, I call it," granted Bull. "I don't see anything funny in it myself."

"But what does it mean?"

"You can construe it, can't you?" grinned Wharton. "It's a pun on the first line in the *Aeneid*—*arma virumque cano*—arms and the man I sing! *Crura puerumque cano*—that means, 'Legs and the boy I sing.' It's a rotten pun. I suppose they think Johnny put up a specially good sprint when he bolted yesterday."

"What was I to do?" roared Johnny Bull. "I tell you there were five of the rotters. Ponsonby and Gadsby—"

"Yes, yes!"

"And Monson and Merton and Vavasour. I tell you I gave Ponsonby a thick ear—"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"And I dotted Monson on the nose. But—"

"Of course!"

"I couldn't fight five of them, could I?"

"No, no, of course not!"

"Then what are you sniggering at?" demanded Johnny Bull wrathfully. "I don't see anything funny in that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you silly chumps—"

"It's all right, Johnny, don't be waxy. It's rather funny, you know!"

"I don't call it funny!"

"But it's beastly cheek, all the same," said Harry Wharton.

"I should jolly well say it is. If there had been only two of 'em, I'd have wiped up the ground with 'em!" snorted Johnny Bull. "But I couldn't handle five. How was I to handle five fellows, I'd like to know, all of 'em as big as I am!"

"No, no!"

"Didn't I have to bolt? They were going to shove me in the ditch—three feet of water!"

"Quite so. It's all right!"

"Well, don't snigger, then!" growled Johnny Bull, who was evidently very much "edge-wise" just then. "I don't call it funny!"

"Well, it's a rather good pun, you know!"

"I think it's a rotten pun!"

"And the picture isn't badly drawn!"

"I think it's rottenly drawn."

"And they've caught your likeness, too."

"If you say that is anything like me, I'll punch your head!" exclaimed Johnny Bull excitedly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, what have you got there?" Billy Bunter rolled up, and blinked at the picture postcard through his big spectacles. "He, he, he! That's Bull, of course. I heard about his running away from the Highcliffe chaps—he, he, he!"

Johnny Bull glared at the fat junior. Billy Bunter was too short-sighted to see the signs of a coming storm, and he chuckled gleefully.

"Skinner saw Bull coming down the road," he remarked. "He said he was going like a giddy steam-engine. He, he, he!"

"Shut up!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! We all know you ran away, you know. He, he, he! I thought it was rather disgraceful myself. The Highcliffe chaps have the laugh of us now. We shall never hear the end of it. I say, you ought to enter for the mile next sports day. You're the best sprinter in the school. He, he, he! I wish I'd been there. I'd have protected you, I would, really. He, he, he!"

Johnny Bull did not reply. He strode towards the fat junior, and grasped him in his powerful hands. Bunter ceased chuckling all of a sudden.

"I say, you fellows. Leggo, you beast! Ow, ow! I can't help it if you ran away from the Highcliffe chaps! 'Tain't my fault you're a beastly funk! Ow, ow! Yah!"

Squash!

Johnny Bull whirled the fat junior off his feet, and with a terrific heave, tossed him off the School House steps. Billy Bunter disappeared into the snowdrift beside the steps, and vanished with startling suddenness.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter had disappeared from sight for a moment. A fat face and a pair of spectacles rose into view from the snow, and Bunter roared for help. The snow was up to his ears.

"Ow, ow, yow! Hellup! Yow! Gimme a hand! Yah! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter scrambled wildly in the snow, and slipped over, and disappeared again. The snow crumbled over him and covered him. From under it came a sound of wild howling.

"Groogh! Groogh! Help! Yow! Ow!"

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, looked out of the doorway. His face wore a puzzled expression.

"What is that?" he exclaimed. "Who—what—"

"Yow! Ow! Help! I'm buried alive! Yaroooh! Help me out, you beasts! Groooh!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "That is Bunter's voice, is it not?"

"Sounds like it, sir," said Frank Nugent demurely.

"Where is he? Bunter!"

"Yow, ow! You beast! Yah! You rotter!"

"What!"

"Yaro-o-o-op! Help me out! I'm being suf-suf-suffocated!"

Bunter's head rose from the snow again. His fat face was furious. Mr. Quelch uttered a startled exclamation.

"Are you going to help me out, you rotters?" howled Bunter.

"Dear me! You must have been very clumsy to fall into the snowdrift, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch severely. "Get out at once! You will catch cold!"

"I didn't fall in!" howled Bunter. "That beast Bull chucked me in! And I can't get out! Yow, ow!"

Mr. Quelch leaned over, grasped the fat junior's collar, and dragged him out. Billy Bunter was landed on the steps gasping like a newly-caught fish—a very fat fish. Mr. Quelch panted a little from his exertion; Bunter was not a light-weight.

"Bunter, go and change your clothes at once—"

"Ow! I'm wet! I shall catch c-c-cold—"

"Go in at once! Bull, did you throw Bunter into the snow?"

"Yes, I did!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Then you will follow me to my study!"

"Oh!"

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"What do you want?" asked Ponsonby. "Just a little visit," answered Harry Wharton calmly. "We've come in answer to your postcard. The other fellows are waiting outside!" "Chuck them out!" exclaimed Vavasour.
(See Chapter 3.)

Johnny Bull followed the Form-master to his study. The chums of the Remove turned angry glances upon Bunter.

"You fat rotter!" said Bob Cherry wrathfully. "You—you rotten sneak!"

"Yow! I'm jolly glad he's going to get a licking! Yow, ow!"

"Pitch him in again!" exclaimed Nugent.

Billy Bunter fled into the House, and escaped up the stairs. From Mr. Quelch's study came the sound of a twishing cane. Johnny Bull came out of the study, looking a little flustered, and squeezing his hands under his arms, and twisting—looking curiously as if he were trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife.

"Ow-w-w-w-w-w-w!" he murmured.

"Hurt?" Nugent asked sympathetically.

Johnny Bull glared at him.

"No," he groaned. "I'm doing this for fun, you silly fathead! Ow-w-w-w!"

"It's rotten, old chap!" said Bob Cherry, with sympathy.

"But—"

"I'm going over to Highcliffe this afternoon!" said Johnny Bull ferociously.

"To Highcliffe?"

"Yes. I'm going to lick Ponsonby!"

"But—but there'll be a crowd—"

"I don't care! I'm going—"

"The Head's down on rows with Highcliffe since—"

"I'm going!"

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FOR NEXT
MONDAY—

"BUNTER'S BLACK CHUM!"

"But look here, Johnny—"

"I'm going!"

And Johnny Bull stamped away, still squeezing his hands under his arms. The chums of the Remove exchanged hopeless glances. Johnny Bull evidently meant what he said, and there was no possibility of dissuading him.

"There'll be a row," said Harry Wharton. "Of course, we can't let him go alone. It will be a tremendous rag if we all go, and—"

"And Mobbs will come over and complain again—"

"And we shall be licked!"

"The lickfulness will be terrific!"

"We must try to make Johnny see reason," said Harry Wharton.

And they tried. But to all reasonings Johnny Bull made the same reply, without variation:

"I'm going!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Expedition!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. looked very thoughtful when they came out of the dining-room after dinner.

Johnny Bull had made up his mind. Other fellows besides Billy Bunter had chipped him about his inglorious encounter with the Highcliffe fellows the day before. Ponsonby's picture-postcard had been the finishing

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touch. It was, as Bob Cherry remarked, the last straw which gave the camel the hump.

Johnny Bull was going over to Highcliffe to bestow upon Ponsonby a most terrific licking. And as Johnny would certainly be ragged by the Highcliffians if he went over alone on that amiable errand, the Co. had to go with him. And such an expedition meant trouble.

There had been a good deal of trouble already between Greyfriars and Highcliffe. The Highcliffe fellows did not play the game. If Harry Wharton & Co. had the worst of an encounter, they were content to take it as cheerfully as they could, and say nothing. But more than once Ponsonby & Co. had caused complaints to be made to Dr. Locke, the Head of Greyfriars. Mr. Mobbs, their Form-master, had come over, and his visit had had the most painful results for the heroes of the Remove. And a raid on Highcliffe was certain to be followed by a complaint from Mr. Mobbs, if not from old Dr. Voysey himself, and then there would be trouble.

Apart from that consideration, the Remove fellows were quite keen on a row with Highcliffe. As Bulstrode remarked, it would fill up the afternoon beautifully, football being off. And most of the fellows were willing to risk the certain row that would follow, for the sake of bearding the enemy in their den.

The expedition having been decided upon, Harry Wharton found no lack of enthusiastic followers. Half the Remove were willing to go. Even Mark Linley, the scholarship junior, who had intended to spend that snowy afternoon grinding at Greek, was willing to give up swotting to join in the expedition. Even Lord Mauleverer, the slacker of the Remove, announced his readiness to tear himself away from his armchair and his study fire in order to follow the flag. After dinner Harry Wharton called his followers together in the Rag to discuss the plan of campaign.

"Who's willing to come over to Highcliffe, and risk the row afterwards?" he inquired.

"Everybody!" said Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!" said the meeting with one voice.

"Sure, and we're all dyin' to get at close quarters with the spalpeens!" said Micky Desmond.

"A licking afterwards won't hurt us," said Bolsover major.

"We've been licked before."

"And we shall be licked again!" grinned Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior. "Let's go over in a body and rag them baldheaded!"

"Only they're such rotten sneaks," said Nugent.

"There'll be a complaint to the Head."

"Chance it!" said Bulstrode.

"Hear, hear!"

"I guess it's risky," remarked Fisher T. Fish, the American junior. "You see, we shall have a crowd of the galoots on to us—"

"Oh, rats!"

"I'm going, anyway!" said Johnny Bull obstinately.

"You fellows coming?"

"Hold on!" said Mark Linley, in his quiet voice. "Johnny wants to thump Ponsonby, and there's no need to make a regular riot of it. Suppose we take Johnny over, and he can challenge Ponsonby to stand up to him, and we'll all see fair play?"

"Yes; that's a good idea," exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Ponsonby can't refuse, after writing that blessed postcard. They can have it out in the gym, with the gloves on."

"And then they'll rush us!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Well, if they do, we shall be ready for them. Then we sha'n't have the blame of beginning it. After all, the Head's the Head, you know, and he's down on these rags."

"Well, I'm satisfied, so long as I can get at Ponsonby," said Johnny Bull. "I'm jolly well going to lick him for sending that rotten postcard. I'll show him whether I run away from Highcliffe cads or not."

"Well, you did run away, you know!" chuckled Skinner.

Snack!

Skinner suddenly collapsed upon the floor, and Johnny Bull pushed back his cuffs, and stared at him fiercely.

"Want some more?" he demanded.

"Why, you—you rotter—" howled Skinner.

He jumped up and rushed at Johnny Bull. There was a rush of the juniors to separate them. Skinner was shoved back, and Johnny Bull was bumped down and sat upon by three or four Removites.

"No rowing here!" exclaimed Wharton. "We shall have enough of that at Highcliffe. Now, how many of us are going?"

"All the Form," said Bolsover major. "If any chap wants to funk, we'll give him a licking, and make him go, all the same. Where are you going, Snoop?"

"Eh? I've got some lines to do!" said Snoop, who was sidling towards the door.

"Come back here!" exclaimed the bully of the Remove.

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"Ahem! You see, Bolsover—"

Bolsover major collared the sneak of the Remove, and dragged him back into the Rag.

"You're coming with the rest," he said grimly.

"Leave him alone," said Harry Wharton quietly. "If Snoop is a funk, he's better left out. Let him stay."

Snoop turned red.

"I—I'm not a funk!" he growled. "I don't see the fun of it, that's all. I'm not afraid to come."

"Come then," said Bolsover major, with a grin.

And he slipped his arm through Snoop's.

"I—I'm quite willing to come, of course!"

"All serene! I'll see that you do!"

"We'll get out quietly, in twos and threes," said Harry Wharton. "If we all go out together the prefects will spot us, and smell a rat!"

"Yes, rather!"

And the Removites left the Rag, and singly, or in twos and threes, they strolled out of the School House, and out of the school gates. Wingate, of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, met Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry as they were going out.

"Where are you kids off to?" he asked.

"Going up the road," said Bob airily. "Would you care to come and have a game of snowballs, Wingate?"

The Sixth-Former laughed.

"None of your rows with Highcliffe, remember," he said.

"My dear chap, we won't have any rows with Highcliffe if we can possibly help it," said Bob.

"Well, mind you don't."

And the captain of Greyfriars walked on.

"Nothing like telling the exact truth, is there?" said Bob.

"We sha'n't have any row if we can possibly help it. We sha'n't begin."

"No fear!"

"If Ponsonby meets Johnny fair and square, there won't be any row with us," said Bob. "We're only going to see fair play. No good explaining that to Wingate, though. Prefects are unreasonable. He might think our going over to Highcliffe was looking for trouble. And it isn't."

"Not a bit of it," said Harry, laughing.

They joined the rest of the Removites on the Courtfield road. Nearly all the Remove were there. Bolsover major had one arm linked in Snoop's, and the other in Billy Bunter's. Both Snoop and Bunter looked very unhappy.

"Here we are!" said Bob Cherry. "Now, march's the word!"

And they marched.

Billy Bunter stumbled and slipped over in the snow, dragging his arm away from Bolsover major. The bully of the Remove halted.

"Get up, you fat duffer!"

"I—I think I've sprained my ankle," said Bunter faintly.

"I—I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to go over to Highcliffe after all. I'm sincerely sorry. Ow, ow! Keep your beastly boots to yourself, Bolsover, you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get up!" roared Bolsover.

Billy Bunter scrambled up, and, dodging Bolsover's outstretched hand, started off for Greyfriars at a breathless run.

"Come back!" roared the bully of the Remove.

But Billy Bunter did not come back. He disappeared down the road, his little fat legs going like clockwork.

"The rotten funk!" growled Bolsover. "I suppose you'd like to cut after him, Snoopey, wouldn't you?"

"Nunno!" stammered Snoop. "Not at all, Bolsover!"

"What are you trying to get your arm away for, then?"

"I—I wanted to scratch my nose."

"Scratch it with the other hand, then," chuckled Bolsover. And he kept his grasp upon the arm of the funk of the Remove as the troop of juniors marched on towards Highcliffe.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Unexpected Visitors!

PONSONBY & CO. were in Ponsonby's study at Highcliffe.

It was a large, roomy study, and extremely well furnished. The Hon. Cecil Ponsonby was one of the richest fellows at Highcliffe, where almost all the fellows had well-to-do people. Highcliffe was a much wealthier school than Greyfriars, a fact upon which the Highcliffians prided themselves. There were, as Ponsonby & Co. said with pride, no scholarship bounders there—like Mark Linley, the one-time factory lad, and Penfold, the son of the village cobbler, who were at Greyfriars.

Highcliffe was ruled with a very slack hand. Old Mr. Voysey, the headmaster, hardly knew what was going on in the school. He relegated most of his authority to the under-

masters, and they were not well-chosen men. Many of them were rather bent on gaining the favour of well-connected pupils than in keeping them in order. The school was, in fact, suffering from "rot." The rot showed itself in everything—in the games especially, and in the manners and customs of the Highcliffe fellows.

Ponsonby & Co. in the Fourth Formaped the manners and customs of the "blades" in the Sixth. Most of them had plenty of money, and they spent it upon enjoyments that would hardly bear the light. Few of the young rascals neglected to make a "book" on the important races of the year—and they knew all about the "form" of the well-known racehorses.

They played bridge in Ponsonby's study for stakes that were very high, nap and banker not being quite good enough for their aristocratic tastes. On this particular afternoon, when the heavy snowfall kept them within doors, Ponsonby was giving a bridge party in his study.

At the end of the passage a fag was keeping watch, in case of the unlikely approach of a master. Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth, was gifted with infinite tact, and he was not likely to happen along where he was not wanted. Mr. Mobbs hoped for great things some day from the influence of Ponsonby's father, a noble earl; and nothing would have induced him to find out anything that would have got the Honourable Cecil into trouble. Mr. Mobbs, like Nelson, could turn a blind eye upon things that he did not wish to see.

"I leave it to you, partner," Ponsonby yawned, as he laid down his cards and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"No trumps!" said Vavasour.

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and the fag put his head in at the door, looking excited.

"I say, Ponsonby—"

"Don't say that Mobby is coming," said Ponsonby, without turning a hair. "If Mobby saw me smoking, he wouldn't be able to pretend he didn't know."

And the bridge party chuckled.

"Tain't Mobby," said the fag.

"What's the matter, then?"

"There's a crowd of Greyfriars chaps coming in at the gates."

"Greyfriars chaps!" exclaimed Ponsonby.

"Yes; nearly twenty of 'em, I should think."

"Oh, by Jove!"

"Awful cheek, coming here!" said Gadsby. "It was that blessed postcard stirred them up, I suppose, like a giddy nest of hornets."

"Go and tell the porter to keep them out," said Ponsonby.

The fag grinned.

"I just saw them rolling the porter in the snow, and they're coming towards the house," he replied.

"My hat! What a nerve!"

"Well, they can't come in here," said Monson.

Ponsonby looked serious.

"I don't know. They've got nerve enough for anything. They came and ragged us here once, you know—right in the study. I think we'd better get the cards out of sight. If there's a row, the masters will be coming round—and some of them don't keep their eyes shut like Mobby."

"Look here, that's spoiling the game!" grumbled Merton.

"I've got a jolly good hand."

"Can't be helped. Get the cards out of sight—and the smokes, too. It's no good running risks."

The Highcliffe fellows, with scowling faces, obeyed Ponsonby's directions. The cards had disappeared by the time there was a tramp of feet in the passage, and six Greyfriars fellows thumped at the door, kicked it open, and looked in. They were Harry Wharton, Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Bolsover, and Mark Linley.

The Highcliffians were all on their feet now, and they stared angrily and superciliously at the new-comers.

"What do you want here?" exclaimed Ponsonby.

"Just a little visit," said Wharton agreeably.

"You've forced yourselves into the House—"

"Well, we found the door open; but we should have come in, anyway," said Harry Wharton calmly. "We've come in answer to your postcard. The other fellows are waiting outside."

"Chuck them out!" exclaimed Vavasour. "Call up the porter and the servants. We're not going to have our quarters invaded like this."

"Hold on!" said Ponsonby. "We don't want a row. Tell us what you want, you chaps. I suppose you know we can have you thrown out if we like; and if you make a row, your headmaster will hear of it."

Wharton's lip curled.

"Yes; we know all that," he said. "We don't want a scrap, if you don't. Here's your picture postcard—you sent that?" He held it up. "I know your writing."

The Highcliffe fellows grinned.

"Well, what about that?" yawned Ponsonby. "I was struck with admiration by the way Bull sprinted, and I felt

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FOR NEXT MONDAY—

"BUNTER'S BLACK CHUM!"

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ONE PENNY.

bound to commemorate it. Never saw such a jolly good runner. He ought to be a professional, you know."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

Johnny Bull clenched his big fists.

"I'll jolly well—" he began.

"Dry up, Johnny!" said Wharton. "I'm doing the talking."

"Look here—"

"Shurrup! Now, Ponsonby, that postcard amounts to an accusation of funk against Bull. That's what you meant by it."

Ponsonby yawned.

"Your perspicacity does you credit," he said, with calm impertinence. "It shows what education will do for a fellow."

And the Highcliffians chuckled again. Johnny Bull made a step forward, but Nugent and Bob Cherry dragged him back.

"I tell you I'm going to punch his head!" roared Johnny Bull.

"All in good time," said Bob. "Shut up!"

"Did you come over simply to ask whether I wrote that postcard?" asked Ponsonby. "Well, I wrote it. Now, will you kindly go? I don't want to be rude, but we're rather particular whom we associate with."

"Absolutely!" grinned Vavasour.

"Very well. We've come over to see fair play," explained Harry Wharton. "Johnny Bull is going to lick you—with or without gloves, just as you like. After what you've said, you can't refuse, unless you're a rotten funk yourself."

Ponsonby crimsoned.

"So that's what you want, is it?" he sneered.

"Yes; that's it."

"And that's what we're going to have," said Johnny Bull truculently. "You can come into the gym, and put the gloves on, or you can have it here and now. I don't care which. But I'm going to lick you before I go."

Ponsonby hesitated. He did not much care for a personal encounter with the sturdy junior. But to do him justice, he was not a funk, and he could not refuse so plain a challenge, under the eyes of his special comrades, without losing his prestige. He quickly made up his mind.

"I'm quite ready to lick you if you're looking for a licking, my dear fellow," he said, with studied insolence. "I really don't want to soil my hands on you, but if nothing else will satisfy you, I'll give you a licking."

"Right-ho!" said Johnny Bull grimly. "Come on!"

"We'll go down into the gym," said Ponsonby airily, "and we'll have the gloves on. I don't want to fight like a hooligan with bare knuckles. That may suit you and your sort, but—"

"Not so much jaw!" said Johnny Bull. "Come to the gym, then!"

Ponsonby glanced round at his admiring friends.

"Gentlemen," he said, "will you do me the honour of coming to the gym, to see me knock some of the cheek out of this cad?"

"What-ho!"

"Good old Pon!"

"Now, my good fellows, we are quite at your service," said Ponsonby, with an insolent look at the Greyfriars juniors.

Johnny Bull clenched his hands till the nails dug into his palms. He was no match for Ponsonby in words, but the airy insolence of the Highcliffe junior made him almost boil over with rage. Ponsonby walked gracefully out of the study, without another word or look to the Greyfriars fellows, and went downstairs, followed by his friends.

"Oh, my hat, won't I wollop him!" muttered Johnny Bull.

