

"THE SHADOW OF THE PAST."

A Grand, Long, Complete Tale of School Life.



Loder pointed to Vernon-Smith's bed, and, as Mr. Quelch looked at it, a frown gathered on his brow. There was no doubt the Bounder was not there. "Absent! At this hour of the night! Disgraceful!" he said angrily. (An incident taken from the grand, long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. in this issue.)

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THE SHADOW OF THE PAST

A Splendid, New, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. and
the Bounder of Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Vernon-Smith was feverishly anxious to get his visitor out of sight, and he drew him into the pavilion. Once he was there, he turned upon Hawke fiercely. "You scoundrel!" he said, between his teeth. "You villain! What are you doing here?" (See Chapter 9.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Jerry Hawke's Tip!

"HERE he is!"
"Here's Smithy!"
Vernon-Smith of the Remove—the Bounder of Greyfriars, as he was called—looked round him quickly.

He had just come in from the cricket-field, and was still in his flannels, with his bat under his arm. His face was ruddy, and wore a cheery smile as he came into the School House.

The smile died away as he looked round at the crowd of Remove fellows there, who were evidently waiting for him.

"Yes, here I am," he said quietly. "What's the matter?"

Some of the juniors laughed. All of them were looking at the Bounder very curiously. It was clear that something unusual was "on," but no one seemed to be in a hurry to explain.

"Oh, I say, Smithy," said Billy Bunter, with his irritating chuckle, "it's really too thick, you know!"

"Too risky, at any rate," said Bolsover major. "You must be an awful ass, Smithy."

"Suppose Quelch saw it?" said Skinner.
 "Or the Head!" remarked Snoop.
 And then there was a sort of chorus:
 "Oh, crumbs! What would the Head say?"
 Vernon-Smith looked from one to another, the amazement in his face giving place to angry annoyance.
 "I haven't the faintest idea what you're driving at!" he exclaimed sharply. "What are you talking about?"
 "He, he, he!" cackled Bunter.
 "You ass, Smithy!"
 "You duffer!"
 Vernon-Smith turned to Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, who was talking to Bob Cherry in the doorway.
 "Do you know what these silly asses are babbling about, Wharton?" he asked.
 Wharton jerked his thumb towards the letter-rack in the passage.
 "There's a postcard for you there," he said. "Bunter has been reading it. If what he says is true, the sooner you get it out of sight, the better."
 Vernon-Smith looked puzzled.
 "I don't see—" he began.
 "You'll see when you see the card!" chuckled Bunter.
 "You must be an awful ass, Smithy. Anybody might see it."
 Vernon-Smith turned on him angrily.
 "So you've been spying into my correspondence!" he exclaimed, making a threatening movement towards the fat junior.
 Billy Bunter backed away promptly.
 "Ahem! I—I saw it by accident," he explained. "I was looking for a letter—you see, I was expecting a postal-order, and—"
 "And he thought he'd find it in your postcard, Smithy," said Johnny Bull, with a grin.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Vernon-Smith frowned, and moved towards the letter-rack. Some of the juniors followed him, and all of them looked after him curiously. There were three or four letters and a card in the rack. The letter was addressed to "Mister Vernon-Smith, Eskwire," in a large and sprawling hand. Vernon-Smith started as he saw the writing. Evidently he was acquainted with it. He took down the postcard hastily.
 "Get it out of sight," advised Skinner, "and you'd better warn your giddy correspondent to put it inside an envelope next time."
 "It would be safer!" grinned Snoop.
 Vernon-Smith did not heed them. He was reading the postcard. His brow grew as black as thunder as he read it. It was a sufficiently startling message to be written openly on a postcard addressed to a junior schoolboy at Greyfriars. For it ran:
 "Try Son of Mine for the Lantham Plate. Five to one against.—Jerry Hawke."
 All eyes were upon the Bouncer.
 He stood for some moments as if rooted to the floor, his brow growing blacker and blacker. Then he crumpled the card savagely in his hand. There was a chuckle from the spectators.
 Vernon-Smith strode back to where Harry Wharton was standing. The captain of the Remove met him with a cold look.
 "You know what's on this postcard?" said Vernon-Smith, in a low voice that shook with suppressed rage.
 "I know what I just heard Bunter say," replied Wharton coldly. "It's a tip from a bookmaker, according to Bunter."
 "That's it!"
 Wharton's face set grimly.
 "You gave us your word that you'd done with that kind of thing," he said. "I must say that it's rotten of you, Smithy—as well as idiotic. You've been taking us in!"
 "He didn't take me in!" chuckled Billy Bunter. "I knew all along that he was humbugging. I've said so, too—Yaroooh!"