And the Co. followed Ponsonby and his friends downstairs, and joined their comrades, who were waiting in the quadrangle. And the whole party followed Ponsonby & Co. into the gymnasium.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

With the Gloves On.

THEY had the gym. to themselves.

There was no one else there when they entered; but the word had gone round already, and Ponsonby's friends came in good numbers to see the fight—fellows of the Fourth, and the Shell, and the Upper Fourth, and some of the Fifth, till a good two score of fellows were gathered there.

The Greyfriars party kept together. They did not trust the Highcliffians. If Ponsonby got the worst of the encounter, it would be very like him to give the signal for a general rush.

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And in that case the Greyfriars fellows would have to stand shoulder to shoulder and fight their way out.

Ponsonby stripped off his jacket in an airy way, smiling genially at his friends. Ponsonby was a good boxer, and his comrades were not without hope of seeing him lick the Greyfriars champion.

"I suppose we're going to have this thing in order?" yawned Ponsonby. "Rounds, and a timekeeper, and all that—What?"

"Certainly!" said Harry Wharton. "Three-minute rounds and one-minute rests. I suppose you can lend Bull a pair of boxing-gloves?"

"Oh, yes. Get them out, Vav. You can keep time, Gadsby."

"Right-ho!" said Gadsby.

Wharton looked a little uncertain. It was impossible to depend upon the Highcliff fellows for fair play, and Gadsby was Ponsonby's closest chum. But Johnny Bull only grunted contemptuously, and did not raise any objection, and so Wharton let it pass. After all, he felt that Johnny was more than a match for the elegant Highcliffian, however he might be favoured by the referee.

Johnny Bull had taken off his jacket and donned the gloves. His sleeves rolled back, showed his powerful arms, which looked nearly twice as thick as Ponsonby's. The airy smile faded for a moment from Ponsonby's face as he glanced at Bull's arms. It was evident that Johnny could hit very hard if he knew where to plant his blows.

Gadsby took out his watch—a handsome gold ticker.

"You fellows ready?" he asked.

"I'm ready!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, quite!" yawned Ponsonby.

"Seconds out of the ring!" said Gadsby. "Time!"

Johnny Bull started serious business at once. Ponsonby's airy manner had the effect of irritating him considerably. He was anxious to get at the impertinent Highcliffian and give him a good hammering and get it over.

But Ponsonby knew how to box. He was a little taller than Bull, too, and longer in the reach, though not nearly so thickset or muscular.

He backed away, giving ground, and leading Johnny Bull right round the ring, every now and then putting in a tap that made Johnny Bull more irritated and excited.

The Highcliff crowd began to chuckle.

"Go it, Pon!"

"Another dot on the nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Johnny made a furious rush. Ponsonby side-stepped with great agility, and drove in a right-hander that caught Johnny on the side of the head and sent him reeling. Before he could recover his balance or his guard, Ponsonby was upon him, with driving left and right. Biff, biff, biff! The heavy gloves came crashing on Johnny Bull's face and neck, and he went down like a log.

There was a roar from the Highcliffians.

"Bravo, Pon!"

"Hurrah!"

"Count! Count!"

Gadsby began to count.

"It's time!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly. "That round's lasted more than three minutes!"

"Who's timekeeper?" growled Gadsby. "Four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—"

Johnny Bull scrambled up breathlessly, and Ponsonby rushed in upon him again, hitting out right and left. Johnny, with a desperate spring back, escaped the rush, and defended himself as well as he could, gaining time, till Gadsby, for very shame's sake, had to call "Time!"

Harry Wharton received Johnny Bull on his knee, and Nugent fanned his flaming face.

Johnny Bull, strong and sound as he was, had bellows to mend with a vengeance.

"It's rotten foul play!" said Tom Brown. "That round lasted over four minutes. They'll call time sharp enough if Ponsonby gets pressed!"

"Never mind," muttered Johnny Bull thickly. "I'm going to lick him."

"You won't lick him if you're not more careful," said Harry Wharton bluntly. "What do you mean by going at him like a bull at a gate? He isn't a soft funk like Vavasour. He'll beat you to the wide if you don't take care."

"I'll take care next time," said Bull. He knew that what Wharton said was true. He had given away the first round, and it had nearly cost him a defeat.

"Time!"

Johnny Bull stepped up a little heavily. He had not quite recovered yet, but he was by no means groggy. Ponsonby was smiling more serenely than ever. He was making a great show before his comrades, and beating the Greyfriars champion, and he was greatly elated. But during that round his elation was considerably diminished.

Johnny Bull had lost his temper at first, but he was no fool. In the second round he was very cautious, and he did not allow Ponsonby to come near him. Instead of pursuing his elusive enemy round the ring, he stood his ground and let Ponsonby attack. The round was all sparring, without any harm done, till close on the finish, when Ponsonby rushed in to close. A jolting blow on the point of the jaw flung him back, and he staggered, with his hands wildly in the air. Johnny Bull sprang forward, his right drawn back for a finishing drive, when Gadsby shouted:

"Time!"

Johnny Bull dropped his hand and stepped back at once. There was a growl from the Greyfriars fellows. Several of them were looking at their watches. It wanted half a minute to time.

"The cads!" said Mark Linley hotly. "Johnny would have finished him that time."

"Never mind," said Johnny grimly. "It will end the same. I know I can lick him."

Indeed, during that round Johnny Bull seemed to have quite recovered from the handling he had received in the first round. He was fully himself again, and Ponsonby was looking a little wry. That jolt on the chin had made every tooth in his head ache, and shaken him up very considerably.

"I say, you chaps!" said Snoop uneasily. "Do you see what a blessed crowd is getting round us? There must be fifty fellows here!"

"Let 'em all come!" said Bob Cherry carelessly.

"They've closed the door," said Snoop.

"What does it matter?"

"I believe I saw one of them turn the key."

"Oh, rats!"

"Well, I don't like it," said Snoop. "It's no joke to be locked in here with those rotters—two or three to one against us if there's a scrap."

"You can clear off if you're funky!" growled Johnny Bull.

But that did not suit Snoop at all. He did not care to venture away from the main body while in the enemy's country. Sidney James Snoop was, however, in a state of funk. His eyes were very sharp, and he could see by the looks and whispers of the Highcliff crowd that they meant mischief. If Ponsonby was beaten in that fight, there was going to be trouble, and the odds on the Highcliff side were overwhelming. The other fellows were not thinking about it, but Snoop was not thinking of anything else. He would have given a great deal to be safe back at Greyfriars.

"Time!"

The third round began. Ponsonby was getting a little nervous and uneasy now, but he came up to the scratch readily enough. Johnny Bull fairly settled down to work in that round. Ponsonby did not seem to have a chance. Johnny Bull drove him round the ring under a shower of blows; and had not Gadsby called "Time!" a full minute early, the Highcliff champion would have been hopelessly knocked out.

"Rounds long or short to suit all tastes!" growled Bob Cherry. "Is this what you chaps call fair play?"

"Go and eat coke!" retorted Gadsby. "I'm keeping time!"

"Well, it won't make any difference, that's one comfort."

"He won't last through another round," said Johnny Bull, with grim confidence.

"I say," murmured Sidney James Snoop. "Those fellows—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Bolsover major.

"Yes, but—"

"Ring off, you booby!"

"Time!"

It was quite a long rest—three minutes, at least. Ponsonby needed it. But Gadsby had to call time at last, and the opponents faced one another once more. Ponsonby was looking very groggy; and his late cigarette was telling upon him now that he wanted all his wind. His breath was coming in short gasps.

Johnny Bull had it all his own way in the fourth round. Ponsonby was knocked right and left; and a sudden, terrific upper-cut, that caught him on the jaw, sent him with a crash to the floor. He lay there, gasping feebly.

"Count! Count!" yelled the Greyfriars fellows.

Ponsonby showed no sign of rising. Gadsby began to count, reluctantly, and he counted very slowly indeed.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—ahem—time!"

ANSWERS

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Every Saturday, 2



Mr. Mobbs looked dizzily along the road—the light of the cart was just disappearing in the distance. He put his hand to his head—his fingers came away wet! He realised what had happened—there had been a stone in the snowball that struck him down! (See Chapter 9.)

"'Tain't time yet!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Time!" repeated Gadsby obstinately.

"Now a ten-minute rest, I suppose?" said Frank Nugent sarcastically.

And the Greyfriars fellows laughed.

Vavasour picked Ponsonby up, and helped him out of the ring. In spite of the gloves, the hard hitting had done considerable damage. One of Ponsonby's eyes was darkening, his nose looked a little sideways, and his cheek was puffed. He was gasping painfully for breath as he sat on Vavasour's knee.

"Feel very bad, old chap?" whispered Vavasour.

"Yes. I—I can't go on!" groaned Ponsonby.

"Not another round?"

"Grooh! No!"

Gadsby cast an anxious look towards the Highcliffe champion. He wanted to give him every chance. The minute rest had already lasted three minutes.

"Time!" said Gadsby at last, reluctantly.

Ponsonby did not move.

"Time!"

"Keep it up," said Bob Cherry, with a sniff. "Go on saying it for half an hour or so, and perhaps your man will walk up presently."

Gadsby put his watch back into his pocket. Ponsonby's

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bruised face was black with rage. He whispered to Vavasour, and Vavasour nodded. The whisper ran through the crowd of Highcliffe fellows, and there was a general movement towards the Greyfriars party. Harry Wharton understood, and his voice rang out sharply:

"Back up, Greyfriars!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Fight Against Odds!

JOHNNY BULL threw off the gloves, and donned his jacket. He was far from done yet—and he was quite prepared to take his share in the trouble that was evidently coming. The big door had been closed, and the key turned in the lock; and a crowd of Highcliffe juniors had gathered between the Greyfriars party and the door. Harry Wharton & Co. had no chance of getting out of the gym, without fighting their way out, and the odds against them were tremendous. But they had expected something of the sort when they came over to Highcliffe, and they were not scared.

They drew close together, shoulder to shoulder, facing the enemy.

"Well, it's over now," Harry Wharton said calmly. "Our man has licked your man. Now we're ready to go quietly."

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Ponsonby burst into a bitter laugh.

"You may be ready, but you're not going quite so easily as all that," he said. "You shoved yourselves in here, and you're going to be jolly well ragged before you get out. You're going to be frog-marched round the gym, and rolled in the snow, and kicked out, every man jack of you!"

"Yes, rather!" said Gadsby emphatically. "And if you give us any trouble, we'll pitch you into the ditch to finish up with!"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

Wharton set his teeth.

"Well, come on," he said. "You won't find it very easy. Is that what you call fair play?"

"Enough said!" exclaimed Gadsby. "Collar the cads, you fellows!"

"Rush them!" exclaimed Ponsonby.

"Hurrah! Sock it to them!"

And there was a rush on all sides.

"Stick together, and hit out!" sang out Harry Wharton.

"Make for the door!"

"The stickfulness is terrific!"

"Back up, Greyfriars!"

And the Greyfriars party met the rush with a firm front. There was a terrific melee for a few minutes, and the gym was filled with shouts and yells and gasps and the trampling of feet.

The odds were on the Highcliffe side; but the Greyfriars fellows were made of sterner stuff. Every fellow in the party was keen for a scrap, with the single exception of Snoop. Snoop made a wild break for the door, and was collared by the Highcliffians, and rolled over, and bumped without mercy. The rest of the Removites kept together, and fought their way to the door, knocking the Highcliffians right and left. After a few minutes of it, the enemy fell back, and the Removites were at the door, still all together, and so far victorious.

"Rescue!" Snoop was yelling, from amid a bunch of Highcliffe fellows. "Ow! Help! Rescue!"

"We can't leave him," said Harry Wharton. "Follow me!"

"Back up, Remove!"

The Removites made a rush to the rescue. The Highcliffians were driven back, and Snoop was dragged out of their hands, and Harry Wharton & Co. reached the door again. Bob Cherry unlocked it, and they went streaming out into the quadrangle.

After them the crowd of Highcliffians poured, shouting and yelling. Snowballs began to fly through the air.

"Two can play at that game!" Bob Cherry remarked.

"Go it!"

"Give 'em socks!"

Whiz! Whiz! Whiz! Smash! Smash!

It was a snow-fight on a large scale. The Greyfriars party moved towards the gates, keeping up a fusillade as they went, with snowballs smashing on them on all sides.

There was a sudden yell from Snoop, and he fell, with a streak of red running down his forehead. The juniors halted.

"Get up, you funk!" roared Bolsover major.

"Ow! I'm hit—it was a stone!" howled Snoop.

Wharton's brow grew as black as thunder.

"They're putting stones in the snowballs!" he exclaimed.

"The awful cads!"

"Oh, go for 'em!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Hammer the rotters!"

A little man in cap and gown came out of the distant schoolhouse, and ran towards the scene of the conflict. It was Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe.

He was waving his hands wildly in the air and shouting:

"Stop, stop! Stop this at once! You young ruffians, what are you doing here? Stop this scene at once, I tell you!"

Mr. Mobbs rushed into the midst of the combatants.

It was a somewhat reckless thing to do, for the air was thick with snowballs, whizzing to and fro, and Mr. Mobbs ran right into the line of fire.

Snowballs smashed on him on all sides—on his chest, and his back, and his cheeks, and his ears, and his neck, and his nose. His cap was knocked off, and he went staggering blindly under the shower of missiles, and fell into the snow. There was a roar of laughter.

Mr. Mobbs sat up dazedly.

"You young rascals—ruffians—hooligans! How dare you come here! I will telephone for the police! I will complain to your headmaster! I will—Grooogh!"

A snowball caught Mr. Mobbs in the mouth, and cut short his flow of eloquence.

He staggered up, sputtering and gasping, and made a rush at the Greyfriars juniors. Sidney James Snoop was unfortunately in his way, and Mr. Mobbs grasped Snoop, and began

to box his ears furiously. Snoop roared and struggled and yelled for rescue.

"We're not going to stand that," said Johnny Bull. "Hands off, you silly ass, or you'll get hurt."

But Mr. Mobbs, having found a victim, boxed away at his ears with terrific energy. The unhappy Snoop shrieked for help.

Johnny Bull rushed up, and gave Mr. Mobbs a shove that sent him flying. The Highcliffe master collapsed into the snow, and lay there gasping. The Highcliffians were closing round again now, and the Removites fought their way to the gates. The disturbance in the quadrangle had attracted attention from all sides now. Two or three masters had come out into the quadrangle, and Dr. Voysey himself could be seen blinking through his glasses at his study window.

The Greyfriars party reached the gates at last, and went pouring through into the road. There they formed up, in the snow, with snowballs ready for the Highcliffians if they pursued.

But Ponsonby & Co. did not pursue. They had had enough of the tussle.

They crowded in the gateway, yelling threats and opprobrious epithets at the Removites, but they did not venture outside.

"Are you coming out?" roared Bob Cherry. "We're waiting for you."

But the Highcliffians did not accept the invitation.

"Let's get off," said Harry Wharton. "After all, we've licked them. But my hat, what a row there will be over this."

Snoop groaned.

"I've got a beastly cut on my forehead!" he snapped. "And that beast, Mobbs, has made my head ache. Look here, if they put stones in the snowballs, we can do the same. Let's give them—"

"Shut up!" said Harry Wharton, in disgust. "They can do as they like, but we're not going to do a beastly cowardly thing like that. Come on!"

"But I think—"

"Rats! Come on!"

And the Greyfriars party, considerably breathless and dishevelled by the battle, marched home, elated by their defeat of the Highcliffians, but with a very lively anticipation of the trouble that was sure to follow.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Facing the Music

VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, was standing in the doorway of the School House, when Harry Wharton & Co. came back. The Bounder, who was on friendly terms with the Highcliffe fellows, had not joined in the expedition.

He grinned as he looked at the returning warriors. Most of them showed very plain signs of the stress they had been through.

"Had a good time?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Ripping!" said Bob Cherry. "We've licked your Highcliffe pals to the wide. Go and eat coke!"

"What's the matter with your nut, Snoopey?"

"One of the cads had a stone in a snowball," said Snoop.

"Well, I've known you to do a thing like that yourself," said the Bounder calmly. "Don't you remember, last term?"

"Oh, rats!" said Snoop, and he went into the house.

"Snoop's had the worst of it!" grinned Nugent. "He really wasn't anxious to be in the giddy forefront of the battle—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he got there, all the same. Mobbs collared him, and gave him a fearful thrashing. And he's got that chip on his cocoanut. Mobbs was quite warlike, and I think he'd have really hurt Snoop if Johnny hadn't bumped him over."

"Bumped Mobbs over?" said Vernon-Smith, with a whistle. "My hat! There will be a row if you've been bumping masters over."

"He wouldn't let Snoop alone," growled Johnny Bull. "He shouldn't have shoved himself into the scrap if he didn't want to get hurt."

"Oh, I don't blame you, but he will come and see the Head about it."

"Let him come."

"It will mean lickings all round," said the Bounder, with a shake of the head.

"Well, you're safe enough, as you took jolly good care to keep out of the trouble," said Johnny Bull, sarcastically, and he strode on.

Vernon-Smith reddened.

"I thought I'd better keep out of it, you chaps, as I'm on friendly terms with Ponsonby," he said awkwardly.

"That's all right," said Harry Wharton. "You weren't needed."

"The rightfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy; but your palfulness with the cads does not do you credit," remarked Hurree Singh.

Harry Wharton & Co. went up to No. 1 Study to tea. They were hungry after their expedition in the snow, and the prospect of trouble to come did not impair their healthy appetites. The Famous Five sat down to a big tea, as the dusk gathered over the old Close of Greyfriars.

It was very cosy in No. 1 Study, with a bright fire sparkling in the grate, and the table gleaming with crockery and good things. The chums of the Remove attacked their tea with keen appetites. But every now and then they paused in their talk to listen. They were pretty sure that a visit from Highcliffe would not be long delayed. Mr. Mobbs's dignity must have been sorely hurt; and it was quite possible that Dr. Voysey himself might come over about what had happened.

The study door opened just as they finished tea, and Billy Bunter blinked in through his spectacles. There was a grin on his fat face.

"I say, you fellows——"

"You're too late!" growled Bob Cherry. "Tea's over." Bunter sniffed.

"I haven't come to tea. I've had a jolly good tea in my own study. Peter Todd's in funds. Blow your old tea! What have you had—half a sardine oach, I suppose. I've come to tell you that Mobby has just come in."

"You've seen him?"

"Yes, rather; and he looked in an awful wax!" grinned Bunter. "He's waiting in the hall downstairs now, and Trotter's gone in to tell the Head."

The Famous Five exchanged glances.

"Well, we knew it was coming!" said Harry Wharton, after a pause. "We've had our fun, and now we've got to pay the piper."

"The payfulness will be terrific."

"Well, we can stand it," said Bob Cherry. "If the Highcliffe rotters had any sense of decency they'd keep their mouths shut about it. They could easily have passed it off as a snow fight, just for fun. If they'd come here and tackled us, we shouldn't have dragged Quelch into it."

"Rotten sneaks!" said Nugent.

"Let's go down," said Harry.

"I say, you fellows, you'll get an awful licking, you know," chuckled Bunter. "I'm awfully sorry for you, of course. He, he, he!"

"You'll be sorry for yourself soon, if you don't stop your he-he-heing," said Bob Cherry, exasperated.

"He, he, he!"

Bob made a stride towards the Owl of the Remove, and Bunter promptly vanished. His he-he-he could be heard down the passage as he fled.

The Famous Five descended the stairs. In the hall below Mr. Mobbs was waiting. He had not yet been shown in to the Head. Dr. Locke happened to be busy just then. Trotter, the page, had come back, and he was asking Mr. Mobbs if he would wait a few minutes. The Highcliffe master snappishly assented.

Mr. Mobbs was evidently in a very bad temper. His pale, thin face looked as spiteful as a cat's, as Johnny Bull remarked. As the chums of the Remove came down, Mr. Mobbs's little greenish eyes turned upon them, and glittered.

"Ah, you were among that band of ruffians!" he exclaimed.

"How do you do, Mr. Mobbs?" asked Frank Nugent politely. "I hope you've enjoyed your little walk over?"

Mr. Mobbs frowned majestically.

"Don't be impertinent, boy!"

"Begad!" remarked Lord Mauleverer, the Dandy of the Remove. "Have you come over to inquire how we are, Pobbis, my dear fellow? Awfully kind of you!"

"How dare you call me Pobbis? My name is Mobbs, as you very well know."

"Sorry! I never remember names," said Lord Mauleverer calmly. "How do you do, Jobbs?"

"I have come to make a complaint to your headmaster of your ruffianly conduct," said Mr. Mobbs, controlling his temper with difficulty.

"Too bad of you, Cobba."

"Did we hurt any of the little darlings?" snorted Johnny Bull.

Mr. Mobbs fixed his eyes upon him.

"Ah, you are the hooligan who pushed me over!" he exclaimed.

"I pushed you over," said Johnny Bull. "But I'm not a hooligan, and if you call me names I'll push you over again, and jolly quick."

"Shut up, Johnny!" murmured Wharton.

"Well, the little beast isn't going to call me a hooligan."

Mr. Mobbs made a stride towards Johnny Bull. The latter faced him coolly, clenching his hands. Harry Wharton and

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Bob Cherry grasped their irascible chum, and dragged him away by main force.

"You silly ass, we don't want matters to be made worse," said Harry, when Johnny Bull was removed to a safe distance. "It's bad enough already."

"The little beast isn't going to cheek me."

"Yaas. Shobbs is a cheeky little beast, begad!" Lord Mauleverer remarked. "Blessed if I know how the Highcliffe fellows can stand such a little beast as Dobbs."

Trotter came back, and requested Mr. Mobbs to follow him. With a spiteful look at the Removites, Mr. Mobbs followed Trotter down the passage, and disappeared into the Head's study. A time of suspense followed for the Removites. They knew that the Highcliffe master was pitching his tale of woe to Dr. Locke, and making it as black as he could. Any minute now they might be sent for, and they were feeling exceedingly uncomfortable.

"You kids have got yourselves into a ripping row, I must say," said Coker of the Fifth, with a severe glance at the Removites. "I shouldn't wonder if it's a flogging. I must say you've asked for it."

"Go and cat coke!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Yes, run away, Coker; don't bother now," urged Harry Wharton.

Coker frowned. He did not like to be told to run away and not bother, by a mere fag in the Lower Fourth. He was about to take vengeance into his own hands, when Trotter came along the passage, looking very serious.

"Master Wharton——"

"Adsum!" said Wharton grimly.

"You're wanted in the Head's study, sir," said Trotter. "You and all the young gentlemen that was over at Highcliffe this afternoon."

"The whole giddy family?" said Bob Cherry.

"Everyone that was at Highcliffe, the Head said, sir," replied Trotter. "Which 'e's lookin' hawfully solemn, sir."

"Now for it!" groaned Nugent.

"Call the fellows up," said Harry. "We've all got to go, and the more the merrier. The Head can't very well flog twenty chaps at once, anyway."

"Well, that's one comfort."

The raiders were soon gathered together. They had all been expecting the summons. There was only one who showed unwillingness to go, and that, of course, was Snoop.

"I think I ought to be left out of this," Snoop exclaimed. "I didn't want to go over to Highcliffe—you all know that. Bolsover dragged me into it!"

"And now I'll drag you into the Head's study, if you don't come!" growled Bolsover major.

"Well, I consider——"

"You can stay out if you like, of course," said Harry Wharton quietly. "But the Head will ask if we're all there, and you'll be sent for."

"I think I've jolly well had enough, without going through it with the Head," said Snoop savagely. "That beast Mobbs pitched into me himself. I wish I could get a chance of giving him one!"

"Oh, come on!"

"Well, I'm not coming!"

Bolsover made a threatening movement.

"Let him alone," said Wharton. "The Head will send for him, anyway!"

And the culprits marched to the Head's study in a body. Wharton knocked at the door.

"Come in!"

The Head's voice was very sharp and stern.

Harry Wharton opened the door, and the juniors filed in. Dr. Locke was seated at his desk, his brows contracted, and his face very severe. Mr. Mobbs was standing. Dr. Locke ran his eye over the juniors as they stood before him in a body.

"Are all the boys who went over to Highcliffe this afternoon here?" he asked sharply.

"There was another one," said Mr. Mobbs, who had very keen eyes. "I remember one other very distinctly—I came into personal contact with him——"

"There was another, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Call him in at once!"

Wharton went to the door, and looked into the passage.

"Snoop, you're wanted!"

And Sidney James Snoop came reluctantly into the study, and took his place among the other fellows.

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THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Taking the Gruel!

DR. LOCKE fixed his eyes sternly upon the crowd of juniors.

They stood before him, silent and sheepish, looking and feeling extremely uncomfortable.

Mr. Mobbs looked like the incarnation of spiteful triumph.

The Head of Greyfriars was offended and worried by the complaint about his boys, and he was quite certain to punish their offence with a heavy hand. And that was what Mr. Mobbs wanted. There was nothing of the sportsman about Algernon Mobbs, M.A.

"I heard from Mr. Mopps—" began the Head, in a deep voice.

"Mr. Mobbs, if you please," broke in the Highcliffe Form-master, acidly.

"I really beg your pardon," said the Head courteously. "I have heard from Mr. Mobbs, my boys, that you have paid a wholly unauthorised and riotous visit to his school. Kindly tell me exactly what has happened, Wharton."

"Your pardon, sir," came Mr. Mobbs's acid voice again. "I have already told you, at some length, what has happened."

"Quite so, Mr. Mopps—Mobbs—at some length, as you say," said the Head urbanely. "And now I wish to hear the other side stated. Kindly proceed, Wharton!"

Wharton coughed. It was clear that the Head did not like Mr. Mobbs, and that he was only as polite to him as courtesy compelled him to be. But that was not likely to help the culprits very much. The Head, indeed, was more than ever likely to be severe, because complaint came from a man whom he despised. He did not like a person like Mr. Mobbs to be able to criticise Greyfriars and make complaints as to the conduct of its pupils.

"Well, sir, we went over to Highcliffe," said Wharton awkwardly.

"To quarrel with the boys there?"

"No, no, sir! Only for a-a-a scrap——"

"A what?"

"Just for a scrap between Johnny Bull and Ponsonby, with the gloves on, sir," said Harry, with more confidence. "Ponsonby as good as accused Bull of being a funk, and, of course, there was no answer to that but one."

"A ruffianly outbreak——" began Mr. Mobbs.

The Head made a gesture.

"Pray allow Wharton to proceed, Mr. Mobbs. And what happened, Wharton?"

"Johnny had it out with Ponsonby in the gym, sir, and then the rotters——"

"The what?"

"The Highcliffe fellows, sir, all set on us together, and we had to fight our way out!" said Harry Wharton.

"Did you anticipate a disturbance when you went over?"

"Ahem!"

"Kindly answer that question, Wharton!"

"Well, sir, we knew the rotters—I mean the Highcliffe fellows, might cut up rusty," Wharton admitted. "But we were willing to keep the peace. We only wanted to make Ponsonby answer for what he had said about Bull, sir."

"And if they had not attacked you——"

"Then there wouldn't have been a row, sir!"

The Head pursed his lips. Mr. Mobbs broke out angrily: "That statement is quite incorrect. These wretched boys came over bent upon a disturbance. They forced their way into the school, treating the porter with violence at the gate——"

"What did you do with the porter, Wharton?"

"Ahem! He got in the way, sir—ahem——"

"Well?"

"And—and we gave him a sort of a shove, sir——"

"Kind of gentle push, sir," ventured Bob Cherry.

"And he fell over, sir," added Nugent innocently.

"Then they burst into Ponsonby's study!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs, "and forced that highly-born and delicate lad to enter into a brutal fistical encounter with a rough brute——"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Johnny Bull.

"Bull!" rapped out the Head.

"Yes, sir."

"You must not use such expressions to Mr. Mobbs."

"Well, sir, he shouldn't call me a rough brute, should he?"

"Indeed, Mr. Mobbs, it would be wiser to moderate your expressions. This is a matter that cannot be settled by abusive epithets," said Dr. Locke.

"I repeat my expression," said Mr. Mobbs spitefully. "Ponsonby is a delicate lad. He has been dreadfully disgraced by that boy."

"I fancy he's got one black eye, at any rate," said Johnny

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Bull, with satisfaction. "He won't call me a funk again in a hurry."

"It appears, Mr. Mobbs, that a boy of your school gave the first offence."

"Not in the least, Dr. Locke. Master Ponsonby denies having done anything of the kind."

"He would!" said Nugent.

"Silence!" said the Head.

"Why, we got a picture postcard from the cads, sir, a picture of Johnny Bull running away from them!" exclaimed Wharton indignantly.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Mobbs.

"Have you that postcard now, Wharton?"

"No, sir; I took it with me to Highcliffe, and it was dropped in the row!"

Mr. Mobbs smiled. He knew that, because he had picked it up in the gym.

"The attack," said Mr. Mobbs, "was utterly unprovoked. Are we, sir, to be subject to lawless raids from the boys of this school? Master Ponsonby and his friends—his aristocratic friends belonging to some of the best families in the kingdom—were studying in their room, when these young hooligans——"

"No names, please, Mr. Mobbs!"

"Master Vavasour, sir, a lad of extremely high connections, was struck upon the nose by a boy I see here—a boy, from what I have heard, who is nothing more or less than a factory hand," said Mr. Mobbs, his thin lip curling with contempt as his greenish eye sought out Mark Linley.

The Lancashire lad flushed, but he did not speak. The contempt of a little rascal like Mr. Mobbs was not likely to hurt him.

"And a good dab on the nose it was, too!" said Johnny Bull. "Master Vavasour didn't want a second one!"

"Silence, Bull!"

"Yes, sir."

"Unless," said Mr. Mobbs, with acidulated emphasis—"unless a condign punishment is administered to these boys, and Dr. Voysey is assured that no such an occurrence can recur, Dr. Voysey will have no alternative but to appeal for police protection against such organised outbreaks of hooliganism in the future."

"We need not go into that, Mr. Mobbs," said the Head. "If the boys have done wrong, they will be punished. My boys, I have no doubt that you received provocation. That, however, is no excuse for what you have done. You have deliberately broken the peace by going over to Highcliffe. I had already made it quite clear that I forbade these constant disturbances between the two schools. Whatever provocation you received, and in whatever manner the Highcliffe boys acted while you were there, the fact remains that you went to Highcliffe, and so all the trouble came about. For that, I have no alternative but to punish you severely."

Mr. Mobbs rubbed his skinny hands. He was satisfied now.

"That is all that I require," he said.

Dr. Locke did not appear to hear him.

"I shall, therefore, cane severely every boy who took part in this expedition to Highcliffe," he said. "Are all here, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. You will advance in turn, and I shall cane you. Mr. Mobbs, your business here is now concluded, and I wish you a good-evening!"

Mr. Mobbs did not stir.

"It would be more satisfactory to Dr. Voysey, sir, if I should witness the punishment of the delinquents," he said.

A faint flush came into the doctor's face. But he would not allow so insignificant a person as Mr. Mobbs to draw him into an angry reply.

"As you wish, sir," he said stiffly.

Mr. Mobbs prepared to look on at the scene, with evident enjoyment. Dr. Locke rose from his seat, and took up a cane.

"You first, Wharton!" he said.

"Yes, sir."

Harry Wharton advanced quietly, and held out his hand. The cane came down with a loud swish. The doctor was evidently in earnest, and the punishment was probably all the more severe because he was annoyed at having to inflict it in the presence of Mr. Mobbs.

Thrice again the cane came down, hard; and then the Head signed to Wharton to retire. The captain of the Remove passed from the study, his hands clenched, and his face a little pale. One after another the Removites stood up to their punishment, and the doctor's arm did not flag. Indeed, he seemed quite tireless as he worked through the batch of culprits, and the last swish was as heavy as the first.

Most of the juniors took their punishment in grim silence,



A whisper ran through the crowd of Highcliffe fellows, and there was a general movement towards the Greyfriars party. Harry Wharton understood, and his voice rang out sharply: "Back up, Greyfriars!" (See Chapter 4.)

but Fisher T. Fish uttered wild howls, and Sidney James Snoop yelled and doubled up. Snoop was the last, and then the study was empty, save for the Head and Mr. Mobbs.

"I wish you a good-afternoon, Mr. Mobbs," said the Head icily.

Mr. Mobbs took his hat.

"Thank you, sir! I trust that that lesson will not be lost upon those extremely ruffianly young rascals!"

"I do not desire to hear your opinion of my boys!" said the Head of Greyfriars.

And he turned his back upon the Highcliffe master.

Mr. Mobbs grinned spitefully, and walked out of the study. He seemed quite elated as he came down the passage, as if the scene he had just witnessed had had an inspiring effect upon him. Perhaps it had! In the hall, there were groups of juniors squeezing their hands, grunting, and looking extremely lugubrious. Mr. Mobbs smiled at the sight. The Removites gave him grim looks.

"Ah," said Mr. Mobbs, "perhaps you will reflect before you are guilty of another ruffianly outbreak—what? If I were your headmaster, I should have flogged you! Young rascals!"

And he passed out into the Close, leaving the Removites simply writhing with rage.

Johnny Bull gritted his teeth.

"I'll give the cheeky little rotter one snowball——" he muttered.

Wharton caught his arm.

"Don't be an ass! He'll only go back to the Head about

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it, and then there'll be more trouble! We've had enough for one afternoon."

"The enoughfulness is terrific!"

Johnny Bull grunted, and desisted. Mr. Mobbs, turning up the collar of his coat, walked away across the Close, and disappeared into the winter dusk.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Smith's Treat!

THE punished juniors dispersed, most of them looking very black.

It was not only the punishment they minded, though that had been severe enough. But they had not really been so much to blame as Ponsonby & Co. And Ponsonby & Co. had escaped scot-free. And Mr. Mobbs's parting taunt irritated them very much. The mean triumph of the Highcliffe master was very galling. There was not a fellow there who did not long to give Mr. Mobbs something to remember his visit by—something, of course, of a personal and painful nature.

Sidney James Snoop was the most bitter of all. He had, indeed, suffered the most. His head was still aching from the boxing of the ears that Mr. Mobbs bestowed upon him at Highcliffe. And Snoop was not of a forgiving nature. He wanted vengeance, and he wanted it badly, and he was thinking of that as the slight form of the Highcliffe master disappeared into the shadows of the Close. Vernon-Smith tapped him on the shoulder, and Snoop turned with a start.

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"Come into the tuckshop, Snoopey," said the Bounder, with unusual cordiality.

Snoop shook his head.

"I don't feel up to it, thanks!"

"No good grousing over it!" the Bounder remarked comfortingly. "It'll pass off, you know."

"I wouldn't mind if I could only give that beast one!" muttered Snoop. "I say, Smithy—"

He paused, and hesitated.

"Well?" said Smithy.

"The rotter's walking back to Highcliffe," Snoop went on, in a low tone, "and it's jolly dark in the lane. It's a long way, and he's a slow walker."

The Bounder stared at him.

"What are you driving at?" he demanded.

"A chap could easily get ahead of him, taking the short cut through the wood," muttered Snoop, "and—and lay for him, and—and give him something for bothering us like this."

"Thanks!" said the Bounder promptly. "None for me! Mobby would come back here, making no end of a fuss."

"He wouldn't see—he wouldn't know—"

"He would jolly well guess," said Vernon-Smith.

"But—if you did it, you couldn't be bowled out—"

The Bounder laughed.

"Not taking any, thanks!" he replied. "It's no business of mine. And I'd recommend you not to do anything of the kind, either. Mobbs is a spiteful little beast, and there would be no end of trouble."

"He couldn't prove anything, if he didn't see me," said Snoop defiantly.

"Gosling would see you go out."

"Not if I legged it over the wall."

"Better let it drop," said the Bounder, with a shake of the head. "You're excited now, Snoopey; you'd be sorry afterwards."

"Oh, of course, I'm not going after him!" said Snoop carelessly. "I was thinking that you might, that's all!"

"No fear!"

The Bounder walked away, leaving Snoop still staring out into the Close, where the snowflakes were still falling in the thickening darkness. Vernon-Smith went into the common-room. He came out a few minutes later, but Snoop was gone.

The Bounder walked to the door and looked out. There was no sign of Snoop. Vernon-Smith wondered if he had gone out. But he reflected that it was no business of his, and dismissed the matter from his mind.

He went upstairs to the Remove passage, and looked into No. 1 Study. Harry Wharton was there, working at his table, but there was no sign of Frank Nugent, who shared the study with him. The Bounder nodded cordially.

"I say, Wharton, I suppose you haven't got it up against me, about my not coming over to Highcliffe with you?" he said abruptly. "Considering that I know Ponsonby, you know, I didn't feel that I could."

"That's all right," said Harry.

"I felt rather out of it," said the Bounder. "I say, I'm thinking of standing a feed in the Rag to all the giddy heroes who went over—a sort of triumphal celebration, you know. I'm in funds. Will you come?"

Wharton smiled.

"I'll come with pleasure, Smithy."

"Right-ho! In the Rag at seven, then—that'll give you time to get your prep. done. Where's Nugent?"

"I don't know—he hasn't been up here."

"Tell him when you see him, will you? I'll go and speak to the other chaps."

"Right you are."

Vernon-Smith went down the passage to No. 13 Study, which belonged to Bob Cherry, Mark Linley, Hurree Singh, and little Wun Lung, the Chinese. Mark Linley was there, working at his Greek, and little Wun Lung was curled up in the armchair watching him.

"Feed in the Rag at seven," said the Bounder. "All the heroes of Highcliffe invited. Coming, Linley?"

"Pleased," said Mark.

"Where's Cherry and Inky?"

"I don't know. I think Bob's gone out."

"Gone out—in this weather!"

"I saw him go into the Close, anyway. Inky's in the gym, I think."

"I'll look for him."

The Bounder dropped next into No. 14 Study, where he expected to find Johnny Bull. Only Fisher T. Fish was there. The American junior was rubbing his hands lugubriously.

"I guess this giddy expedition was rather a fizzle!" he remarked. "It was all O.K. at Highcliffe, but just now—Ow, ow!"

"Where's Bull?"

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"Gone out!"

"Seem to be a lot of chaps with a fancy for going out in the snow," said Vernon-Smith, puzzled. "Did he go with Bob Cherry?"

"I guess not. I spotted him going out the back way. I called him, but I guess he didn't answer. Up to something, I suppose. Ow! I guess I'd like to scalp that little beast Mobbs! Ow! The Head wouldn't have laid it on so hard if Mobbs hadn't been there! Yow!"

The Bounder repeated his invitation, which Fisher T. Fish "guessed" he would accept, and went down the passage. The door of Bolsover's study was open, and Vernon-Smith looked in. Hazeldene was there, reading before the fire.

"Where's Bolsover?" asked the Bounder. "And Brown?"

"Gone out," said Hazel.

"Gone out—together?"

"Yes."

"Where have they gone?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Hazeldene, and he returned to his book.

Vernon-Smith, with a very thoughtful expression on his face, departed. He looked into the other studies, and he went over to the gym, but he did not find any of the juniors who had gone out. The rest of the raiding-party he found easily enough, and they all cheerfully accepted his generous invitation to a feed. Vernon-Smith went to the school shop to give orders on a lavish scale, and Billy Bunter followed him there.

"I say, Smithy, I'm going to help you," said Bunter. "I understand that you're treating all the chaps who went to Highcliffe. I was one of them, you know."

"Rats!" said the Bounder, without any unnecessary waste of politeness.

"Oh, really, Smithy, I was one of the party, you know, only—only I sprained my ankle, and had to come back!"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"I suppose I'm to come into the Rag?" said Bunter indignantly.

"You'll get booted out if you do," said the Bounder.

And he gave his orders; and carried an enormous basket of good things back to the School House, followed with hungry eyes by Billy Bunter. The raiders gathered in the Rag in good time for the feed, with six exceptions. It was just seven when Sidney James Snoop came in, breathing a little hard. The Bounder looked at him quickly.

"I hear you're standing a feed to us," Snoop remarked.

"That's so," said Vernon-Smith. "Been out?"

"Out! No!"

"I looked for you, and couldn't find you."

"I've been in the library," Snoop explained.

"Did you get your boots muddy in the library?" the Bounder asked caustically.

"I just had a turn in the Close afterwards. I got sleepy over my book," said Snoop in a careless way. "Well, I'm ready for the feed. Where are the other chaps?"

"Gone out, or in the library, perhaps," said the Bounder. "We won't wait for them. Gentlemen, pile in—the feed's ready!"

And the gentlemen piled in with great gusto.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Done in the Dark!

MR. MOBBS turned up his coat-collar as he crossed the Close, and murmured something to himself as he stepped out of the gateway of Greyfriars, and the keen wind caught him, laden with snowflakes. He had been very pleased with the result of his visit to Greyfriars; but he was not pleased with the walk back to Highcliffe, a mile upon a dark and lonely road in the snow and the wind. But there was no help for it, and he tramped away with his collar up round his neck, and his head bent down.

His progress was not rapid. There was thick snow on the road, and the wind was against him. And Mr. Mobbs was not a good walker. He was about half-way to Highcliffe when there was a pattering of feet in the snow behind him. Mr. Mobbs did not stop, but as he tramped on, something hard caught him on the back, and he jumped. It was a very big snowball.

The Highcliffe master regained his balance, and swung round savagely. He guessed at once that one of the punished juniors had followed him from Greyfriars, and was snowballing him in the dark. He caught a dim glimpse of two figures in the deep dusk, showing up on the white snow.

Whiz, whiz, whiz, whiz!

The snowballs came thick and fast. Mr. Mobbs staggered under the shower of them as they broke over him.

"You—you young scoundrels!" he gasped. "I—I know you! You shall be punished for this! Ow, ow, ow!"

He grasped his umbrella fiercely, and charged back at the two dim forms. Had he reached them he would certainly have damaged both them and the umbrella. But they flitted away into the darkness, and more snowballs came whizzing. The missiles smashed all over Mr. Mobbs.

"Oh, you young ruffians! I will return at once and complain to your headmaster—ow—ow—ooch!"

Snow smashing in his mouth stopped Mr. Mobbs's utterance. He gave up the idea of returning to Greyfriars with a fresh complaint. He knew that he would have the company of two determined young rascals with snowballs all the way, for half a mile in the dark. It was not quite good enough. Instead of that, he turned in the direction of Highcliffe, and ran. He ran on for some distance, and then, discovering that he was not pursued, he dropped into a walk, panting breathlessly.

Whiz, whiz, whiz, whiz!

From the dark trees at the side of the road came a sudden whizzing of missiles. Heavy snowballs smashed all over Mr. Mobbs. With a gasping yell, he broke into a run again, and he heard a shout of laughter in the darkness under the trees.

"They shall pay for this! Oh, they shall pay for it!" he panted, as he ran on.

A figure loomed up before him suddenly in the road. Mr. Mobbs had been under the impression that all his enemies were behind him, but he quickly discovered that there was one in front.