Vernon-Smith swung round his arm, and the back of his hand came across Billy Bunter's mouth, effectually interrupting his remarks. The Owl of the Remove staggered back and collapsed against the wall, yelling.
 Vernon-Smith looked round him with a flashing eye.
 "Does anybody want to repeat Bunter's remarks?" he demanded. "I'm willing to give him the same, if he does!"
 There was no reply. The Bouncer was not a pleasant fellow to deal with when his temper was up. And it was plainly up now. He looked savagely from face to face, as if in search of a victim; but as the juniors did not speak, he turned back to Harry Wharton again.
 "You say I've taken you in, Wharton?"
 "Well, it looks like it."
 "It certainly looks like it," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose you won't say that message has been sent to you for a joke?"
 "Ow! Ow! Ow!" came from Bunter.
 Vernon-Smith looked savagely at the chums of the Remove. He crumpled the offending postcard harder in his hand. It was not so very long since the Bouncer had been in the habit of receiving such communications from gentlemen of the sporting fraternity; but at that time he had at least been cautious about it. He had never taken the risk of his dealings with the bookmakers coming to the knowledge of the school authorities. Many of the juniors knew, or suspected, the Bouncer's peculiar little ways, but he had been very careful to cover up his tracks. And then had come the time when the Bouncer seemed to see the error of his ways; when he had said a final farewell to his reckless way of life. More than one of his old companions in rascality had been exasperated by his reformation; but Harry Wharton & Co. had received him with open arms, as it were—they had taken him on trust. Vernon-Smith was now on the best of terms with the Co. He was a member of the Form eleven, and Harry Wharton firmly believed that he was as straight as a die. That made the shock to him more painful now. It was not pleasant to him to think that the Bouncer had been tricking him.
 "I suppose it's no good my saying anything, then?" said the Bouncer between his teeth.
 Wharton shrugged his shoulders.
 "I don't see that there's anything for you to say," he replied. "If the rascal who wrote that postcard is sending you tips for races now, it looks to me as if you've been fooling us all along. It's no business of mine; you can go your own way until you get sacked from the school—that's what it will come to."
 "That's enough!" said the Bouncer harshly. "I could explain this quite easily; but if that's the amount of faith you have in my word, it's no use my saying anything."
 "If you can explain it—" began Wharton.
 "I don't choose to now."
 "Yow—ow!" came from Bunter. "You—you beastly gambling rotter, I've a jolly good mind to tell Quelch! Hands off, you rotter! Yah! Oh!"
 The Bouncer's suppressed rage broke out into flame. He seized the fat junior by the collar, swung him round, and kicked him furiously. His boot came upon Billy Bunter's fat person with what a novelist would describe as a sickening thud.
 "Ow! Ow! Help!" roared Bunter.
 Thud! Thud! Thud!
 "You spying cad!" said Vernon-Smith between his teeth. "That'll teach you to let my correspondence alone!" Kick! Kick! "Take that! And that! And that!" Kick! Kick! Kick!
 "Yow-ow-ow-ow!" bellowed Bunter. "Help! Yaroooh! Help!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Cave!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Chuck it, Smithy! Here comes Quelch!"
 But it was too late. Bunter's roaring had brought Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, to the spot. The Form-master came striding along the passage, with an angry frown upon his brow.
 Vernon-Smith released the Owl of the Remove, who staggered against the wall, yelling.
 "Ow! Ow! Ow! Yow!"
 "Vernon-Smith, what are you treating Bunter in this brutal manner for?" rapped out Mr. Quelch.
 "He's been reading my letters!" said Vernon-Smith sullenly. "He's always spying into fellows' letters!"
 "Tain't a letter!" roared Bunter. "Tain't a letter! It's a postcard; and I saw it by accident! It's a postcard from a rotten bookmaker! Yow-ow! Don't stamp on my foot like that, Bob Cherry, you beast!"
 "Cherry! Leave Bunter alone at once!"
 "Ahem! Yes, sir."
 Mr. Quelch fixed his eyes upon Bunter.