He halted, as the dark shadow popped up in his path, but too late! The dim figure ran right into him, and Mr. Mobbs was completely bowled over.

He fell with a thud into the snow.

"Ow! Help!" he gasped.

In an instant the dimly-seen form was upon him. Mr. Mobbs was rolled mercilessly in the snow, snow was jammed down the back of his neck, his hat was tossed over a hedge, and in a couple of minutes the Form-master was gasping helplessly, quite at the mercy of his assailant.

Then the dim figure disappeared into the darkness.

Mr. Mobbs sat up dazedly in the snow.

His hat was gone, his hair was wildly ruffled, there was snow down his neck, snow all over him.

He was in a parlous state.

The Highcliffe master muttered words as he rose to his feet, words which it was fortunate there was no one nigh to hear. They were really not words that a respectable Form-master should have uttered.

Trembling with rage and cold, Mr. Mobbs resumed his way. His assailant had scudded off in the direction of Greyfriars, and Mr. Mobbs had not the slightest doubt that it was one of the Remove fellows who had been caned, whether the same fellow who had attacked him earlier he could not tell.

But Mr. Mobbs's troubles were not yet over.

He turned a corner in the road, and as he did so, a snowball caught him under the chin, and fairly bowled him over.

He went down with a gasp, and he heard a yell of laughter, and a sound of retreating footsteps, soon inaudible in the snow.

Mr. Mobbs jumped up convulsed with rage.

But his assailant was gone, and vengeance had to be postponed. The thought of returning to Greyfriars crossed his mind again, but he dismissed it. He did not want to traverse that dark road again.

He tramped on furiously, hatless, his eyes gleaming greener than ever with rage.

Suddenly a form detached itself from the shadow of a tree by the roadside, and Mr. Mobbs was aware that another enemy was upon him, or the same enemy, he could not tell. The obnoxious junior might easily have cut through the wood and got ahead of him on the road.

Mr. Mobbs started back and flourished his umbrella.

"Stand back, you young ruffian!"

Smash, smash, smash!

Snowball after snowball crashed and smashed in Mr. Mobbs's furious face. He made a wild rush at the assailant, and brought down the umbrella.

The dark figure dodged away, and the umbrella smashed on the ground. There was a mocking laugh in the darkness.

Whiz, whiz, whiz!

Again Mr. Mobbs took wildly to his heels.

Snowballs whizzed after him as he ran, peppering him over the shoulders and the back of his uncovered head.

But he got out of range at last, and dropped into a walk, panting. He had bellows to mend with a vengeance now; he was not used to sprinting.

The Highcliffe master began to regret his officious visit to Greyfriars. He had seen the Removes severely punished, but he was having a taste of punishment himself now that was far from agreeable.

Whether he had had one, or two, or half a dozen assailants, he was too confused to know. But he would gladly have seen all Greyfriars soundly flogged at that moment, from the Head

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of the Sixth to the smallest and inkiest babe in the First Form.

He tramped panting through the snow.

He was getting near to Highcliffe now, and he hoped that he had finished running the gauntlet. On his left, as he tramped on, was the stile that gave admittance to the foot-path in the wood, a short cut from Greyfriars. Mr. Mobbs glanced rather apprehensively at the dark opening in the trees. Any number of Greyfriars fellows could have got ahead of him there by taking the short cut, if they had liked.

And Mr. Mobbs's fears were not without foundation.

As he passed the dark opening in the wood he caught sight of something dark and moving on the white snow.

With a gasp he broke into a rapid run to escape the danger.

Whiz!

The snowball came out of the darkness with deadly aim, and it struck Mr. Mobbs fairly on the side of the head.

He fell in the snow like a log.

There were no further missiles; his assailant had vanished. Mr. Mobbs lay in the snow for several minutes without moving. He was stunned. He had fallen by the side of the road, in the snow-covered grass, and the fresh flakes were settling thickly over him.

There was a sound of wheels in the road, and a carter's voice urging on a horse. A cart passed the still form, and disappeared in the direction of Greyfriars. Mr. Mobbs did not see or hear it. But as it disappeared down the snowy high road, he sat up dazedly.

He looked dizzily along the road. The lights of the cart were just disappearing in the distance. All round him was silent and still. He put his hand up to his head. His fingers came away wet. And it was not snow that wetted them. He knew that there was a cut there!

He realised what had happened. There had been a stone in the snowball that had struck him down!

Mr. Mobbs staggered up and groaned. He set off at a shambling run for Highcliffe, and he gasped with relief when the lights over the school gates came into sight.

He rang furiously at the bell. The school porter opened the gates, and stared in alarm and amazement at the wild, hatless figure of the Form-master. Mr. Mobbs reeled in.

"Send—send for a doctor!" he gasped.

Then he reeled forward into the arms of the astonished porter.

He had fainted.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Mum's the Word!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Wherefore this thusness?"

Bob Cherry looked in at the doorway of the Rag.

The celebration was going strong. Vernon-Smith waved his hand to the new arrival.

"Come in!" he called out. "Where on earth have you been?"

"Out!" said Bob.

He came in willingly enough. A walk in the snow had given him a good appetite. The crowd of chairs round the long table in the Rag were pretty well filled, but Harry Wharton made room for Bob on a form beside him.

"Seen Nugent?" he asked, as Bob sat down.

Bob shook his head.

"No; isn't he here?"

"He's out, I think." Wharton looked curiously at Bob.

"What have you been up to?"

"Least said, soonest mended," said Bob diplomatically.

"A still tongue shows a wise head." Speech is silver, and silence is golden."

"Been learning proverbs?" asked Mark Linley, laughing.

"No; I've been—ahem!—least said soonest mended."

Pass the cake. I'm hungry."

"Hallo! Here's Nugent!" said Bulstrode.

Frank Nugent came in. He was looking a little breathless, and he made no explanation as he sat down among the other fellows.

It was ten minutes later that Bolsover major and Tom Brown looked into the Rag.

The Bounder waved his hand in welcome.

"You're late!" he called out.

"Didn't know there was anything on," said Tom Brown.

"I looked for you. Where had you scooted off to?"

"Oh, I went for a walk with Bolsover!" said the New Zealand junior, laughing.

"I went for a walk with Brown," said Bolsover major.

And they explained no further.

"Seen anything of Johnny Bull and Inky?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes; I saw them going to their studies."

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"Then they've come in?" said the Bounder.

"Come in!" said Bolsover. "Have they been out?"

"I think so; I couldn't find them."

"Well, they're in now."

"I'll go and give them the tip," said Harry Wharton. "Pity for them to miss the feed. And such a ripping feed, too."

Wharton hurried out of the Rag. The peculiar absence of his chums made him feel a little uneasy. What had they all been out for—and so secretly? He could not help remembering that Mr. Mobbs had been walking home along a dark road, and that the juniors were very much incensed against him. But for the fact that the Bounder was standing a feed to the heroes of the Highcliffe expedition, their absence might have passed unremarked. But the attention of a crowd of fellows was drawn to it. And their unwillingness to explain where they had been showed that there was something "up."

Wharton looked first into Inky's study. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was there, drying his boots before the fire. He looked round with his usual amiable grin as the captain of the Remove looked in.

"Hallo! You're here, then?" said Harry.

"The herefulness is terrific, my worthy chum!"

"You've been out?"

"The outfulness was——"

"Yes—terrific; I know. But what have you been doing?"

The Nabob of Bhanipur closed one eye.

"The golden silence shows the wise head, and with the silver speech the still tongue is soonest mended," as your English proverb says," he replied.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I don't think the proverb puts it quite like that, Inky, but I understand what you mean. You've been playing the giddy goat."

"The weather is very cold," murmured the nabob.

"Did you see anything of Mobby?"

"It is a very dark evening."

"Look here, Inky——"

"It is possible, my esteemed chum, that there may be inquisitiveness about what has happenfully come to pass, and in that case my chums will be safer if they are not knowfully aware of anything."

"You mean that you are not going to tell me?"

"The perspicaciousfulness of my esteemed chum is——"

"Oh, rats! There's a feed in the Rag, and you're wanted. Come down at once. I'm going to tell Johnny Bull!"

"The pleasurefulness will be great."

Wharton passed along to the end study. He found Johnny Bull there, beginning his preparation.



GOOD TURNS.

No. 28.

A Magnetite, who is a good skater, does his less expert sister a good turn by taking her round the ice for instruction, instead of "showing off" his figure-skating.



The carter came towards the assembled Removites, and his eyes searched over them in turn. He pointed a stubby forefinger at Snoop. "That's the young gentleman, sir!" he said. (See Chapter 16.)

"Been out?" said Wharton.

"Yes," said Johnny Bull briefly.

"And you're not going to tell me anything about it?"

"No!" said Bull, with equal brevity.

"Why not?"

"May be a row."

"Well, come down to the Rag. There's a feed on."

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull, getting up at once. "I'm on!"

"I hope you haven't been doing anything idiotic, Johnny," said Wharton uneasily. "That fellow Mobbs is as spiteful as a cat. And the Head will be awfully ratty if anything further crops up."

"Shouldn't wonder," agreed Johnny Bull.

"Look here, Johnny—"

"All the more reason why you shouldn't know anything about it, Wharton. No good you getting dragged into it if there's more trouble."

"Did you see anything of the other chaps?"

"What other chaps?"

"Nugent, Bob, Inky, Tommy Brown, and Bolsover."

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They've all been out, and they're all as close as oysters about what they're been up to."

Johnny Bull looked startled.

"I didn't see anything of them," he said. "I remember hearing somebody on the road, and I cleared off into the trees till they'd passed. It was very dark, anyway. What have they been up to out of gates?"

"They won't say."

"Oh! Well, they haven't tackled Mobby."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I'm pretty sure," said Johnny Bull, with a chuckle.

"Do you mean that Mobby hasn't been tackled at all?"

"Oh, no! I won't say that."

"Then you—"

"I'm not going to say anything. I'm not going to make you an accessory after the fact, you know. Best for you to know nothing about it, in case you're questioned."

"Yes; but—"

"Mum's the word," said Johnny Bull. "Let's go and look after that feed. I'm as hungry as a hunter."

And Johnny Bull declined to say another word. The two

juniors descended to the Rag, and joined the feasters. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was already there, with genial smiles upon his dusky face, evidently in a very satisfied humour. In fact, all the juniors who had been out appeared to be quite satisfied with themselves, and in good spirits—perhaps with the exception of Snoop. But Snoop had denied having been out, his explanation of his absence having been that he had been reading a book in the library. The Bounder had his own ideas about that, however.

Harry Wharton was feeling uneasy enough for six, though. That the absence of his chums had something to do with Mr. Mobbs he felt assured; indeed, Johnny Bull had as good as admitted it. And Wharton had a grim foreboding of more trouble to come. Mr. Mobbs certainly deserved any punishment the juniors might have meted out to him, but that was not the point. There would be more complaints, more trouble with the Head, and Dr. Locke was already deeply annoyed by the friction with Highcliffe. In fact, Wharton foresaw a whole sea of troubles, if Mr. Mobbs had been interfered with—and he had no doubt upon that point.

When the feed was over, the Removites went up to their studies to do their preparation. The half-dozen fellows who had been out of gates had said nothing as to what they had done, and they had not compared notes. As Bob Cherry had said, "the least said, the soonest mended." Whatever they had done, they did not want to drag others into the consequences.

Harry Wharton did not ask for their confidence, but he was feeling very uneasy, and he would have felt more uneasy still if he had known what was happening in the Head's study while the juniors were doing their prep.

Dr. Locke had dismissed the matter from his mind. He was chatting with Mr. Quelch, the Remove-master, when the telephone bell rang. The Head took up the receiver, and a startled look came over his face.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

Dr. Locke looked quite agitated.

"Impossible!" he said into the receiver. "Mr. Mobbs has made a mistake! You say he could not distinguish them in the darkness. Quite so. Certainly it was not done by Greyfriars boys! Impossible! I will, however, inquire if any of my boys have been out of gates since locking up. Kindly hold the line for a moment."

The Head turned to Mr. Quelch.

"It is a call from Highcliffe," he said. "Dr. Voysey is speaking. He says that Mr. Mobbs has been assaulted on his way back from here, and felled by a snowball containing a large stone. His head is badly cut. He declares that it was done by a Greyfriars boy."

Mr. Quelch shrugged his shoulders.

"I should require the plainest proof before I believed that, sir," he said.

"Quite so, I do not believe it for one moment. But we can easily ascertain whether any boys have been out. It was dark when Mr. Mobbs left. Gosling should have been closing the gates soon afterwards. Will you kindly inquire of Gosling whether he has let out any boys since Mr. Mobbs went, and whether he has seen any going out before he locked the gates."

"Certainly!"

Mr. Quelch left the study. He returned in a few minutes.

"What does Gosling say?" The Head was still at the telephone.

"He locked the gates immediately after Mr. Mobbs, sir, and he has not opened them since."

"I consider that conclusive."

"Of course, a boy, or boys, might have gone out by some other way," Mr. Quelch remarked. "But unless Mr. Mobbs can offer some kind of proof—"

"He offers none."

The Head spoke into the receiver again:

"None of my boys have been out of gates since Mr. Mobbs was here. It was undoubtedly some other person who assaulted him. What? Very well. I will see Mr. Mobbs in the morning if he cares to come over, but I really do not see what he can have to say to me. Yes—yes. He can certainly come. I will see him. I regard this accusation, however, as utterly unfounded, and, I may say, malicious. Yes; I will see him. Good-night!"

The Head hung up the receiver.

If the Remove fellows had known of that talk on the telephone, they would probably not have gone to bed that evening in a comfortable frame of mind. But they did not know.

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THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bad News!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came down cheerfully in the morning.

The snow had ceased to fall; but the Close was a sheet of white, and the juniors turned out cheerfully to snowball one another and get an appetite for breakfast.

When they took their places at the breakfast-table, some of them noted that the face of their Form-master was unusually grave.

Mr. Quelch was at the head of the Remove table. His brows were a little contracted, and his manner decidedly grave.

"Something up!" Bob Cherry murmured to Wharton.

Harry Wharton nodded. He knew the danger-signals well enough.

"I wonder if Mobbs has been complaining again?" Bolsover major remarked, with a grin. "I wonder if he was snowballed, or anything, going home last night?"

Bob Cherry started.

"What do you know——" he began.

"Nothing."

"Then don't say anything."

"The stillfulness of the esteemed tongue," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "is a proof of the wisdom of the golden silence."

Mr. Quelch glanced along the table, and the whispers died away.

When breakfast was over, and Mr. Quelch rose, he made a sign to the juniors. They understood that he had something to say, and they stood respectfully listening.

"The Head was telephoned from Highcliffe last night," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" murmured the Removites.

"I hope there haven't been any more complaints, sir?" said Bolsover major calmly.

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Has anything happened, sir?"

"Something has happened. Mr. Mobbs was struck by a snowball as he was going home last night."

"Only one, sir?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"This snowball contained a large stone, and Mr. Mobbs's head has been cut," added the Remove-master.

There was a gasp from all the juniors at once.

"Impossible!" cried Bob Cherry.

"It isn't true, sir!"

"It's a whopper!"

"Indeed! How do you know, Brown?" asked Mr. Quelch, fixing his eyes upon the last speaker.

The New Zealand junior turned red.

"Well, sir, I—I know a Greyfriars chap wouldn't put a stone in a snowball!" he said. "The Highcliffe chaps did yesterday. Snoop had his forehead cut."

Mr. Quelch's glance turned on Snoop.

"That's true, sir," said Snoop. "Look at my forehead."

The cut was very visible on Snoop's narrow forehead. There was no doubt of the truth of the assertion, and Mr. Quelch frowned.

"I need not tell you that such a thing is cruel and cowardly in the extreme," he said.

"We know that, sir," said Harry Wharton. "If any Greyfriars chap snowballed Mr. Mobbs, he wouldn't put a stone in that snowball. We leave that to those rotters."

"I feel sure of that," said the Remove-master. "But Mr. Mobbs is coming here to-day to see Dr. Locke about it, and there will be an investigation. If, as is barely possible, one of my boys acted in the manner described, I ask him to tell me so now, frankly, and take the consequences. That is the best thing he can do, for certainly the truth, whatever it is, will be found out."

There was no reply.

"No one has anything to say?" asked Mr. Quelch.

Apparently no one had. At all events, no one said anything.

"Very well," said the Form-master. "I am glad to think that no boy here has such a disgraceful confession to make. I should not, of course, believe such an accusation without the strongest proof."

"It's a rotten accusation to make, sir!" said Harry Wharton hotly. "Does Mr. Mobbs say that he recognised a Greyfriars fellow?"

"No. It was too dark. But he is sure it was a boy. He thinks that it was a Greyfriars boy."

"He has no right to think so, sir."

"Not without some proof, certainly," assented Mr. Quelch. "Unless he can offer some proof, the Head will not listen to him. Fortunately, the gates were closed just before Mr. Mobbs departed, and no one left after him."

Mr. Quelch surveyed the Removites very keenly as he

said that. He observed that more than one face turned a little pink.

"If any boy was out of bounds last evening about that time I beg him to tell me so," said the Form-master earnestly. "He will not be punished for breaking bounds unless he was concerned in an attack upon Mr. Mobbs."

Grim silence.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch. "If any boy may have been out of bounds, I hope he will think it over and confess, so that the matter may be cleared up."

And the Form-master made a sign of dismissal.

The Remove fellows marched out of the dining-room, and there were several gloomy and troubled faces among them.

Harry Wharton drew Johnny Bull aside in the snowy close. Bull was looking decidedly worried.

"Johnny, old man—"

Bull gave his chum a sharp look.

"I suppose you don't think I did that?" he exclaimed.

Wharton shook his head.

"I know you wouldn't put a stone in a snowball," he said.

"That's a dirty trick, and I know you wouldn't do it. But—but you were out of bounds at that time, and I know you went after Mobbs. Did you?"

"Yes, I did!" growled Johnny Bull.

"And you snowballed him?"

"Yes, I did."

"Oh, what rotten luck! But—but you're sure there wasn't a stone in the snow when you scraped it up? One might have got there by accident."

Johnny Bull looked very troubled.

"Well, you see, it might have happened, though it's not likely. And I gave him a good many snowballs—six or seven at least. The rotter! He was fairly bowled over."

"Bowled over! Oh, Johnny!"

"Well, if there was a rotten stone in the snow, I couldn't help it. I couldn't feel it or see it. It's not a likely thing to happen without a chap knowing."

"I'm afraid they'll think you did know," said Wharton.

"The worst of it is, that some of the other fellows were out at the same time, and—and they'll be found out, and suspected of—of this."

"No, they won't!" said Johnny Bull promptly.

"Why not? What do you mean?"

"Because I'm going to tell Quelch I was out of gates, and that I snowballed the rotter. That will clear the other chaps, anyway."

"I—I suppose you'd better tell Quelch," said Wharton hesitatingly. "But—but it will look rotten against you, Johnny. Mobbs's head is cut, they say. It can't be a lie, as he's coming over here, and we shall see whether he's cut or not. There must have been a stone in the snow, I suppose."

"Somebody else may have snowballed him as well—one of the village kids," said Johnny Bull.

Wharton shook his head.

"No reason why a village kid should put a stone in the snowball. He hasn't done anything to them."

"Well, I'm going to Quelch. If I hurt Mobbs, it was an accident, and I'm not afraid to own up," said Bull.

And he made his way to Mr. Quelch's study. Harry Wharton waited for him in the passage.

Johnny Bull came out a few minutes later, looking a little pale.

"What does Quelch say?" asked Wharton anxiously.

"Frightfully ratty about my snowballing Mobbs on his way home," growled Bull.

"But he believes it was an accident about the stone?"

"He says it doesn't matter what he believes—it's a question of what Mr. Mobbs believes, and the Head!"

"Well, I suppose that's so. It's beastly unlucky!"

"Oh, it's rotten!"

And Johnny Bull strode away with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and a worried frown upon his brow.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Half a Dozen of Them!

MR. QUELCH was seated in his study, waiting for the bell to ring for morning chapel, with his brows corrugated in a deep frown.

Johnny Bull's confession had worried him. He was glad that the junior had owned up, but it placed him in an awkward position. He had scorned the idea that a Greyfriars junior would have made such an attack upon Mr. Mobbs. But Johnny Bull's confession justified Mr. Mobbs's accusation. And the story that a stone had got into the snowball by accident might satisfy Mr. Quelch, who knew the honest nature of the junior; but it was quite certain that Mr. Mobbs would not believe it.

The Form-master's unpleasant reflections were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Come in!" he rapped out.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh entered the study.

"Well, what is it?"

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FOR NEXT
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"BUNTER'S BLACK CHUM!"

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ONE
PENNY.

"Please pardonfully forgive me for interrupting your esteemed leisure, honoured sahib," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"If you have anything to say to me, Hurree Singh—"

"Yes, sir."

"Then say it at once!"

"I will proceedfully do so, honoured sir! I have come to make the confessful clean breast!"

"The—the what?"

Mr. Quelch stared at the dusky junior.

"The clean breast of it, honoured and esteemed sir," said the nabob humbly. "Since the noble and ludicrous words addressed to us at the breakfast-table I have thoughtfully turned it over in my brain, and I have decidefully come to you to explain."

"To explain what?"

"About the lamentable injury donefully inflicted upon the never-enough-to-be-respected napper of the esteemed Mobbs."

The Form-master started.

"Do you know anything about that, Hurree Singh?" he exclaimed.

"The yesfulness is terrific!"

"What do you know?"

"I did it, sir!" said the nabob simply.

"What!"

"I was extremefully ratty by the conduct of the ludicrous Mobbs, honoured sir, and when he departfully went I climb-fully got over the school wall, and scooted after him," the nabob confessed. "I did not intend to hurt him badfully. I hurled the esteemed snowballs, but if there was a stone in the snow, it was pure accident. I am not the base and cowardly person to put a stone in a snowball!"

Mr. Quelch looked at him blankly. After Johnny Bull's confession, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's story was a little surprising. A very stern look came over the Form-master's face.

"Are you saying this to shield another boy, Hurree Singh?" he exclaimed.

"No, sir. As it is possible that other boys were out gatefully, I thought I should speakfully communicate with you, in order that suspectfulness might not fall upon the wrong person."

"Did you know that Bull was out of gates?"

"I was not aware of that honourable fact."

"Did you know," exclaimed Mr. Quelch sternly, "that Bull has just been to me, and has confessed that he snowballed Mr. Mobbs in the lane last night, and that the stone must have got into the snowball by accident?"

The nabob looked astounded.

"Oh, sir! The esteemed Bull! But I did not see him! Truly it was very dark, and I had cutfully gone through the wood. But—"

"Am I to understand, then, that the two of you went out unknown to each other, and that you both snowballed Mr. Mobbs?" the Remove-master exclaimed.

"It would appearfully seem to be so, honoured sir."

"You did not throw a stone at Mr. Mobbs intentionally?"

"Certainly not, sir!" the nabob exclaimed indignantly. "It would be a beastly mean and rottenful action!"

"Very well, Hurree Singh, you may go! I am glad that you have come to me, though I really do not know what can be done in the matter now."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh left the study, leaving the Remove-master in an unenviable frame of mind. One confession helped to clear up the matter, but two confessions were a little too much of a good thing.

The Remove-master would have been still more perturbed if he had known what was coming.

As Hurree Jamset Ram Singh walked away from the study he met Bob Cherry, evidently making for the Form-master's door. Bob was looking gloomy and troubled.

"This is a ripping kettle of fish, isn't it, Inky?" he grunted.

"The kettlefulness of the esteemed fish is terrific!" said the nabob ruefully. "Where are you proceedfully going?"

"I'm going to see Quelch."

"But what—"

"I'll tell you afterwards—I want to catch him before chapel now."

And Bob Cherry hurried on, leaving the nabob staring after him in astonishment.

Bob knocked at Mr. Quelch's door and entered. The Form-master looked at him inquiringly, and frowned.

"What is it, Cherry? I trust you have no confession to make?" he exclaimed sarcastically.

"Eh? How did you know, sir?" exclaimed Bob, in astonishment.

"What! Is it possible that you have—"

"I thought I'd better tell you, sir—"

"About what?"

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"The snowball—the stone. If there was a stone, it was quite accidental. I can't imagine how it got into the snowball—"

"What!"

"I hadn't the faintest idea—I simply can't imagine—" stammered Bob.

"Are you referring to the assault upon Mr. Mobbs?"

"Yes, sir; of course!"

"Were you with Bull?"

"Bull? No."

"You were with Hurree Singh?"

"Inky! Not at all, sir!" said Bob, puzzled.

Mr. Quelch glared at him. His temper was beginning to give way under this very peculiar strain.

"Do you mean to say, Cherry, that you went out and snowballed Mr. Mobbs in the road last night—you by yourself?" he thundered.

Bob Cherry nodded dolorously.

"Yes, sir. I thought I'd better tell you, as it's turned out. I didn't mean to hurt the little beast—ahem!—I mean Mr. Mobbs, sir. I just bumped him over in the snow, and gave him a snowball or two; but—but if there was a stone mixed in the snow, I didn't see it or feel it. I was never so astonished in my life—"

Mr. Quelch rubbed his perspiring brow.

"Are you aware, Cherry, that you are the third junior who has been to me with this identical confession?" he exclaimed.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Both Bull and Hurree Singh have confessed to exactly the same action."

"My hat! I mean, I didn't know, sir. I didn't see them. Now I come to think of it, I remember seeing somebody dodge by me in the dark—"

"You all three appear to have been actuated by the same thought, but without taking counsel with one another," said Mr. Quelch. "I suppose you know that you did a very wrong and lawless thing in assaulting a Highcliffe Form-master?"

"It wasn't an assault, sir; it was only a lark—"

"It was a lark that will turn out very seriously for the boy who threw that stone at Mr. Mobbs. You may go!"

"But, sir, I—"

"You may go! The chapel-bell is ringing!"

Bob Cherry went. Mr. Quelch was very much disturbed during morning chapel. Three confessions of delinquency worried him dreadfully. One of the juniors had inadvertently thrown that stone, he supposed. But which? It was impossible to tell. And lawless as their conduct had been, he could appreciate their frankness in coming and owning up to him, for fear that the blame might fall upon innocent parties. If they had cared to tell falsehoods, they would have been perfectly safe; they had only to deny that they had been outside the gates of Greyfriars, and their absence certainly could not have been proved.

Even Mr. Mobbs did not pretend to have recognised his assailants.

And worried and annoyed as he was by the whole affair, the Remove-master felt proud of his boys for refusing to shelter themselves behind a falsehood, which would have been easy and impossible to detect.

But even that frankness might be overdone; he could not help thinking, as Frank Nugent stopped him in the Close after chapel. Nugent was looking worried and forlorn.

"Can I speak to you a minute, sir?" he asked.

"You may," said Mr. Quelch. "Pray be quick, however."

"I won't keep you a minute, sir. It's about what happened last night—about Mr. Mobbs, and what happened to him," said Nugent, flushing.

"You were there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Had you a hand in the matter?"

"I did it, sir!"

"What!" almost yelled Mr. Quelch.

"It was I, sir!" said Nugent, surprised by the expression on the Form-master's face. "I have been thinking it over, sir, and I think I'd better make a clean breast of it. I know some other fellows were out of gates at the time, and I don't want them suspected, when they don't know anything about it."

"Tell me what you did, Nugent."

"I got out over the wall, sir, and scudded through the wood, and caught up Mr. Mobbs in the lane and snowballed him!" said Nugent. "From what you've told us, sir, I think that there must somehow have been a stone among the snow, and I scooped it up without seeing it. You can't believe, sir, that I'd deliberately throw a stone at a man to hurt him. It would be a cowardly thing to do."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch.

"I can't understand it, sir—I felt the snow in my hands

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when I squeezed up the snowballs, and never noticed any stone. But unless somebody else was there, going for him, it must have been one of my snowballs that bowled him over. I'm awfully sorry. I hadn't the faintest idea—"

"Were you alone, Nugent?"

"Quite alone, sir!"

"You did not know that Bull, and Cherry, and Hurree Singh had left the school secretly, with precisely the same object in view?"

Nugent's jaw dropped.

"Why, n-n-no, sir! I—I knew nothing. They—they didn't—they wouldn't have chucked a stone at Mr. Mobbs. He's an awful cad—I—I mean we don't like him; but they wouldn't have done a thing like that!"

"I have little doubt that it was an accident," said Mr. Quelch. "But the boy who did it will be punished in the most exemplary manner. I do not quite see, however, how he is to be discovered among four. However, I shall report this to the Head."

He walked on, much perturbed.

There were glum faces among the Removites when they gathered in their Form-room. Mr. Quelch was looking very black when he came in. Tom Brown and Bolsover major exchanged glances, and both of them stood up and began to speak at once.

"If you please, sir—"

"If you please, Mr. Quelch—"

The Form-master looked at them angrily. His temper was at breaking-point.

"Well, what is it—what is it?" he snapped.

"I think we ought to tell you, sir, considering what has happened," said Tom Brown.

"I'm not afraid to own up!" growled Bolsover major.

"We snowballed Mr. Mobbs in the lane last night, sir. But there wasn't any stone in the snowballs I gave him!"

"And there wasn't in mine!" said Tom Brown. "If there was a stone, it got in by accident, sir—I didn't know it was there!"

"I'm jolly certain there wasn't a stone!" said Bolsover.

Mr. Quelch looked blankly at the two juniors.

"Do you mean to tell me—" His breath came thick and fast—"that you two boys also went out and snowballed Mr. Mobbs last night?"

"I don't know about also, sir," said Tom Brown, in surprise. "We did, certainly; we went out together."

"We didn't intend to hurt the little beast," said Bolsover.

"I can't imagine how it happened, sir—"

"If it happened at all, it was an accident, sir—"

"I sha'n't believe it, sir, till I see Mobbs's face," said Bolsover.

Mr. Quelch passed his hand across his brow in utter bewilderment.

"This is too much!" he stammered. "No fewer than six boys have confessed that they broke bounds last evening and snowballed Mr. Mobbs in the lane. Has any other boy here a similar confession to make?"

There was no reply.

Vernon-Smith's eyes rested searchingly upon the face of Sidney James Snoop. But Snoop kept his eyes fixed upon the desk before him, and seemed quite oblivious of the Bounder's glance.

Mr. Quelch drew a deep breath of relief. He wanted frank confessions from the culprits, certainly; but he had had quite enough to go on with. He was glad that there were no more confessions to come.

"Very well," he said. "The matter will drop for the present. The Head himself will deal with it when Mr. Mobbs arrives here from Highcliffe."

And morning lessons went on their usual course—though there were six or seven members of the Lower Fourth who were thinking of anything just then, but lessons.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Wants to Know!

VERNON-SMITH joined Snoop when the Remove came out after morning lessons. Mr. Mobbs was not in a hurry, apparently, to pay his visit to the Head of Greyfriars; at all events, he had not arrived yet. Before he arrived, the Bounder wanted to have a little talk with Snoop. That desire was not at all reciprocated by Sidney James Snoop. He dodged out into the Close to avoid the Bounder; but Smithy followed him and joined him there.

"It's no good buzzing off, Snoopey!" the Bounder said coolly. "I've got to see you. I want to know what you did out of gates last night."

Snoop gave him a defiant look.

"I wasn't out of gates last night!"

"That won't do for me," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "I didn't believe you at the time, when you said that you were in the library. Now I know what happened to Mobbs, I know where you were. You chucked that snowball with the stone in it. It was just what you had proposed to me to do."

"Do you mean that you're going to sneak, and tell that I was out of gates?" said Snoop, between his teeth. "I shall deny it!"

"You'll say that you were in the library?"

"Yes."

"I've asked Trotter about that. He says there was no one in the library at that time. There was no light in the room at all until nine o'clock, when Hobson of the Shell went there."

"I—I suppose I could sit in the dark if I liked."

The Bounder laughed.

"You told me you were reading."

"Well, suppose I wasn't in the library?" said Snoop viciously. "I was about the school somewhere. You can't prove that I wasn't!"

"I don't want to prove that you weren't. But you ought to own up!"

"Rats!"

"The other fellows have owned up about what they did."

"Yes; but what they did wasn't—wasn't—"

"Wasn't so serious," said the Bounder, as Snoop hesitated.

"They didn't put stones in their snowballs, as you did!"

"I don't admit anything of the sort. If you say anything about me, I shall deny it!" said Snoop doggedly.

"If you don't own up, one of them will get it in the neck, for what you did."

"I don't admit that I did anything."

"And if it should come out—"

"There's nothing to come out!"

"If it should come out," repeated the Bounder, "you won't be able to say that the stone was an accident. If you keep it dark, and it comes out afterwards, everybody will know what you kept it dark for—because you put the stone in the snowball on purpose. If you own up now, like the rest, you can pretend that it was an accident."

"Oh, rats! I've got nothing to own up to. And if you sneak, all the fellows will be down on you—even those chaps who are going to get it in the neck!"

Vernon-Smith paused.

"I don't want to sneak," he said, at last. "But I don't see how I can hold my tongue and let them suffer for what you did."

"I've got nothing to say."

"Then you won't go to Quelch?"

"No fear!"

"It would be better for you!"

"Oh, rot!"

"I tell you it's bound to come out. These things always do come out in the long run!" said the Bounder. "It was you—"

"It wasn't! How could it have been?" said Snoop. "A lot of chaps seem to have been along the lane, snowballing Mobbs as he came by. They all tackled him after I—after I was in the Rag with you. You know yourself that they all came in later, after I was in the Rag."

"Well, I suppose you were the first that tackled him, and got back first," said the Bounder.

"After bowling him over with a stone—you think that those half-dozen fellows pitched into him when he was in that state—when he was going along with his head badly cut?"

The Bounder pursed his lips. He knew that that was unlikely. If Mr. Mobbs had been hurt by the stone, the juniors would have let him alone.

"The chap who pitched the stone at him must have been the last chap who tackled him, if he was really badly hurt," the Bounder said, after a pause.

"Well, and I was the first chap in the Rag—the first back, if I went out at all," said Snoop, with a sneer.

Vernon-Smith looked at him very hard.

"But you did go out!" he said.

"I'll tell you all about it, if you'll keep it dark," said Snoop, with an air of great frankness. "I was going out—when I spotted a couple of them in the lane. I guessed what they were out for, so I came back. That's all. I thought I'd leave it to them."

"I don't believe it," said the Bounder, with a shake of the head; "anyway, you ought to go to Quelch and tell him."

"Rot!"

"Then you're not going to say anything?"

"No; I haven't anything to say!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders, and left the cad of the Remove without another word. He did not believe Snoop; but he did not know what to think. The injury done to Mr. Mobbs must have been done after the juniors had snowballed him—they would not have ragged an injured man. He knew that. Yet, if the injury had been inflicted by the

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last fellow who tackled the Form-master, and that fellow was Snoop, how was it that Snoop had got back to the school before any of the others? He must have been further away from Greyfriars, and must have had a greater distance to cover in returning—yet he had certainly appeared in the Rag before any of the other fellows had come in.

It was a puzzle, and Vernon-Smith could not make it out. But he was sure of one thing—rather by instinct than reasoning—and that was, that Sidney James Snoop could have let light in on the matter if he had chosen to do so.

And that certainty placed the Bounder in a very uncomfortable position. Convinced in his own mind that Snoop was the real culprit, he had the choice of betraying him—or of allowing the other fellows to be severely punished for what they had not done, to say nothing of the slur that the cowardly action cast upon their names.

For there were certainly a good many fellows who would not believe that the stone had got into the snowball by accident—and, indeed, it wanted some believing, as several fellows had already remarked. If Snoop had done it deliberately, all was explained. And the Bounder felt that that was the correct explanation. But what was he to do?

Even if he told about Snoop, he had no proof to offer. And could he tell?

He was debating that troublesome question in his mind, when a cab drove into the gateway of Greyfriars. Vernon-Smith caught a glimpse through the closed windows of Mr. Mopps's pale and spiteful face, as the vehicle came up the drive. The Highcliffe master had arrived.

"Here he is!" murmured Bob Cherry, as the Highcliffe master stepped out of the cab. "Looks as if he caught a cold last night—doesn't he? I wonder how?"

Mr. Mobbs was wrapped up to the ears. His nose showed flaming red in the middle of a pasty face, and his eyes seemed inflamed. The edge of a bandage showed under his hat, which was a little sideways. Altogether, he was a somewhat pitiable-looking object.

He gave the juniors on the steps a fierce look as he passed into the House.

"Looks good-tempered and sweet, don't he?" growled Johnny Bull, rubbing his hands in anticipation. "Now look out for trouble!"

"Trouble for six!" groaned Tom Brown. "Why couldn't you asses stay indoors, as Bolsover and I were going after the cad?"

"Why the dickens couldn't you tell us you were going?" grunted Nugent. "I'd have left the beast to you with pleasure!"

"Same here!" said Bob.

"The sameness is terrific!"

"What are you looking down in the mouth for, Smithy?" asked Bob, catching sight of the Bounder's thoughtful face. "I suppose you didn't go out and snowball the fellow, too, by any chance, did you?"

The Bounder shook his head.

"The little beast must have run a regular gauntlet from here to Highcliffe!" chuckled Bolsover major. "I didn't know there was anybody but Brown and me after him."

"I suppose we shall be wanted in the Head's study pretty soon!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Hallo, here comes Trotter! What's wanted, Trotter?"

"You are, Master Bull," said Trotter, "and all the young gentlemen who told Mr. Quelch that they went out last night."

"Come on!" said Bob Cherry. "Nugent, old man, get your mouth-organ, and play a funeral march!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And with many misgivings the six juniors made their way to the Head's study. Sidney James Snoop showed no inclination whatever to follow them.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Six Innocents!

MR. MOBBS was cold and bitter and savage. He had come over to Greyfriars this time with an undoubted grievance. That he had been hurt was undeniable.

His face showed it, and, in addition to the injury that was concealed by the bandage, he had caught a cold through lying in the snow. He was sneezing and coughing with great energy when he was shown into the Head's study. Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch were there.

The Remove-master had told the Head of the six confessions he had received. The Head was as puzzled as the Form-master by that over-abundance of confessions. One would have cleared up the matter, but six made confusion worse confounded.

There was no affectation of politeness about Mr. Mobbs.

He came in as an enemy among enemies. And such being his attitude, the Head did not waste any courteous greetings upon him.

"You know why I am here, sir," said Mr. Mobbs, with sharp abruptness. "I was assaulted—savagely and brutally—as I went away from this school last night. I have been considering whether I should place the matter in the hands of the police. Dr. Voysey has requested me to avoid a scandal. For that reason alone I am willing to leave the punishment of the hooligan in your hands. That punishment must be severe, or I shall not be satisfied."

The Head coloured with wrath.

"That is not the language to use here, Mr. Mobbs!" he said coldly. "Unless you can express yourself more civilly, I shall order you to be shown to the door, and you can take whatever steps seem to you proper!"

Mr. Mobbs shrank a little. He dearly loved to bully when opportunity offered, but the reverend Head of Greyfriars was evidently not a person to be bullied. And Mr. Mobbs's mention of the police was, as he himself realised very clearly, mere "gas." He knew that he had no proof whatever to offer that a Greyfriars boy had attacked him.

"I have no doubt, sir, that you will see justice done," he said, in a more subdued manner. "I was knocked over by a stone, and stunned. I lay insensible in the snow for some time—I do not know how long. I cannot think that you will look upon such an offence with a lenient eye."

"I shall flog in the severest manner the boy who was guilty of this, if it can be proved against him," said the Head quietly. "But you do not expect me, I suppose, to proceed without proof?"

"Proof will be forthcoming," said Mr. Mobbs. "I suggest that the boys should be questioned, and asked directly whether they were outside the school at the time. But apart from any confession they may make, there will be proof. When I recovered my senses, sir, I saw a vehicle in the distance that had passed while I lay unconscious. It was going in the direction of Greyfriars. Inquiries are now being made, and I have no doubt whatever that the carter will be discovered, and he will be able to give evidence whether he saw any Greyfriars boys on the road last night. He must have passed on the road the boy who attacked me so brutally."

The Head coughed.

"The fact is, Mr. Mobbs, that six boys of the Lower Fourth Form here have confessed that they went out last evening, after you had gone, and snowballed you in the lane," he said. "Of course, they will be punished for that. But they all deny having placed a stone in any snowball, and affirm that if a stone was there, it must have got into the snow unseen by them, by accident. I trust you will take this view."

Mr. Mobbs sniffed.

"It is incredible to me," said the Head, a little sternly, "that any Greyfriars boy would deliberately perform such an act."

Another sniff from Mr. Mobbs.

"To me, sir, on the other hand, it appears quite probable, and, in fact, more than likely!" he retorted.

"I take the view that it was an accident——"

"And I do not!" said Mr. Mobbs.

"There is also another point to be considered," said Mr. Quelch. "It is quite possible that although these six boys snowballed you, quite another person may have thrown the snowball that contained the stone."

Sniff!

The sniff angered Mr. Quelch, and his eyes began to glitter, but he remained quite calm.

"I do not know what terms you may be upon with the boys of your own school," he said tartly. "Someone there may have treated you in this manner."

"No Highcliffe boy would be guilty of such an act, I am glad to say!" announced Mr. Mobbs pompously.

"There you are certainly mistaken. One of my boys has a bad cut on his forehead, caused by a stone flung in a snowball at Highcliffe yesterday."

"Flung by one of his own comrades, then!" said Mr. Mobbs.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"The boys would not be likely to fling snowballs at one another, when they were disputing with double their number of assailants," he said. "Besides, I have questioned the boy I mention—Snoop—and he has told me the name of the young rascal who stoned him—the name is Vavasour."

"I do not believe his statement," said Mobbs; "and I repudiate the suggestion that one of my own boys might have been guilty of this attack upon me. I am on the best of terms with every boy in my Form at Highcliffe. They are all gentlemen, and the sons of gentlemen, which is something that I cannot say of the young hooligans here, who seem to be encouraged——"

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"That is quite enough, Mr. Mobbs!" broke in the Head decisively. "We have not met to bandy words about our respective schools!"

"Atchoo—atchoo!" came from Mr. Mobbs. He dabbed his handkerchief fiercely to his nose, leaving it redder than ever. "I trust we have met to see justice done, Dr. Locke! My injury might have been very serious. I might have suffered from a fracture of the skull. It is not that boy's fault that I did not!"

"As I have said, the culprit will receive the severest possible punishment, if found. I will send for the boys who snowballed you."

The Head rang for Trotter. A few minutes later six juniors, looking extremely serious and solemn, came into the study.

Mr. Mobbs's greenish eyes glittered over them, looking more greenish than ever. The juniors did not appear to be aware of his existence, however. They fixed their eyes upon the Head, and waited for him to speak.