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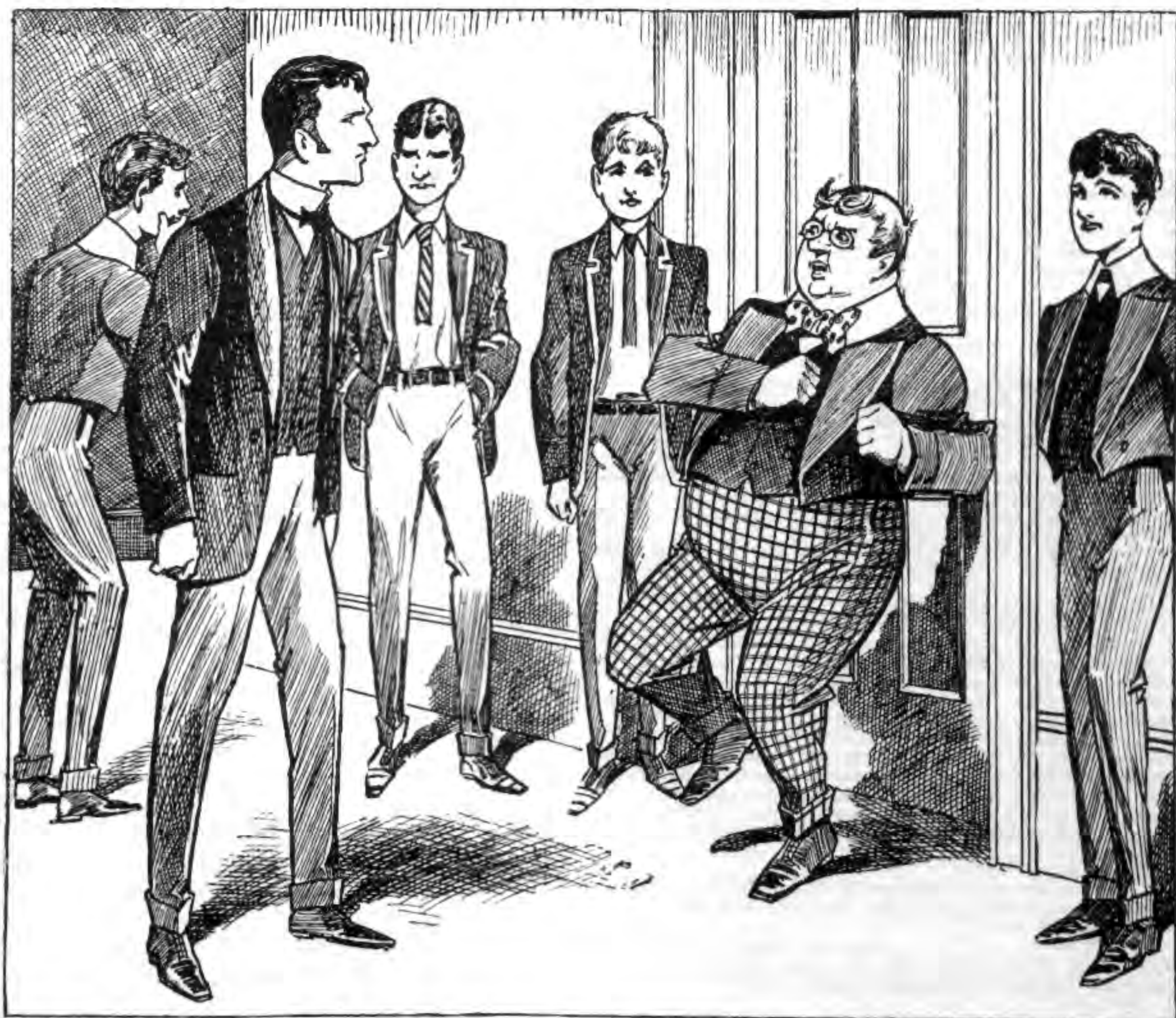
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"Ow! Ow! Ow!" yelled Billy Bunter, as Vernon-Smith brought his boot into play. "That'll teach you to pry into my affairs!" panted the Bounder, but he paused as Mr. Quelch, alarmed by Bunter's frantic yells, came upon the scene. "What are you treating Bunter in that brutal manner for?" demanded the Form-master. (See Chap. I.)

"Now, Bunter, what did you say? That Vernon-Smith has received a postcard from a bookmaker?"

"Yow-ow! I—I—I—" stammered Bunter. The juniors were all giving him deadly looks, and Bunter realised that if he "sneaked" about the Bounder there would be severe punishment for him afterwards. "I—I—I—you see, sir—I meant—ahem—"

"Is that the postcard in your hand, Vernon-Smith?" said Mr. Quelch, turning away from the stammering Owl of the Remove.

"Yes," said the Bounder.

"Show it to me."

The Bounder hesitated. There was a breathless hush among the juniors. They could imagine the effect the sight of that communication would have upon their Form-master. A red rag to a bull would be nothing to it.

"Do you hear me, Smith?"

The Bounder reluctantly held out the crumpled card. Mr. Quelch took it, smoothed it out, and looked at it. His brow grew like thunder. The juniors waited with beating hearts for the storm to burst.

But it did not burst. Mr. Quelch looked at Vernon-Smith with steely eyes.

"Follow me to my study!" he said quietly.

"Very well, sir!"

And the door of the Form-master's study closed behind Mr. Quelch and the Bounder.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"LOOKING AFTER UNCLE!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Not all U.P.!

"D ONE for," said Bolsover major.

"Fairly done in," said Skinner. "Well, I must say he's brought it on himself. Why couldn't he be more careful?"

"It was simply asking for trouble to have his blessed tips sent to him in that open way," remarked Ogilvy. "He used to be so jolly careful, too. Blessed if I can understand him taking chances like this. Why, anybody might have seen it."

"But nobody excepting Bunter would have peached on it!" said Peter Todd, bestowing a ferocious glare upon his fat study-mate.

"Oh, really, Todd!" murmured Bunter.

"Rotter!"

"Sneak!"

"Toad!"

"I—I say, you fellows, you see—look here, leggo!" roared Bunter. "I only spoke from a sense of duty—I mean, I didn't speak at all—that is to say—yow-ow-ow!"

"Collar him!"

"Yow-ow! I'll yell to Quelch—yaroooh!"

"Will you?" said Bob Cherry grimly. "Yank him out into the quad, and then he can yell as much as he likes."

"Yaroooh! Help! Oh!"

A dozen pairs of hands were laid upon the fat junior, and he was whirled off his feet, and rushed out into the Close.

A Splendid Complete Tale of the
Chums of Greyfriars. Order Early!

Harry Wharton & Co. joined in with the others. There were few of the Remove who approved of Vernon-Smith's "little games," Harry Wharton & Co. least of all; but they were still more down upon Bunter for giving him away to the Form-master. For now that the secret was out, there was hardly a doubt that the Bounder would be "sacked." So complete an exposure could hardly be followed by anything else. And whether the Bounder deserved it or not, there was no doubt about what the sneak deserved. And Bunter was about to receive his deserts.

Wriggling and gasping in the grasp of the angry juniors, Billy Bunter was whirled out into the Close, and rushed across to the Cloisters, a secluded spot whence his yells were not likely to reach the ears of authority.

And there, while half a dozen fellows spread-eagled him on the old flagstones, Bolsover major larruped him with a cricket-stump, till the dust rose from Bunter's trousers in clouds, and yells rose from him crescendo.

Meanwhile, Vernon-Smith was "facing the music" in another way.

The Bounder had followed his Form-master quietly into the study, and the door was shut. Mr. Quelch stood with one hand on his table, in the other the postcard. His stern eyes were fixed upon the junior before him.

"You understand that this is a very serious matter, Vernon-Smith!" he said icily.

"Yes, sir."

"The name signed on this postcard is that of a very disreputable character."

"A thorough rascal, sir," said the Bounder quietly. "He has been in prison, and has lately been released."

"And with such a man you, a Greyfriars boy, are in communication?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Quelch held up the postcard.

"Then what does this mean?"

"It does not mean what you suppose, sir. I can explain."

Mr. Quelch sat down. The cool steadiness of the Bounder's voice and look seemed to make an impression upon him.

"I am willing to hear what you have to say, Vernon-Smith. Unless you can explain in the most satisfactory manner, I need not tell you that it is my duty to place the matter before the Head. Your expulsion from the school will immediately follow. On a previous occasion, this kind of conduct was brought home to you, and the Head pardoned you upon your solemn promise to reform. That promise, I believed, had been kept. If it has been broken, you know what to expect."

Vernon-Smith winced.

"Now explain this—if you can!" added the Form-master. "What communication have you had with this man Hawke to receive this reply?"

"None, sir."

"Do you mean to say that the man has written to you without any communication from you to cause him to do so?"

"I do, sir."

There was a pause.

"That is a very extraordinary statement to make, Smith," said Mr. Quelch at last.

"I know it, sir. But consider—if I had taken up that kind of thing again, do you think I should be fool enough to let the man send me postcards like that? Gosling might read any postcard when he takes it in from the postman. Any fellow might see it in the rack—any master or prefect. If I wanted Jerry Hawke to send me a tip, there are a dozen safe ways of doing it—a letter, or I could meet him if I liked. That postcard coming here openly is proof enough that I didn't want it to come."

"Certainly it was most incautious. But why should the man send you this communication against your will?"

"I will tell you, sir. He has been in prison, as I said. He has come out penniless. He has been warned off the course, and cannot practise as a bookmaker now, excepting by hanging about in public-houses and that kind of thing. He is hard up, and he thought he could get money out of me."

"You mean that you had dealings with him in the past?"

"I confessed that to the Head, sir."

"Before your promise to the Head?"

The Bounder winced again.

"Yes, sir."

"And now——" said Mr. Quelch.

"Now he has written to me twice, asking me for money. I have taken no notice of his letters. I put them in the fire as soon as I received them. He threatened to make trouble for me if I did not meet him again—to give him money, of course. This is his way of making trouble. He has sent this postcard on purpose, not because I have any dealings with him, but because I refuse to have any."

Mr. Quelch scanned the junior's face while he was speaking.

The face was very earnest, and there was a ring of truth in the Bounder's tones. The Remove-master's brow cleared.

"You know, sir, all correspondence is subject to inspection by the Head. That is the rule here, though Dr. Locke doesn't often enforce it. The rotter wanted this to be seen, that's why he put it on a postcard. As it happens, it wouldn't have been noticed if Bunter has not been spying."

"I believe you, Vernon-Smith," said the Form-master, after quite a long pause. "You say you have destroyed the man's letters?"

"Immediately I had them, sir."

"That is unfortunate. What he is attempting is blackmail, and with the letters it would have been possible to place the matter in the hands of the police. If you should receive another letter from him, Smith, bring it to me at once, and a charge shall be laid against him without loss of time."

"Very well, sir."

"I will keep this postcard," said Mr. Quelch, placing it in his desk. "I have said that I believe you, Vernon-Smith. But in view of your previous conduct you cannot be too careful. If you have not erred since you made your promise to the Head, you have nothing to fear. Anything the man may say against you previous to that date will not have the slightest effect. If he makes another attempt to blackmail you, he shall be dealt with as severely as the law allows. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir."

The Bounder left the study. As he passed through the doorway he hesitated and paused. The Form-master looked at him sharply.

"Have you anything more to say, Smith?"

"No, sir," said the Bounder hastily.

He quitted the study, and closed the door. But his face did not clear as he went down the passage. There was deep trouble in his look as he strode out into the Close. From the direction of the Cloisters a fat figure came running, with a troop of juniors whooping after him. It was Billy Bunter. He dashed past Vernon-Smith, and ran into the School House.

His pursuers halted, to gather round the Bounder.