"All these boys have confessed to the snowballing," said the Head. "For that, of course, they will be punished. But the serious matter is to discover who threw the snowball containing the stone. Unless the stone was there by accident, I cannot believe that it came from the hand of one of these lads."

"I do not believe that such an accident is possible!" snapped Mr. Mobbs. "No boy could knead a snowball without feeling a stone in it, if a stone was there."

"It is not probable, certainly—but it is possible. I suppose you do not recognise any of these boys as having been near you last night in the lane?"

"I am not gifted with the power of seeing in the dark."

"Naturally!" said the Head, controlling his temper with difficulty. "I did not ask you that. These boys appear to have gone out unknown to one another—and it follows that they must have interfered with you at different points on your walk home, or they would have seen one another so engaged. If you can remember exactly where you were when you received your injury, we may discover which of these boys inflicted it—if any."

"Quite so; and I remember perfectly where I was. I had been attacked several times—four times, to be exact—before I received that injury. Whether it was by the same boy, or different boys, of course, I have no means of telling, as I caught but the faintest glimpse of my assailant on each occasion. But I should not be surprised to learn that there are six, or more, such hooligans in this school."

"Kindly keep to the point. Where were you when the stone was thrown?"

"At the point in the lane where it is joined by the footpath through the wood. Knowing that that was a short cut from Greyfriars, I was on the watch as I passed the place, thinking that one of the young rascals might have got ahead of me there, and might be waiting for me to pass. I was right; for from the opening of the footpath came the missile that stunned me."

There was a general exclamation of relief from all the juniors.

"Then it wasn't Bolsover or me," said Tom Brown. "We snowballed the rotter—ahem!—I mean, we snowballed Mr. Mopps about halfway to Highcliffe."

"That's right," said Bolsover.

"And it wasn't I!" said Bob Cherry. "I went through the wood, but I didn't take the footpath, and I never went anything like so far as the end of the short cut."

"Same here!" said Nugent. "I think I was a little more than halfway to Highcliffe, but certainly nothing like so far as that place."

"The sameness here is also terrific!"

"And it's the same with me," said Johnny Bull. "I wasn't so far as that—as near as I can judge, a good hundred yards this side of it."

"It wasn't any of us, then!" said Bob Cherry. "I must say I didn't see how a stone could have got in my snowball without my knowing it. If there was one there, it was there by accident. But, from Mr. Mobbs himself says, it wasn't any of us that chucked the snowball with a stone in it."

The Head drew a deep breath of relief.

"You hear that, Mr. Mobbs?"

"I hear it, sir," said the Highcliffe master, with a bitter sneer.

"I trust the words of these boys absolutely."

"I do not!"

"They were not compelled to admit being out of the school at all," said the Head, raising his voice a little. "They came forward of their own accord and confessed, to save suspicion from falling upon others. Each was willing to admit that he might have flung the stone by accident—unknowingly. But they all declare that they did not go to the place where you say you received your injury."

"I do not believe them!"

"Really, sir—"

"If they are telling the truth, there is another boy who has not confessed," said Mr. Mobbs.

"I will question every boy in the Remove, if you wish," said the Head.

"Very well. I shall probably be able to detect some sign of guilt in the face of the boy who utters falsehoods," said Mr. Mobbs. "I, at least, do not wish the young scoundrel to escape unpunished."

The Head flushed, but made no reply to that remark.

"Each of you boys will be caned severely for what you have confessed to having done," he said. "But I firmly believe your assurance that you were not in the place mentioned by Mr. Mobbs; and that you did not, therefore, make that attack upon him which has caused him injury."

"Thank you, sir!" said Nugent. "If we'd done it, we'd own up."

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific, sir!"

"Kindly call all the Remove together into the Form-room. Mr. Quelch, and I will come there with Mr. Mobbs," said the Head. "You boys may remain here for the present."

The Head quitted the study with Mr. Quelch and the Highcliffe master. The half-dozen culprits were left alone, in a state of considerable excitement.

"So it seems there was another chap, who hasn't owned up!" said Bob Cherry.

"Or else it was a different party altogether!" growled Bolsover. "Did you see the Head turn his eye on me? He wouldn't have believed me alone, but as Browney was with me all the time, he had to believe the two of us."

"Lucky for you Browney was with you," grinned Bob Cherry. "You haven't got the reputation of a giddy George Washington yourself. But the Head knows that Browney wouldn't tell a whopper."

"I wonder how it's going to turn out?" said Nugent uneasily. "If there was another fellow, why hasn't he owned up?"

Johnny Bull compressed his lips.

"There's only one reason why he hasn't owned up," he said quietly.

"And what's that?"

"Because he chucked that stone on purpose!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Some rotten cad!" said Johnny Bull. "There are some rotten cads in the Remove; we all know that. And the rotter's disgraced us, and now he's left us to take the blame of his rotten doings. I wish I knew who it was!" And Johnny Bull clenched a heavy fist. "I'd give three terms' pocket-money for it to turn out to be a Highcliffe chap, or an outsider—but I don't think it was! It was a Greyfriars chap—and a howling cad!"

And the other fellows, reluctantly enough, agreed with Johnny Bull.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

To Speak or Not to Speak!

THE Remove had been gathered in the Form-room, with the exception of the half-dozen juniors who were in the Head's study.

Mr. Mobbs entered the Form-room with the Head and Mr. Quelch.

The Removites were very silent and serious. Mr. Mobbs's expression was sufficient to show them that there was going to be trouble—as bad as he could make it for them. The Highcliffe master's eye rested upon Harry Wharton with a spiteful gleam.

"My boys," said the Head, in a deep voice, "I have to ask you whether another member of this Form was out of gates last night, as well as the boys who have already confessed."

Snoop shivered a little, but did not raise his eyes. There was silence.

"If any boy was out, I hope he will tell me so," said the Head. "This matter must be cleared up."

Silence!

"You see, you will not obtain the truth by asking for it," said Mr. Mobbs, with a vicious compression of the lips.

"My own opinion is that the boy was Wharton."

Harry Wharton started.

"I?" he exclaimed indignantly.

"Yes, you!" said Mr. Mobbs. "I understand that the boys now in Dr. Locke's study are your personal friends, and you are always together. Why is it that you were left out, when all of them started from the school with the same object was in view? You are generally to the fore, I believe, in such acts of rascality, as I have observed in the constant affrays between this school and Highcliffe."

"You did not go with them, Wharton?" asked the Head.

"No, sir."

"Again I ask—why?" said Mr. Mobbs, with a sneer.

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"I did not know where they were going. They did not even tell one another, and they did not tell me," said Harry. "I knew nothing about it till afterwards. When I found they had gone out, I guessed what the game was. That is all."

"And you did not go out?"

"No, sir."

"You did not lie in wait for me at the end of the footpath through the wood, and throw a snowball with a stone in it at me as I passed?"

"Certainly not!"

"I do not believe you," said Mr. Mobbs, very distinctly. "I am certain, Dr. Locke, that Wharton is the boy in question, if it was not one of those now in your study. I do not believe he alone would be left out of an affair like this."

Very curious looks were turned upon the captain of the Remove by the other fellows.

Certainly, when they came to think of it, it was curious that he alone of the "Co." should not have taken part in that pursuit of Mr. Mobbs.

"Perhaps you can prove that you did not leave the school, Wharton?" said Mr. Quelch gently.

"I was in my study, sir."

"Did anyone see you there? I ask merely to satisfy Mr. Mobbs. For myself, I take your word without question."

Wharton brightened.

"Yes, sir. Smithy came to speak to me. That was while all the fellows were out. Smithy was standing a feed to all the fellows who had been over to Highcliffe, and that was how we came to miss the chaps who had gone out."

"That is the case, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "I spoke to Wharton in his study. That was before any of the fellows came back."

"He might have got back before any of the others," said Mr. Mobbs.

"The person who attacked you with the stone could not have done so," said Mr. Quelch sharply. "You say yourself that that was the last of the attacks upon you, and it occurred furthest from Greyfriars. That person, therefore, must have been last back at the school, not first, if he came back to Greyfriars at all."

Mr. Mobbs bit his lip. The point was well taken, and he could not deny it. But his little greenish eyes lingered upon Wharton. He would have given a great deal to prove that Harry was the culprit.

"He may have returned to the school by some vehicle, which made him ahead of the others," he said, after a pause. "I have already told you that a vehicle passed while I was unconscious, and when I rose I saw it disappearing in the distance. Wharton may have got a lift in it, and in that case he would be at the school before the others, who were on foot."

Snoop clenched his hands hard, and his face went very pale. But no one was looking at Sidney Snoop.

"I can only say, sir," said Wharton, "that I was not outside the school at all."

"And I can only say that I do not believe you."

Wharton flushed, but was silent. In the presence of the Head, he could not utter the reply that rose to his lips.

"One moment," said Mr. Quelch. "It appears, Vernon-Smith, that you were gathering all the boys who had been over to Highcliffe, for some celebration or other."

"Yes, sir—a feed in the Rag."

"And so you missed the half-dozen boys who have since confessed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you miss any others?"

The Bounder was silent. It was a direct question, and he could only reply to it by stating his belief that Snoop had been among the missing juniors. Snoop's face was like chalk now, and he turned his eyes almost beseechingly upon the Bounder. There was a long and painful silence. A pin might have been heard to drop in the Form-room.

"Come, Smith," said Mr. Quelch, breaking the silence. "I see that you have something to say. This matter must be cleared up, and you can help us to clear it up. I can see quite easily that you did miss someone else."

"Speak, Vernon-Smith," said the Head.

The Bounder reddened.

"I—I had an idea that another chap was out, sir," he said. "But he explained to me that he—that he hadn't been out."

"Who was it? A member of this form, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"His name?"

The Bounder did not reply.

"It was not Wharton?"

"No, sir."

"Then who was it?"

Silence again. The Bounder set his lips.

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"I command you to give me the name, Vernon-Smith," said the Head. "The boy can explain for himself. The name, please?"

"I—I can't, sir," said the Bounder desperately. "I can't sneak about the chap, sir."

"That is not a reply to make to your headmaster, Smith," said Dr. Locke severely. "This is too serious a matter for considerations of that kind. I demand to know the name of the boy who was absent, since he has not the manliness to come forward and speak himself."

The Bounder's face was like iron now. He did not mean to speak; serious as he knew the consequences would be if he did not.

Mr. Mobbs sneered bitterly. The silence was growing painful. Mr. Mobbs had not the slightest doubt that Vernon-Smith was shielding Wharton, and he intended to push the matter to the very end.

"It is perfectly clear," he said, "that it was Wharton whom Vernon-Smith knew to be absent, along with the others."

"It was not Wharton, sir," said Vernon-Smith.

"I suppose this matter is not to end here, Dr. Locke, on account of the obstinacy of one boy who refuses to obey his headmaster's commands?" said Mr. Mobbs, with a sneer.

"No," said Dr. Locke. "Vernon-Smith; if you decline to give the name, after I have ordered you to do so, I shall punish you most severely."

"I can't help it, sir. I'm not a sneak!"

There was a murmur of approval from the Remove, but it was instantly silenced by the angry glance the Head cast over the Form.

"Will you kindly give me a cane, Mr. Quelch? Come here, Smith!"

The Bounder came out before the Form. His hard face was set in obstinate lines now. The deep frown on Dr. Locke's face showed how angry he was. His orders had been disregarded, and in the detestable presence of Mr. Mobbs. Unless the Bounder gave the required information, there was a bad time before him; and he knew it. But he did not mean to speak. All the hard obstinacy in his nature was roused now, and nothing would have drawn a word from his lips that he did not choose to utter. It was more than a point of honour with him now.

"Now, Vernon-Smith," said the Head, very quietly and very distinctly, "you know the name of the boy who was absent, and who has not confessed. The fact that he has not confessed is a proof, to my mind, that he is the guilty party. He has disgraced the school by his conduct. His punishment is a debt we owe to Mr. Mobbs, who has been assaulted. It is necessary for you to give the name. You understand that. I command you to give it!"

The Bounder's lips tightened, and he did not speak.

"Will you answer me, Smith?"

"I haven't anything to say, sir."

"Then hold out your hand," said the Head greatly incensed.

The Bounder quietly held out his hand. The cane came down with a loud swish, and a spasm of pain crossed the Bounder's hard face. But not a sound passed his lips.

"Now, Smith——"

"I have nothing to say, sir."

"The other hand!" exclaimed the Head.

Swish!

The boys held their breath. The Head was angrier than they had ever seen him before; and he was caning Vernon-Smith with a severity that was most unusual with him. The Bounder's face had gone quite white.

Harry Wharton's eyes went restlessly over the Removes. Who was the fellow who hadn't owned up? Why didn't he come forward now and save the Bounder from that bitter punishment? Who was the cad?

His eyes rested on Snoop's sickly, scared face, and a sudden suspicion shot through his mind. Snoop!

Snoop met his eyes, and flushed scarlet, and then went pale again. His eyes dropped; he did not speak.

Wharton was certain now. But he was helpless. Snoop's name was the name that the Bounder refused to give. And Snoop was the last fellow in the Form to own up to save another from punishment. And Wharton was helpless.

The Head was speaking again.

"Vernon-Smith, will you give me the name?"

"I cannot, sir."

Dr. Locke laid the cane upon the desk.

"I will not punish you further, Vernon-Smith! But you must understand that a boy in this school cannot disobey my orders. You will give me the name, or I shall expel you from Greyfriars."

The Bounder's lips twitched for a moment. There was a breathless hush. Snoop was trembling; he felt that the Bounder would speak now.

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But the Bounder did not speak.

His face hardened, and his eyes gleamed. He faced the Head with reckless hardihood; and his voice was quite firm as he answered:

"Very well, sir. You know best."

The Head pointed to the Form-room clock.

"I will give you five minutes to think it over, Vernon-Smith. If by that time you have not given me the name, you may go and pack your box. You will leave by the next train."

"Very good, sir."

"Bravo, Smith!" came a voice from the back of the Form.

"Silence!" exclaimed the Head angrily.

There was a tense silence. The minutes ticked away. All eyes were upon Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder might have been a figure of bronze, for all the sign of emotion that he gave. He had made up his mind, and he was not to be beaten. Mr. Quelch's face was deeply distressed. It was impossible not to admire the grim pluck of the junior, who was facing so much rather than yield on what he considered a point of honour.

The silence was broken by the opening of the Form-room door. Bob Cherry looked in. The Head looked round angrily.

"Cherry, I ordered you to remain in my study!"

"Yes, sir," said Bob meekly. "The telephone bell's ringing, sir. I came to tell you."

"Oh, very well!"

The Head left the Form-room. He hurried to his study; the telephone bell was buzzing incessantly. Dr. Locke made a gesture to the juniors waiting there.

"You may go to the Form-room."

"Yes, sir."

They left the study. Dr. Locke took up the receiver.

"Yes, yes—this is Greyfriars—Dr. Locke is speaking—that is Highcliffe! What is it?"

The juniors heard the words as the door closed. Then they went on to the Form-room, and joined the rest of the Remove there.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Mobbs is Not Quite Satisfied!

HERE was a grim silence in the Remove-room.

Bob Cherry and the rest, when they came in, had learned in a few whispers what was passing.

Then there was silence.

The Bounder stood quite quietly and calmly, with an almost expressionless face. Mr. Quelch restlessly turned over papers in his desk. He was deeply annoyed and distressed.

Mr. Mobbs was smiling. He had little doubt that the Bounder, under the threat of expulsion, would give the name—and that the name would be Harry Wharton. But however the matter turned out, Mr. Mobbs felt that he was having quite a good time. He was causing trouble and worry to everybody concerned, and that was very gratifying to his amiable nature.

The five minutes had passed. But the Head had not yet returned to the Remove Form-room. The telephone was detaining him.

"Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch, breaking the oppressive silence at last. "I trust that you will act sensibly, and speak. You must know that it is your duty to obey your headmaster, above all other considerations."

"I can't sneak about another chap, sir."

"Good old Smithy!" murmured Bob Cherry. And Bob's remark went unrebuked. Mr. Quelch turned to the papers in his desk again.

The Remove waited in breathless anxiety for the Head's return. It seemed hours before he came back, but it was really only a few minutes. The Form-room door opened at last, and the Head came in.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You may go back to your place."

"I—I——" the Bounder stammered in amazement.

"This matter can now be settled without your assistance. I shall forgive your refusal to answer my question, as I understand that it was a point of honour—a mistaken sense of honour towards your Form-fellows. As I can do without your aid now, I shall not require you to speak. You can therefore go back to your place."

The Bounder drew a deep breath. He was almost giddy for the moment.

"Thank you, sir!" he said, in a low voice. "I—I hope you won't think I meant any disrespect by not answering, sir? I didn't mean that. Only——"

"I quite understand, Smith, and I pardon you, because I no longer require you to speak."

"Thank you, sir!"

And the Bounder went back to his place in the Remove, his heart much lighter. There was a murmur as he rejoined his comrades—a murmur of applause and relief. But one of the Removites was looking sick with fear. It was Sidney James Snoop. What did the Head mean? What had been discovered now? That was the question Snoop was asking himself, with gnawing apprehension.

"I have just received a telephone message from Highcliffe," said the Head quietly. "Dr. Voysey tells me that the inquiries that have been made have been successful, and that the carter who passed in the lane last night has been found. It appears that he gave a lift in his cart to a boy who overtook him in the lane, and the boy left him close by the gates of Greyfriars."

"Oh!" murmured the Remove.

"It is certain, therefore, that this boy was the one who laid in wait for Mr. Mobbs at the end of the footpath, and the lift in the cart accounts for the fact that, although furthest from Greyfriars, he may have been back before all the others," said the Head.

Mr. Mobbs's eyes glittered at Harry Wharton. He did not think of looking at Snoop.

Snoop was holding on to his desk now, to keep himself from falling down. His head was swimming. There was still a faint hope—a hope that the carter might not recognise him—but the hope was very faint.

"The man is coming to Greyfriars, to identify the boy if he belongs to this school," continued the Head. "He may be here any moment now. His arrival will settle the matter definitely."

"I have not the slightest doubt," said Mr. Mobbs, "that he will recognise Wharton as the boy to whom he gave a lift."

"That remains to be seen," said the Head.

There was a shuffling of feet in the passage. Trotter opened the Form-room door.

"There is a person, sir—" he began.

"Show him in immediately, Trotter!"

"Yessir."

A big, burly carter came in, with a whip under his arm. He held his cap in his hand, and he ducked his head confusedly to the doctor.

"Which I been arsked to come 'ere, sir," he said. "I been told—"

"Precisely," said the Head. "You are wanted to identify the boy who was given a lift in your cart last evening in Friardale Road."

"I—I don't want to get nobody into trouble," said the carter hesitatingly.

"It is not a question of that. Your evidence will be the means of clearing a boy from suspicion, as well as of detecting a guilty one."

"Very well, sir."

"Will you kindly look at every boy here, and tell me whether you recognise among them the boy to whom you gave a lift last night?"

"Suttingly, sir."

The man came towards the assembled Removites, and his eyes searched over them in turn.

Harry Wharton met his glance quietly. But the carter's eyes did not rest upon him, and Mr. Mobbs felt a pang of disappointment.

"That's the young gentleman, sir."

The carter was pointing a stubby forefinger at Snoop.

There was a general exclamation:

"Snoop!"

Snoop groaned.

"Come out before the Form, Snoop!" said the Head very quietly.

Snoop staggered rather than walked forward.

"You are sure, my man?" asked the Head.

"Quite sure, sir."

"Thank you very much!"

And the carter, touching his forelock, lumbered out of the Form-room.

The Head fixed his eyes upon Snoop. The cad of the Remove was gasping for breath.

"I—I—I— It was an accident, sir," he stuttered. "I—I—I— I didn't know there was a stone in the snow. I—I—I— And my head was cut by a stone in a snowball at Highcliffe, and—and—"

"That is enough, Snoop! Mr. Mobbs, I trust you are satisfied. You will see this boy given a severe flogging before you leave Greyfriars."

Mr. Mobbs did not look satisfied. He had hoped that it would prove to be Harry Wharton. But he jerked his head ungraciously.

"I am satisfied," he growled.

"Go to my study, Snoop, and wait for me there. Trotter, kindly tell Gosling he is required in my study." The Head took up the cane. "There are six boys here to be punished for snowballing Mr. Mobbs. Come forward!"

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FOR NEXT
MONDAY—

"BUNTER'S BLACK CHUM!"

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ONE
PENNY.

The half-dozen Removites came forward quietly, but they were grunting emphatically as they retired again, and twisting in a most uncomfortable manner. Then the Head left the Form-room with Mr. Mobbs.

"So it was Snoop!" said Harry Wharton. "You knew it was Snoop, Smithy?"

"I knew," said the Bounder quietly. "I couldn't give him away. But—but I'm jolly glad it's come out. I didn't want to be sacked."

Mr. Quelch made a sign of dismissal, and the Removites left the Form-room. From the Head's study could be heard sounds of anguish. Snoop was answering for his sins.

There was a smile upon Mr. Mobbs's face as he emerged from the study. The juniors looked daggers at him as he came by, and a groan of disgust followed him across the Close. But nothing else followed him, though the snow was very handy. There were no more snowballs for Mr. Mobbs. The Greyfriars Remove were fed up with him.

For the rest of that day Sidney James Snoop betrayed a strong and insurmountable objection to sitting down. His punishment had been very severe—severe enough even to satisfy Mr. Mobbs. But he received no sympathy from the Remove. And although the Remove were very keen to get to close quarters with Pensonby & Co., whom they regarded as the cause of all the trouble, they did not think of raiding Highcliffe again. It was good fun, but it was possible to have too much of a good thing.

THE END.

(Another grand, long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next Monday, entitled "BUNTER'S BLACK CHUM," by Frank Richards. Don't forget to order your copy in advance.)

YARNS TO TELL.

A CLEAN SWEEP.

"I want a pound of shilling tea-dust, please," said the small girl to the shop-assistant of the modest grocery stores at which her mother had dealt for years, and had always declared that the best tea-dust she ever tasted came from there.

"Very sorry, missie, but I can't oblige you. Can you come back in an hour's time?" asked the young assistant.

"Mother wants it at once. She can't wait, for she's got company," said the child.

"Then tell your mother she can't 'ave it now, for we 'aven't swept the shop out yet!"

"I think we met at this restaurant last winter. Your overcoat is very familiar to me."

"But I didn't have it then."

"No; but I did!"

FORGOTTEN SOMETHING.

The Territorials were in camp for the first night, and were preparing to turn in after a day's heavy labour. Naturally, they showed all the helplessness of novices.

They were instructed how to lie down and roll themselves in their blankets, and generally make themselves comfortable.

An officer was appointed to see that each company was all right. As the officer was strolling back from the tents of "B" Company, he was accosted by a civilian. The latter had been standing by and watching events with much amusement.

"I say," he cried to the officer, "you've forgotten something!"

"What's that?" was the reply.

"You haven't kissed them good-night!"

WHO WAS THE CULPRIT?

The teacher was very earnest, and the subject he chose was about the terrible outcome of laziness and idleness.

With due solemnity, as befitted the occasion, he drew a terrible picture of the habitual loafer, the man who dislikes work, and who cadges for all he gets.

"Now, Charlie," said the teacher to a little boy who had been looking out of the window instead of attending closely to the lesson.

Charlie was instantly on the alert.

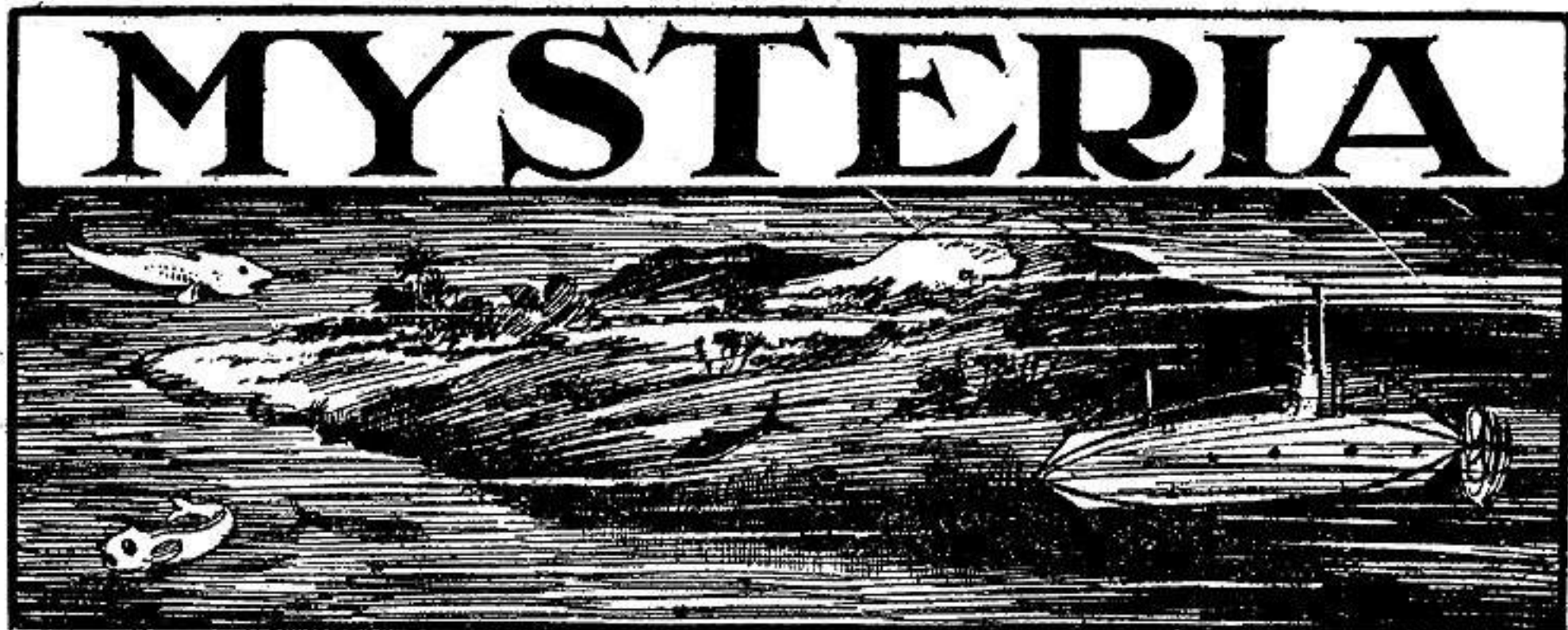
"Tell me," continued the master, "who is the miserable individual who gets clothes, food, and lodging, and yet does nothing in return?"

Charlie's face brightened.

"I know, sir! The baby!"

A Magnificent, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars. Order Early.

Our Grand Serial Story!

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 as they are steaming along one day a bank of fog ahead suddenly parts, and there, not a league away, appears Mysteria—the weird island. Before sunrise next morning a move is made to explore Mysteria. The landing-party find the island to be an evil-smelling swamp, with little sign of life. They catch a glimpse of a terrifying monster which inhabits a black lake, and then Barry creates a diversion by falling down a deep tunnel, and injuring his head. Shortly after this adventure, Jimson, the parrot, is found croaking over a huge bush, and when Prout advances to catch his pet, he stumbles over the body of a man whom they have never seen before. The castaway is found to be alive, and is taken aboard the submarine. The adventurers then find that a great hole has been blown in Mysteria, and Ferrers Lord announces his intention of exploring the bottom of the pit. A cradle is fixed, and the millionaire descends. Suddenly his electric lamp flashes twice.

(Now continue this splendid story.)

Cookey is Upset—and so is Prout!

"Hallo! He's soon had enough," said Ching-Lung. "Hoist away!"

At last the cradle came to the surface, and, grasping the engineer's strong hand, Ferrers Lord sprang out.

"We must have some lights down there, Honour," he said. "This is not enough. If the tunnel has not gone, we can take them in that way."

"Did you see anything?" asked Rupert.

"Nothing at all, but I have fully made up my mind to see something. As soon as we get the lights, I intend to make an excursion in force."

He walked along the edge of the fissure. The crack varied from five feet in width to as many inches, and was almost two hundred feet in length.

"It may hold for weeks," said Ferrers Lord. "Drive some pegs in, so that we can tell how it is going. There are some hours of daylight left. We'll land some of the naphtha lights, and be ready for the grand attack at dawn. I shall need fifty men, Prout! Draw lots for them!"

Little else could be done, so they returned to the ship, their speedy arrival causing some surprise. Honour worked hard, and before twilight came eight of the powerful lamps had been put ashore and dragged and carried to within a few hundred yards of the tunnel. The drawing of lots took place on deck. Those who drew a winning slip of paper out of the pail held by Gan-Waga cheered, and those who drew blanks either sighed mournfully, or else bore their ill-luck without a murmur.

Prout, Maddock, Joe, and O'Rooney took good care not to tempt fortune, for, as non-commissioned officers, they looked upon themselves as exempt from the ordeal. Herr Schwartz was one of the losers, and when he opened the paper and found nothing upon it, he clenched his fists and danced.

"By hokey," said Prout soothingly, "don't take on so, Dutchy! It's the fortune of war, d'ye see? Try and forget the terrible disappointment, and stay at 'ome makin' custards! Make a few bucketfuls, by hokey, and when I come back I'll sluice 'em over you! Why not? I'll do it just to please you, 'cos I know you likes it!"

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Schwartz had had his fill both of custard and of Mr. Thomas Prout. Putting down his head, he hurled himself at the steersman, and scored a bullseye.

When the grinning spectators raised Prout to his feet, he uttered a hollow moan, and pressed his hand over his watch-chain.

"Why do you laugh so loudly, Thomas?" grinned Ching-Lung. "Tell us the joke."

But the steersman answered never a word, for a winded man was he, as Longfellow might have said, but didn't.

An Advance in Force—Water Stops the Way—Barry Sees Things!

Fifty well-armed and perfectly-drilled men saluted Ferrers Lord as he leapt ashore. They looked as neat and spruce as if they expected a visit from Royalty.

"Form fours! As yez were! Form fours! Quick march!" cried Barry O'Rooney in a breath.

The swung away over the crackling leaves of the submarine plants. In addition to rifles, bayonets, and revolvers, they each carried three days' rations and an electric lamp. Some of them followed in the rear with the canvas boat, for Ferrers Lord expected the cavern to contain a shallow lake.

"Ut sames to me, Tommy," said Barry, glancing back. "that we mane at this time. Phwat a lovely sight ut is to see them all walkin' wid the same leg at once. Ut takes me back to the days whin Oi was a bould, brave volunteer in the Ballybunion Bluebottles. Ut was a blue uniform, yez understand, wid brass buttons. Me Uncle Dennis was colonel of the rig'mint, and Oi was captain."

"You was captain, souse me!" exclaimed Maddock. "Of the school cricket eleven he means, by hokey," said Prout. "What was your haverage—a big round O?"

"Yez moight think Oi was tellin' loies, bedad!" said Barry, in a hurt tone of voice.

"Think it, by hokey!" roared Prout. "We don't think it—we knows it! 'Alt, you lubbers—'alt!"

In a moment rifles were stacked, and the heavy metal drums were being hurried forward. One by one, and two by two, the men scrambled into the tunnel. The big lamps

were fitted with wheels, and they were steadied down the dark incline by means of ropes. Bundles of faggots and torches were then passed down.

"Line up!" thundered Prout. "Lamps!"

Nearly sixty powerful electric lamps poured their powerful beams into the darkness of Mysteria's great cavern. Then the naphtha lamps hissed into flame. They gave a dazzling, white light, and flung their rays far and wide, and were capable of burning for eight hours without being refilled. Honour had brought several barrels of naphtha with him.

"We'll camp here, close to the entrance," said Ferrers Lord. "By the way, some of those dry weeds ought to burn fairly well. Tell off a few men to cut some, Rupert. I shall leave you in charge of the camp for the first time, old boy. Francis will fix up the wireless telegraph, and then you can keep in communication with us and with the Lord of the Deep. Do you object?"

"Not a bit," answered Rupert. "I haven't the least objection in the world to being made a martyr. You had better leave Joe as my second-in-command."

Joe lifted his boot and kicked at nothing in particular, but the action showed that he was anything but grateful for the honour conferred on him. A fire was soon crackling merrily, and pouring out smoke.

"Don't go to sleep, Ru, or you may rue it," said the prince. "There are some funny things knocking about down this coal-mine, and if you're swallowed by one of 'em, you'll only have yourself to blame."

Thurston, Joe, and ten men remained to guard the way of retreat. The others formed up in one single line.

"Advance quietly," said Ferrers Lord. "Now for the mystery of the living pillars. Keep in touch with each other there, and look out for pitfalls. Draw a lamp on each flank."

They moved away, the four big lamps flaring and roaring as they bumped over the uneven ground.

"Halt!"

Ferrers Lord could see the pillars that had once terrified them. They looked still enough now.

"Throw the light this way!" he shouted.

The marvellous pillars awoke from their slumbers as the glare fell upon them. There was a cry of wonder from the men. Snakes of fire writhed and spun on the columns, and a hissing sound almost drowned the noise made by the naphtha-lamps. Ferrers Lord advanced, and stood gazing upwards.

"Deep-sea worms, and nothing else!" he said, with a laugh.

"Troth, phwat a place to come for bait whin yez are goin' fishin'!" said Barry O'Rooney.

It was a terrifying sight, and yet marvellously beautiful. The creatures, born in the gloomy depths of the ocean, were their own lamps. As they thrust out their fiery tentacles, and writhed them to and fro, the spectacle was magnificent.

The millionaire ordered the lamps to be switched off. The pillars, wrapped in coloured flame, seemed to reel and totter. Cheer after cheer broke from the men.

"Splendid!" said Hal Honour, whose enthusiasm compelled him to speak. "Magnificent indeed!"

"M'yes. That's worth coming a long way to see," said Ching-Lung. "It's a sort of fireworks-while-you-wait business. I'm not surprised we cleared out in a bit of a hurry the other day, Lord. When you tumble up against a thing like that unexpectedly, you can't be blamed for leaving the premises. Notice how they wriggle, Tommy? Is your hair standing on end yet?"

It was soon over, for the creatures rapidly exhausted themselves. The bright hues grew dimmer and dimmer, until finally they faded out. Ferrers Lord drew a hunting-knife, and cut a dozen of them from their hold for future examination and preservation in spirit.

"If that were the only sight Mysteria had to offer us," he said, "I should not consider it a wasted journey. Hal, I would give years of my life to own a vessel that could descend to such depths. The Lord of the Deep is wonderful, but I am far from satisfied. We must put our heads together, and think of something great."

"Humph!" grunted the engineer. "Everything is possible."

"Except Ching-Lung. You ought to put that in," laughed the millionaire. "Forward!"

Lamps flashed out again, and the wheels of the naphtha-drums rattled and creaked through the silence.

"We're going down," said Ching-Lung. "I've found it, as usual."

He was ankle-deep in water. It extended as far as the lamps could throw their light.

"Halt, there!" cried Ferrers Lord. "Give me a pole."

He went splashing onwards, thrusting the pole before him. At every step he sank deeper.

"Curious," he said, as he came back. "The place below the hole we blasted out must be an island, unless there is higher ground along to the right."

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FOR NEXT MONDAY—**"BUNTER'S BLACK CHUM!"**

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ONE
PENNY.

"As I haven't come across a guide-book describing the locality," said Ching-Lung, "I think the only way of finding out is to go and see. What's Barry, of Ballybunion, wasting electricity for? That beautiful, carrotty, golden head of his ought to give enough light for the occasion."

"He 'ad 'is 'air cut yesterday, souse me!" exclaimed Maddock, causing a chuckle. "That's why, sir."

"Pity he didn't 'ave his throat cut at the same time, by hokey!" said the mighty voice of Prout.

Barry uttered a deep sob. They were getting most unkind to the genial and gallant boy from Ballybunion.

"Never mind, sweetheart! It's only their jealousy," said Ching-Lung. "They're rude and coarse. Cheer up, and I'll buy you a bun at the next shop we come to. You tell your Uncle Dennis about it. Don't cry, little boy!"

"Whisht!" said Barry. "Oi can't hilp ut, sor; and Oi can't tell yez whoy Oi croy. But yez'll all know prisently."

"To the right! Forward!" said Ferrers Lord.

They moved along the edge of the water. The truth was soon known, and the word passed:

"Rock!"

Ferrers Lord, Ching-Lung, and Hal Honour went to examine it.

"That's a settler to our little plan, chaps," said Ching-Lung. "The place you saw is an island. What's the programme?"

"We have the boat."

"But what about the lights? As I told you before, I'm not going in the dark."

A canvas boat was a frail craft in which to explore these unknown, gloom-covered waters.

"Rafts for the lamps," said Hal Honour.

This constant succession of delays was irritating, but it was unavoidable. They turned back to the camp. The engineer called Joe at once, seized a saw, and scrambled through the tunnel. At a glance he saw that some of the hollow weeds were remarkably buoyant. He signalled to the Lord of the Deep for rope. Within an hour it was brought.

The task of cutting and trimming the hollow stems, and taking them down to the water, kept all hands busy. Two rafts were quickly built, and a naphtha-lamp was fastened to each. They floated well.

"We'll lunch before we make a start," said Ferrers Lord.

"Glory be for that blissed word!" remarked Barry O'Rooney. "For, bedad, Oi'm starvin' intoirely!"

It was a merry lunch for such dismal surroundings. When it was over they lighted their pipes.

"Six or seven will be a fair load for the boat with these rafts in tow, Lord," said Thurston.

"Seven will be ample."

"You'll take the usual crowd, I suppose?"

"Of course. They understand each other so well. Do you intend to go with us, Hal?"

"No. I am going up there," said the engineer, "to look at the fissure."

Prout, Barry, Maddock, and Joe needed no telling. The moment they saw Ching-Lung rise to his feet they were ready and waiting. At that moment a voice was heard, and its accents were practically drowned in a burst of laughter, as it plaintively inquired:

"Where my Chingy? I comeded after all, Chingy. Too bad 'nough to stopses. Wheres you ares, Chingy?"

"Ye cods and little tadpoles!" said Ching-Lung. "It's the candle-factory! He has arrived! Where's my wagtail, hunk? Where's my bountiful blubber-biter? Come hither, you poor, thin shadow! Did they give you the push? Say, what made you shift? Weren't they kind to you?"

Gan-Waga grinned all over his expansive face.

"Hoo, hoo, hoo-oo-oo!" he laughed. "It was de bad 'nough ole Cooks, Chingy. Ole Cooks hab de 'gestions once more, and him makes anothers butterfuls jam-nomette. I—hoo, ho, hoo!—I watches him through de hole-keys ob de doors. Ha, haa, ha-a-aa! And when he goeses outs, I—he, hee, hee-e-ee!—I eates de butterfuls jam-nomette, Chingy. Den I hides, and he lookings fo' me wid revolvers! Ho, hoo, hoo-o-oo-oo-oo!"

"How did you get away, you abominable thief?" asked the amused prince. "Chuck giggling, and talk!"

Gan-Waga, who was soaked to the skin, winked one knowing eye.

"I waits fo' him wid a butterfuls mops, Chingy. I gives him one smack on de wrists, and overboards goes de revolvers. Dens I gives him butterfuls smacks on de top-knots—hee hee, hee-e-ee!—and I goes overboards. And he yells 'A-r-r-r-r-r!' and I laughs. Oh, how I laughs! It was alls gladsomefuls, Chingy!"

"It sounds thereabouts," said Ching-Lung. "What are

you going to do now? We're going afloat in a boat, silly goat! Will you stay here with Ruperto?"

"Like betterer goes wid yo', Chingy," said Gan-Waga.

"All serene! You'll do for ballast. If we get upset, and the slimy Chonkabooz with the blab-toes finds us, I know whom he'll go for—eh, Tommy?"

Twenty men accompanied them down to the boat. Prout and Maddock seized the oars. The rafts, with their flaming lamps, were pushed clear, and floated like a couple of miniature lightships.

"Pull!"

The oars dipped into the water, and, with the two rafts in tow, the boat left the shore.

"We'll pull your way, Harold!" called the millionaire.

Honour waved his lamp. The lights became fainter, and faded away into dull red smears.

"Rest on your oars a moment," said Ferrers Lord.

"Now, Ching! Try towards the lights. You can still see them."

Ching-Lung heaved a sorrowful sigh as he prepared to fix up his camera. He accomplished this, and then set two cork mats afloat, and then two more. Each carried a delicate clockwork apparatus for firing a flashlight. Another clockwork apparatus controlled the shutter of the camera, and all were regulated to act at once. There was a dazzling flash, and for an instant the roof and water looked as bright as day. Great luminous spots floated before their dazed eyes.

"Bedad, Oi can say plum-pudden swimmin' about!" said Barry.

The Underground Island—The Perils of the Darkness—Caving In!

"Yo' collars ones, dens, and I eats 'em," gurgled Gan-Waga. "I likes plums-puddens; dey butterfuls 'nough."

They picked up the cork mats, and then pulled further out. They had met with nothing to cause them the slightest alarm. Dreadful as the writhing columns of fire appeared at first sight, they had proved, upon examination, to be as harmless as guineapigs. To all appearance, they were as safe here as they would have been boating on any English lake or Irish, or even safer, for no storms could arise here to endanger their little canvas craft. Perhaps, after all, the cavern held nothing terrifying. Perhaps the roar Ching-Lung and the millionaire had heard had been only caused by the wind hooting through some opening of the great cavern. But the footprint they had seen was new and fresh. That, at least, was evidence that could not be explained away. It was evidence that could not be refuted.

"I wonder if the fresh air, or too much of it, has slaughtered all the ferocious monsters and bite-me-quick?" said Ching-Lung. "Maybe it isn't feeding-time with 'em. Thank your lucky stars, comets, and constellations, if it isn't, Waga of the Gan, for you're the juicy morsel they'd pounce on in extra double-quick time."

"The say-sarpint winked his wicked oi,

'And,' says he, 'a fat Eskimo Oi espoy.'

Thin he opened his jaws, which was six fut long—"

"And afore you could 'knife,' by hokey," said Prout, completing Barry's rhyme, "that Eskimo was gone."

"Har, har, har!" smiled Maddock.

"The man, bedad, who can make 'long' rhyme wid 'gone,'" remarked the poet witheringly, "wants the thing he calls a head knocked clane off his ugly shoulders. He's a brainless spalpeen intoirely."

"I agree with you, Barry," said the prince. "He's no poet, anyhow. There's the letter-hole, by Jove!"

A stream of dull light streamed downwards and touched the water.

"Pull towards it," said Ferrers Lord.

"So that's where your island is—eh?" said Ching-Lung.

"I shall be glad to land and rest my legs, for I'm not enjoying it a little bit. It's not at all interesting, except for the beautiful lighthouses we're dragging after us. They smell something like motor-cars, likewise. Are they heavy, Ben?"

"Like lead, sir, souse me!" answered the bo'sun.

"Then shift out, and let Barry have a go. I'm sure he's dying to do some work."