"He won't sneak again in a hurry," grinned Bob Cherry, "if that's any satisfaction to you, Smithy. I suppose it's all u.p. with you?"

The Bounder's lip curled.

"It may surprise you to learn that it isn't," he replied.

"Not sacked!" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"No!"

"Good luck! Congrats!" said Skinner. "But how on earth did you dodge it? You must have been awfully deep to pull the wool over Quelch's eyes, after what he'd seen."

"The deepfulness must have been terrific!" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

The Bounder sneered.

"Sorry to disappoint you," he said. "But I'm not sacked—I'm not even in disgrace."

"But—but why not?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I've explained to Mr. Quelch."

And the Bounder turned on his heel and walked away, leaving the Removes staring after him in astonishment.

"Well," ejaculated Bulstrode, "this beats the band! How on earth could he explain to Quelch? There wasn't anything to explain; that postcard spoke for itself."

"It's his luck!" said Tom Brown. "Smithy always falls on his feet."

"Blessed if I can understand it!" said Nugent.

Nobody could quite understand it. But the fact was clear enough. Vernon-Smith had not been sacked; and he was not even in disgrace. And the juniors remained in a state of perplexity, for the Bounder's obstinate pride would not permit him to vouchsafe any explanation to them.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Shadow of the Past!

HARRY WHARTON and Frank Nugent were at tea in Study No. 1 in the Remove passage.

The handsome face of the captain of the Remove was not so cheery as usual. He seemed to be deep in thought, and the two juniors had been silent for some time. Nugent, with a slightly amused glance at his chum, broke the silence at last.

"Penny for 'em?"

Wharton started a little.

"Eh? What?"

"Penny for 'em! Though I don't think they're worth it, as I can guess what you're thinking about," said Nugent, laughing.

"It's the Bounder," said Harry, and he did not smile.

"I thought so. It was rather a shock to me," said Nugent.

"I really thought he meant business this time. It certainly

looked like it. Never saw a chap who seemed so much in earnest as he did when he was handling Hazel, and trying to persuade him to chuck up that silly game. And now—

"He was always jolly deep," said Harry. "I feel an ass for letting him take me in. We knew that he went on in the old way after the time he was up before the Head—he broke his promise to the Head. But that was long ago. Since he gave us his word that it was all over, we've made a chum of him, and had faith in him. Now it seems that he's been pulling our leg all along. There seems to be no end to his humbug. All this term he's been thoroughly decent, so far as I knew. And now it comes out—"

Tap!

"Come in!" called out Nugent.

The study door opened, and Vernon-Smith came in. The chums of the Remove met him with grim looks, and the Bounder smiled in a sneering way as he saw it. Vernon-Smith seemed to be quite the old Bounder again now.

"Well?" said Harry shortly.

"You were talking about me, I suppose?" said Vernon-Smith.

"Yes."

"Condemning me in my absence, without giving me a chance to speak for myself?" said the Bounder, with a sneer.

"You've had plenty of chances to speak for yourself, if you want to," said Wharton, his cheeks flushing. "But if you've been taking us in, the less said the better. You gave us your word—"

"Or you wouldn't have admitted me to the honour and glory of your esteemed friendship?" said Vernon-Smith, in the same tone.

"I don't set up as a model," said Harry, biting his lip. "But that kind of thing's blackguardly, and you know it, and I don't want to have anything to do with a fellow who goes in for it. And it must come out sooner or later, and you'll be expelled, and that's a disgrace for the Remove, and for the whole school for that matter."

"I suppose it's natural you should take it like that," said Vernon-Smith, after a pause; "but you happen to be wrong this time. I haven't broken the word I gave you. Jerry Hawke wrote this postcard to me, to do exactly what it has done—to get me into trouble."

"And why?"

"Because I won't have anything to do with him."

"Oh!" said Wharton and Nugent together.

That view of the case had not occurred to them before. They sat looking at the Bounder in uncomfortable silence, and he went on:

"If you think I'm a humbug, you might give me credit for a little common-sense. When I used to have tips from bookies, I didn't have them sent here on postcards that anybody might read."

"Well, I thought it was awfully reckless," said Wharton.

"Do you believe what I say?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so. I never thought of that," said Harry slowly. "I know Loder of the Sixth was down on you when you chucked up the old game. I dare say this rotter might feel the same way. I suppose he's been trying to get money out of you?"

"Exactly."

Wharton looked at him steadily.

"He can be sent to prison for that," he said. "If it's all above-board, Smithy, you needn't be afraid of being down on him."

"It's all above-board, as far as you fellows are concerned," said the Bounder quietly; "but not so far as the Head is concerned. Jerry Hawke has a hold over me, and since he came out of prison he's been using it. You remember the time when I was bowled out, and the Head pardoned me, partly owing to my father's influence? I promised him that nothing of the kind should occur again. I did that simply to get out of a hole; I had no intention whatever of keeping to it. And I didn't keep to it. If I had, this fellow would most likely have rounded on me then. I went on in the same old way for a long time, till—well, till the time came when I saw that I was playing the giddy goat, and I chucked it for good. That was the end of last term. I gave you fellows my word that it was all over—and it was."

"And you've kept to that?"