"That's a big loig—Oi mane. Oi shall be most plazed," said Barry, with a sigh. "Wait till Oi light my poip, and thin Oi can see wher Oi'm goin'. Bedad, Oi niver thought, whin Oi lift Ballybunion, that Oi'd live to be a boatman down in a coal-pit. Av my poor ould bloind grandmother, who died afore Oi was born, could see me now, her oies would stharrt out of her head wid grief and sorrer."

"Oh, stow it, souse me, and get hold of this bit o' wood!" said the bo'sun.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 311.

OUR COMPANION PAPERS. "THE GEM" LIBRARY, "THE PENNY POPULAR," "OHUCKLES," 1d. Every Wednesday. Every Friday. Every Saturday, 2

Each long, powerful shove, in spite of the dragging weight of the rafts, made the light clearer and stronger. And then Prout uttered a horrified yell, missed the water, and fell back, his head striking Barry's knees. A wave rushed up against the boat, making it rock and dance. A snaky head lowered above them, and they saw green eyes and two dripping, distended jaws. A rifle cracked, but it made no impression. The jaws snapped down on the hissing flame of one of the naphtha lamps.

The next instant the boat was a sinking wreck, and they were all in the water.

Ching-Lung rose amid a smother of spray, with a booming, hammering sound in his ears, a misty glare dancing before his eyes, and a vague idea that he was in a bath highly charged with electricity. He dived again swiftly, realising that a blow from the terrible thing that was beating the water would break him in halves. When he came up once more, he saw one of the naphtha lamps tossing and dancing like a lightship on a rough sea, caught the edge of the raft, and rocked up and down.

"Boom-oom-oom!" came a succession of retreating echoes. A sallow, terrified face loomed above the crest of a wave as the prince, see-sawed upwards. The face was below him, but it was above the next moment. Gan-Waga was clinging to the raft on the other side. Ching-Lung's feet struck the bottom.

"Hallo, Gan!" he yelled. "He's gone, hasn't he?"

No matter what kind of creature it was, it had made the mistake of its lifetime. To attack a naphtha lamp in full blaze with a hissing flame six feet high by eighteen inches wide, and to attempt to bite its head off, showed a lack of brain power of the most amazing description. The hissing and booming grew fainter, and the turmoil rapidly subsided. Ching-Lung stood up, twisted the raft round, and brought Gan-Waga close up to him.

"Here, pull yourself together!" he cried encouragingly. "Where are the others?"

"Not knows, Chingy, not knows," panted the frightened Eskimo.

"Stick where you are, then. I'll be back soon. Don't be afraid, Wagtail—that Johnny's had enough."

Ching-Lung struck out, and got clear of the brilliant glare. Presently he saw the light streaming down from the

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roof. The light revealed dark human figures. Ching-Lung counted them in a trice. All were there safe on the low-lying island.

"A-hoy-oo-oy!" he bellowed. "We're all right!" He turned back. "Push it along, Gan," he said cheerily. "It's a good thing. I'm after the other."

Their assailant had failed dismally in his assault upon their lamps. The second one was burning further out. Ching-Lung reached it and forced it towards the shore. Fragments of the canvas boat were floating about. As it became shallow enough to walk, his foot struck something. He ducked, and recovered his camera. A second plunge secured his plate-bag. He was glad to regain his camera, not so much for its value in pounds shillings and pence, though it was a most expensive instrument, but because it was an old friend and campaigner. The plates, too, unless they had been broken, could have come to no harm, for they were in light-tight, airtight, and watertight slides.

"Come on, bonfire!" he yelled to Gan-Waga. "I'm a diver!"

Another scramble under water was rewarded by three rifles, and a fourth dive brought two more. Ching-Lung placed his catches on the raft. Gan-Waga piloted up the other lamp. Prout and Ferrers Lord dashed in to aid them. By a miracle they had all escaped those terrible blows. Gan dropped down prone, and lay panting. In the open daylight he was as brave as a tiger, but he hated gloom and darkness, for in his savage childhood he had been taught that spirits and demons inhabited the gloom, and such superstitions are hard to shake off. And then the sun looked down through the hole in the roof as it passed over Mysteria, warm and bright and cheerful.

"We're jolly well out of that, old man," said Ching-Lung, who had not turned a hair. "It was a handsome-looking beast, eh?"

"Ut was the say-sarpint!" said Barry.

"And a mighty big 'un, by hokey!" added the steersman.

"I had a good view of its head and neck," said the millionaire, "and a good chance of a shot, but I fear I missed. I should put it down as a conger of enormous size."

"And Oi'll wager ut singed ut's whiskers," said Barry.

"Bedad, ut was no minnow. Glory be that the ugly baste athruck up instead of down. Ut cut us clane in halves. As Oi'm a livin' man, Oi sailed thirty feet through the air afore Oi struck water. And our boat, Tommy—phwat about ut?"

In spite of the sun, it was terribly cold. They succeeded in getting one of the lamps high and dry, and gathered round it. The lamp gave a splendid heat. They had lost their wireless apparatus, and could not therefore tell Thurston of their accident. But there was Harold Honour, the man who never failed.

Without exploring it, they could not tell the extent of the island on which they had taken refuge. Their electric-lamps were under water, and the daylight that entered by the hole covered only a comparatively small area. The lamps were a serious loss.

"If we only had a few portable lights," said Ching-Lung, "we could toddle round and keep warm."

"Me allus warms nough, Chingy, but not likes places," said Gan-Waga.

"Oh, I know you're warm enough! You ought to take lodgings in a refrigerator. You can stand that abominable salt, too, though it pickles us. Frog into it again, Gan the Wag-Tail, and duck about for those lamps."

"Yo' nots wants nuffins, hunk?" protested the Eskimo. "Not likes him; him too blackfulness."

"I'll try," said Ferrers Lord, stretching himself.

"No, yo' nots," said Gan-Waga. "I goes all rights. I only jokings, Chingy!"

Gan-Waga was displaying magnificent pluck in again entering the water, and they all knew it. He was desperately afraid of the unknown creatures it held, but he plunged in all the same, and shot up and down across the dark bottom,

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grazing it with his fingers. He failed at the first attempt, but rescued two lamps in succession at the second and third ventures.

"Souse me, Eskimo," remarked Maddock, "you're not such a chuckle-headed chump as you looks, at times."

"Bedad, didn't Oi always spake well of him?" said Barry. "Didn't Oi always till yez he was wan o' the roight sorr't? Brayvo, my fat son of a tallow-barrel. Let's see av the thing's busted!"

One lamp was undamaged, and in a few moments Ferrers Lord had put the other right. Hal Honour, of course, could not have reached the summit of the hill yet, for he had to travel much more slowly, and treble the distance of the boat. Gan-Waga, encouraged by the various compliments, volunteered to try to recover the telegraphic apparatus; but as there was little hope that such a delicate instrument had not been rendered absolutely useless, the millionaire declined the gallant offer.

They had their revolvers and knives, five rifles, and several rounds of ammunition, for Barry, luckily, had retained his bandolier. Dragging the naphtha lamps still further up, they started across the island briskly.

"The water may end here, for all we know," said Ching-Lung, "so we'd better not go too far. It would be a case of when an island isn't an island. My stars, how it must have bumped!"

Heaps of splintered rock and rock-dust showed where the roof had crashed in.

"The gap is widening perceptibly," said Ferrers Lord. "I can see that, even at this distance."

"What with millions of tons of rock looking round for a chance to flatten us to pulp, and hungry gentlemen, with numberless tails and teeth searching about for a free lunch," said Ching-Lung, "I don't feel any desperate inclination to laugh any loud, long laughs. How do you feel about it, Eskimoes?"

"Bad 'nough orfuls, Chingy."

"You prefer butter and cangles, hunk? I don't blame you, either. Ooh-oo-er! What was that?"

Some living thing uttered a hoarse bellow away in the darkness.

"He's got a cough, by hokey, and a bad 'un!" commented the steersman. "Here's more salt stuff, sir."

Again they had reached water. They struck away from it at a tangent, only to meet with it again.

"An island, undoubtedly, lads," said Ferrers Lord—"an island within an island."

"And—phew! Ugh! Pah!—the daintiest smell Mysteria the smelly one has yet dished up!" gasped Ching-Lung, holding his nose. "Great tanyards and soap-factories! What the—"

Their hands tightened upon their rifles. With a piercing shriek and a heavy beating of wings, a great shadowy thing rushed away over their heads into the darkness. A mass of giant bones gleamed white in the rays of the lamps, but they could not tell to what species of dead monster they belonged. The stench was nauseating and intolerable. They beat a quick retreat. So even here there were hideous scavengers that glutted themselves on carrion; even here the air held its winged vultures of the darkness.

"Dis too awfulness, Chingy!" wailed Gan-Waga shudderingly. "Ooh! I so frighteneds, Chingy!"

"So am I, kiddy!" said Ching-Lung; "but I'm not going to show it—no, not much. I wish I'd taken a pot-shot at that sparrow. Look out, there's something in front!"

(This grand serial will be continued next Monday.
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SOLUTION TO OUR LAST WINTER EVENING PROBLEM.

This drawing shows how the fifteen strokes should be arranged in the eight squares to form the word "CHUCKLES." The illusion will be plainer if you hold the page some distance from your eyes, when the name of our latest companion paper will stand out clearly in what is known as "block" lettering,



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By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

In this, our next grand long complete tale of the famous chums of Greyfriars, interest centres largely round a wonderful "darkey" footballer, who plays for a professional team in the locality. This marvellous player is, it appears, a great chum of Billy Bunter, the fat Remove Form junior, and Bunter makes very great capital out of the fact.

When the Greyfriars First Eleven is hard pressed for a "top-notch" player, Bunter's black chum is remembered, and the fat junior is forced to call in his aid.

The arrival of the dusky champion at Greyfriars, and his departure under somewhat peculiar circumstances, causes the whole school to remember for many a long day

"BUNTER'S BLACK CHUM!"

YOUR VERDICT!

By the time these lines appear in print No. 2 of "Chuckles," the great new halfpenny companion paper that all my chums asked for, will be in all the newsagents' windows, and on all the bookstalls. Every one of my MAGNET friends will have read it and formed an opinion on it, and, I hope, have written to me to tell me what that opinion is. That is what I want. I am determined to give my chums

Exactly What They Want,

and if they will only tell me straight out what that is the rest is easy. It is your verdict on our latest new paper "Chuckles" that will count with me! For the rest, I will only say that No. 3 of "Chuckles," for brightness, fun, and general interest, is

Better Than Ever!

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

Lillian Maartens and friends, Holland.—I was most pleased to get your nice letter and St. Nicholas gift, which I accept with the greatest pleasure.

The style and neatness of your letter does you credit, and I am pleased to think that THE MAGNET Library and its companion papers have helped you to obtain such a splendid knowledge of the English language. Regarding your request for the reformation of Vernon-Smith, you will have noticed that his character has improved somewhat of late; and, in any case, I think, on reflection, that you will agree that it is best to allow the author to develop the characters of his own creation in his own way. I will look forward to hearing from my Dutch girl readers again.

W. J. F. (Leicester).—I think the matter can be arranged, but the best thing you can do is to consult the local Insurance Commissioners.

C. Bishop.—There is no special binding published for "The Magnet" Library. As the back numbers you want are out of print, your only chance of obtaining them is to persuade some fellow-reader to part with his.

A. L. (Belfast).—Many thanks for your letter, which I am sorry lack of space precludes me from publishing.

Earnest H. (Leeds).—Wingate's first meeting with Miss Rosie was narrated in No. 162, entitled "Wingate's Chum." "Wingate's Folly" was No. 200, which told of the school captain's meeting with Miss Paula.

III.—HOW TO ENTER A BANK.

By a Bank Manager.

Many misconceptions exist regarding the career of the bank clerk. Statements have appeared from time to time in various newspapers representing him as a very long-suffering individual, tyrannously abused, in consequence of which he has been for many years a popular candidate for public sympathy. These statements, while containing a basis of truth, are often greatly exaggerated, and a large proportion consists merely of the grievances of habitual grumblers—a class by no means confined to banks. Their chief contention—that the rate of payment is totally inadequate to the responsibility involved—the writer would be the last to dispute; but there exist corresponding advantages concerning which these grumblers preserve a conspicuous silence.

So long as he remains honest, the bank clerk's post is a permanent one. The writer would emphasise this fact. The permanency of his employment gives the bank clerk a feeling of security which is denied to employees in most other walks of life. All other clerical work, with the exception of the Civil Service, is characterised by precarious prospects and uncertain tenure.

The bank clerk has always with him the comfortable conviction that he will never be turned out of employment. He runs no risk of his services being dispensed with for those of a cheaper man, for the rate of payment is a fixed one. From the time of his entry into the bank's service to the time he leaves it, his salary accrues automatically to his name. He may be incapacitated for work through illness for several months; his salary will still be paid, and his post kept open for him. He will find advancing years no drawback; indeed, they will be counted to his credit. Instead of causing him to be pushed to the wall by younger men, his length of service will always be in his favour, "seniority" being as much a fetish in banks as in the Civil Service.

Pensions for Long Service.

And when he can work no longer he will draw a pension. This is an important consideration: it practically adds a certain sum yearly to a man's salary, as otherwise he would be compelled to put by so much per annum to provide for his old age. There are still, of course, some banks which have no recognised pension scheme, and by which the granting of a pension is considered an "act of grace"; but an instance where long and faithful service was not rewarded with a pension is, I believe, absolutely unknown.

A bank clerk may be poor all his life, but if he be honest he will never starve, and he will never approach old age with the fear of destitution before his eyes. It is this certainty of employment and remuneration which is the chief advantage of the bank clerk's career; and with the cry of "overcrowding" ringing always in one's ears, where practically all employments are concerned, one must admit that it is a consideration not to be despised.

So that if a youth makes up his mind to remain in a bank, it is futile to develop into a "grouser" because his pay is small. He must content himself by looking on the bright side of things, and make the most of the advantages he has: fairly light hours, work that makes no exacting demands on brain power, certainty of permanent employment, a good social position, a slow but certain improvement in circumstances during his career, and the practical certainty of a pension at the end of it.

(Another interesting
 article next week.)

The Editor

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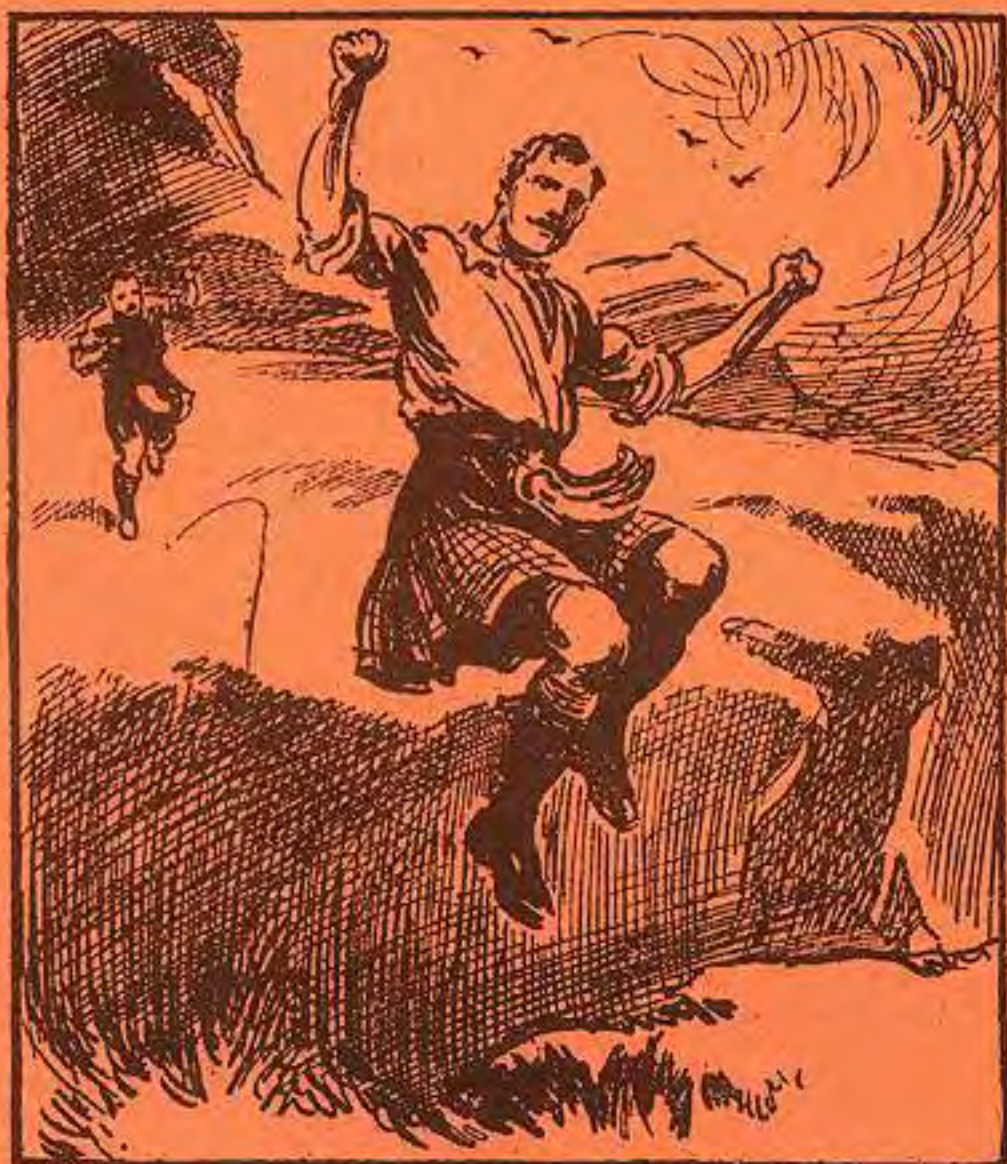
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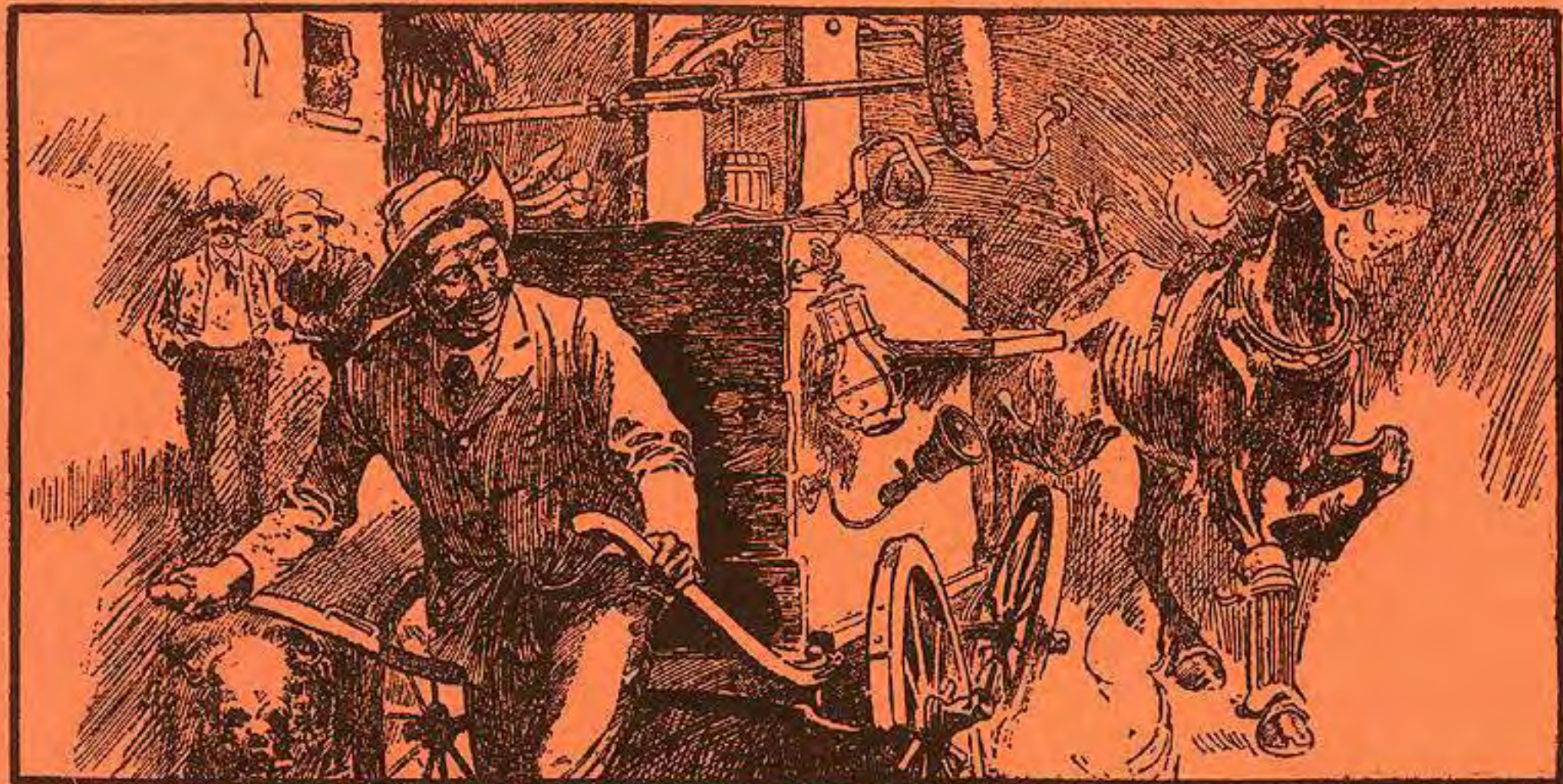
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