"I have kept to it. But that was some time after my promise to the Head. And Jerry Hawke was in prison then, for some swindle or other, but now he's come out. He's written to me for money."

"And it's in his power to tell the Head that you had dealings with him after the date of your promise to Dr. Locke?" said Wharton slowly. "Is that it?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"I wouldn't care what he might say," he replied; "but he's got proof—proof in my writing."

"My hat!"

"You were ass enough to let him have anything of yours in writing?" exclaimed Nugent.

"No. It's a letter of mine to Cobb, at the Cross Keys, that he's got hold of," said the Bounder moodily. "At

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least, he says he has. Cobb is straight enough in his way; he wouldn't go back on a fellow. But this rotter has managed to get hold of the paper somehow—so he says. If the Head saw it, he would know that I broke my promise to him. The date would be enough for that."

"And the man's going to give you away?"

"So he says. I've had two letters from him, asking for money. Only—only he mentioned my letter to Cobb in them, you see, so I couldn't use them against him without giving myself away, so I burnt them. Now he's sent me this postcard, to get me into a row. I've explained it away—I've told Quelch the truth about that. But if he saw that old letter, all the fat would be in the fire again. He believes what I've told him about that tip on the postcard; but if he had proof that I went back on my promise to the Head, of course he wouldn't believe it any longer. And he'll have proof, unless I can get the letter away from Hawke."

Wharton whistled softly.

"By Jove! You are in a hole!" he said.

"If I could make the Head believe that I'd been going straight all this term, it would be all right; but I couldn't. That postcard would knock it on the head, taken along with the letter to Cobb, which Hawke can produce whenever he wants to—at least, he says so. Hawke wants me to meet him outside the school, and he will show me the letter, to prove what he says. If he's really got it—and I'm pretty sure he has—the game's up with me, unless I can make terms with him. You fellows told me you would stand by me if I gave up that game. I've done it, and stuck to it. Can you help me now?"

"What date is the letter?"

"I forget exactly—but it was last term."

"After your promise to the Head?"

"Long after."

The chums of the Remove were silent. It was useless to tell the Bounder that he ought to have kept his promise; he was only too well aware of that. And they believed him now, fully. It was not the first time he had found himself in trouble since he had reformed. It was the shadow of the past falling upon the new and more honourable path the black sheep of the Remove was trying to follow.

"Well, it is rotten luck!" said Wharton at last. "Blessed if I know what to advise!"

"There's one thing I can do," said the Bounder grimly.

"I can chuck up being decent, and get into the old gang again. Jerry Hawke would welcome me with open arms."

"You won't do that!"

"It looks as if I shall be sacked if I don't."

Wharton made an uneasy movement. Certainly it did not seem easy for a fellow who had once gone in the wrong path to get into the right one again.

"You won't do that, anyway," said Harry. "You must get that letter away from the scoundrel somehow. He wants money for it?"

The Bounder shook his head.

"He won't sell it—that's not his game. His idea is to keep it, and keep on bleeding me as long as I'm at Greyfriars."

"The rotter!"

"Calling him names won't do much good. Can you advise me what to do?"

"You might go to the Head, and make a clean breast of it," suggested Nugent.

The Bounder laughed bitterly.

"Go to him, and tell him I've broken my promise once!" he said. "Tell him I'm owning up because I know I'm just going to be found out! What would that do for me?"

"You must get that letter," said Harry.

"Then you advise me to go out and meet Hawke? Ever since his first letter to me, he's been waiting for me at night outside the school."

"You can't break bounds at night."

"He won't meet me any other time. That's his little game, of course—to get me into it deeper and deeper. If I don't meet him, he's going to give me away; and if I do—well, I shall have broken bounds at night, and that will be another point against me when it all comes out!"

"The scoundrel!" said Harry, compressing his lips. "But—but you must make terms with him somehow. It's not much good going to the Head and telling him you've broken your promise. He'd never trust you again, that's a cert!"

"Well, he couldn't be expected to," said Nugent.

"I know that," said the Bounder moodily. "But it comes pretty hard, to be knocked out like this when I'm trying to do the decent thing. Suppose I'm found out when I get out of the dormitory to-night. There's always danger. Loder has had his eye on me ever since I broke with him, and he'd be glad to do me an ill turn!"

"You can't go out," said Harry decidedly. "It's too

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risky. It would be the finish for you if you were bowled out."

"Then what's to be done?"

"Somebody will have to meet the rotter, and try to make terms with him for you," said Harry uneasily. "I—I will try, if you like."

"You!"

"I said I'd stand by you if you went straight, and I meant it," said Wharton. "I'll see the man, and see what terms he'll agree to. If he'll hand over the letter for a sum of money, it seems to me you'd better pay it, and get clear!"

"I'd do that willingly enough; but he won't!"

"I'll do what I can with him," said Harry. "I dare say ten pounds in a lump would make him change his mind. If you'd stand that—"

"It isn't a question of money—I've got plenty of that," said the Bounder, with a touch of his old manner. Vernon-Smith seldom forgot that he was the son of a millionaire, with an almost unlimited allowance. "If you could fix it up with him, it would be all right. At any rate, if you'd meet him instead of me, he wouldn't have any fresh hold on me by getting me outside the school at night. Of course, it's possible that he's lying, and hasn't the letter at all, and it is only a trick to get me outside the school for some reason of his own!"

"Where will he be waiting for you?" asked Harry.

"In the spinney near the stile at eleven o'clock."

"All right; I'll go!"

"You're a good chap, Wharton," said the Bounder, with some touch of emotion in his hard face. "If you get me out of this hole, I sha'n't forget it!"

Wharton nodded, and the Bounder left the study. Frank Nugent looked curiously at his chum. Wharton's face was darkly clouded.

"You're in for it now," Nugent remarked.

"I couldn't do less," said Harry, in a worried tone. "I said I'd stand by him!"

"But if you should be bowled out—"

"I've got to risk that!"

But the risk was great, and Wharton knew it. If it should come out that he had left the school at night to meet such a character as Jerry Hawke, the one-time bookmaker and present gaolbird, the consequences would be very serious for him, and he knew it only too well.

But he did not hesitate about it. That evening a good many fellows noticed that Harry Wharton's face was clouded, but they did not guess the reason.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Wharton's Venture!

LODER of the Sixth saw lights out for the Remove that night. The prefect looked very curiously at Vernon-Smith. The story of the postcard from Jerry Hawke had been talked over in the School House, and had evidently reached Loder's ears.

In the old days Vernon-Smith had been very "thick" with Loder and other black sheep in the Sixth, and he had earned Loder's bitter enmity by throwing them over. Loder detested the reformed Bounder even more than he did his old enemies, Harry Wharton & Co.

"I hear you are up to your old tricks again, Smith," Loder remarked.

The Bounder made no reply.

"For my part, you never took me in," said Loder, compressing his lips. "But take care, my boy! Let me catch you tripping, and you'll know it! I've had my eye on you for some time!"

The Bounder was still silent; and as he refused to be drawn, Loder growled, and put out the light, and left the dormitory.

Harry Wharton did not think of sleep.

He had to be in the spinney at eleven o'clock, if he was to keep his word to the Bounder, and he never thought of not keeping it. But Loder's words had made him feel more uneasy.

After the incident of the postcard, Loder's desire to catch the Bounder tripping might lead him to keep a sharper look-out than usual. Loder's wishes in that direction had been baffled hitherto by the fact that the Bounder was really keeping straight; but the bully of the Sixth was not likely to lose an opportunity if one occurred.

Only, if a discovery should be made this particular night, it would not be the Bounder who would be caught, but Harry Wharton.

Wharton lay silent while the other fellows were talking, answering only in monosyllables when he was addressed. By ten o'clock most of the fellows were asleep; but it was not till half-past ten had sounded from the clock tower that Wharton rose.

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He was dressing quietly in the darkness, when a whisper came from the Bounder's bed:

"You up, Wharton?"

"Yes," said Harry, in the same tone.

The Bounder was sitting up in bed, peering towards the captain of the Remove in the darkness.

"I say, if—if you don't like the idea, don't go," he whispered. "I don't want you to run the risk for me. After all, why should you go?"

"That's all right."

"You heard what Loder said. He may be keeping a look-out. If he should spot you outside the dormitory—"

"Better me than you," said Harry quietly.

"Your reputation would stand it better than mine, you mean," said the Bounder, in his old, ironical tone.

"Yes," said Harry, "that's what I mean, Smithy."

"Look here, you'd better let me go—"

"I'm going!"

Harry Wharton's tone was quite decided, and the Bounder said no more.

Wharton finished dressing, and tiptoed to the dormitory window. There were easier ways out; but it was possible that Loder might make a round of the School House, and Wharton did not want to risk meeting the prefect in the passages. The window was already open at the top. Wharton pushed up the lower sash.

"I'll close it after you," said the Bounder's voice at his side. "I sha'n't sleep till you come back, either!"

"Right-ho!"

"Take care of the ivy!"

"That's all right!"

"It's risky!" the Bounder muttered uneasily.

Wharton smiled.

"That's nothing; I've done it before."

He slipped out of the window upon the sill, and grasped the stout tendrils of the ivy in his hands. It was a risky descent—very risky indeed for any fellow who could not depend upon his nerve. But Wharton's nerve was all right, and he had made the same descent before on more than one occasion.

But the Bounder watched him very anxiously from the open window, till a faint whistle below signalled that Wharton was safe upon the firm earth. Then Vernon-Smith closed the window quietly, and returned to bed, but not to sleep.

Harry Wharton, as he released his hold upon the ivy, stood back against the wall in the deep shadow, and looked about him before he ventured into the Close. All was shadowy and silent about him, the darkness in the Close broken only by the light from curtained windows in the School House. The masters were still up, and many of the seniors, the Sixth Form having the privilege of going to bed at any time they pleased. But the house was locked up, the Close deserted.

Wharton left the ivied wall, and cut across the Close, glad when he was in the deep shadow of the old elms.

There, before he climbed the school wall, he paused to look back. He could see the lighted windows gleaming against the great, dark mass of the School House.

His heart was beating quicker than usual. It was not only that he was breaking bounds; he had done that before. But breaking bounds to get in a supply of "tuck," or to play some boyish prank, was very different from his present purpose—that of going to meet a disreputable character in secret. It was for another's sake; but Wharton could not help feeling a sense of guilt.

As he looked and listened, there was a sound in the Close, and he crouched back into the shadow of one of the elm-trees.

Two figures came along in the gloom, following the path. Wharton could not distinguish them, but he had made out from their height that they were seniors. His heart beat faster. A voice came to his ears—the voice of Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars.

"It's all serene, Courtney."

"Seems so," said Courtney.

"May as well get in, I think," said Wingate, with a yawn.

"Loder seemed to have been suspicious about nothing."

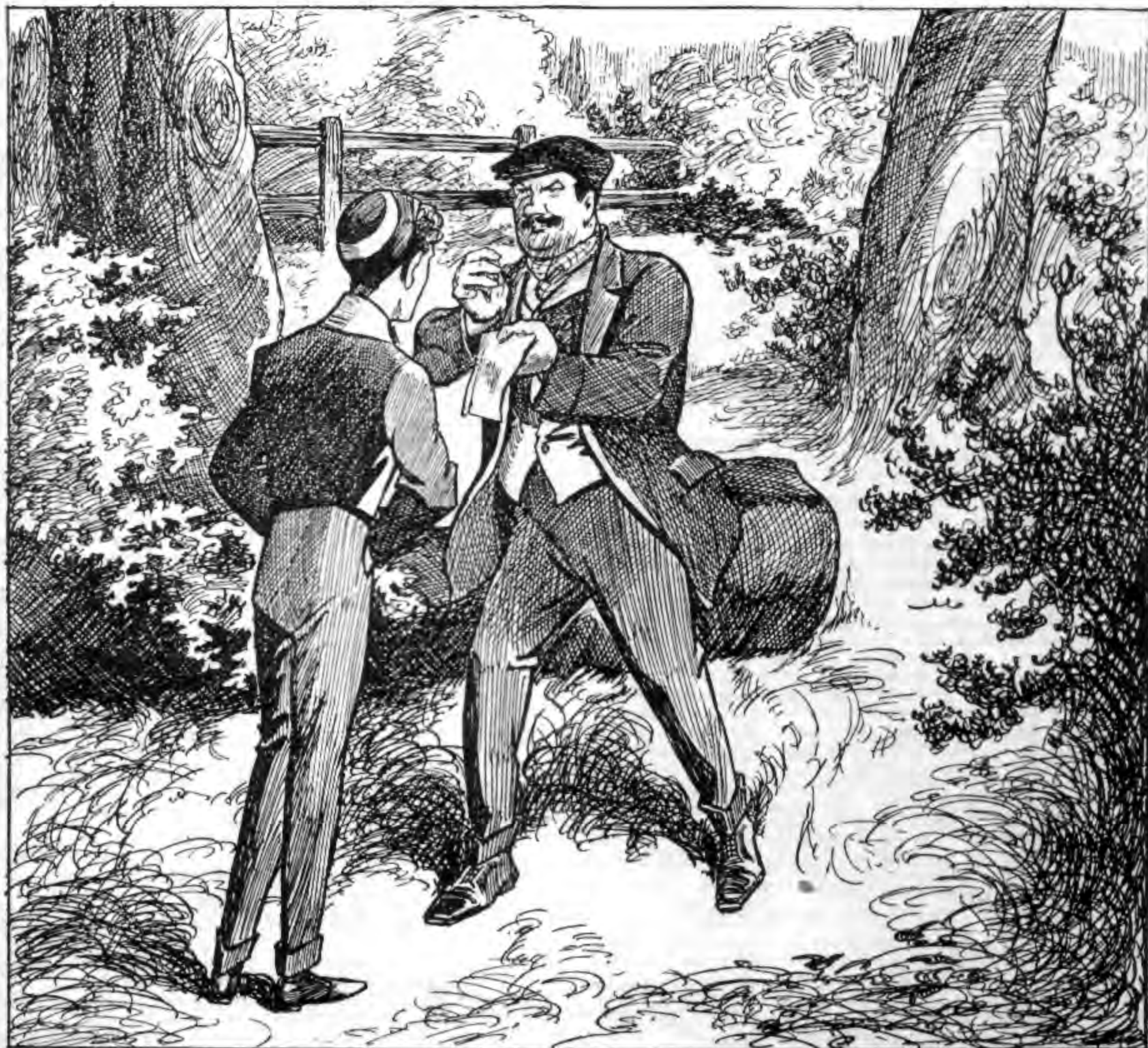
And the two prefects passed on.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath. His uneasiness had been well-founded; Loder had warned the captain of Greyfriars, and Wingate had made a round of the school at that late hour. If they should go to the Remove dormitory—

Wharton drove that thought from his mind. He heard a distant deer close, and then he climbed the school wall, and dropped into the road.

In the dim starlight, he started at a run for his destination. He knew that it was close upon eleven now. And, indeed, as he came in sight of the dark spinney, where Mr. Jerry Hawke was waiting for the Bounder, eleven strokes pealed out from the distant village of Friardale, sounding softly through the summer night.

The scent of a strong tobacco greeted Wharton's nostrils



Wharton glanced at the letter Hawke held in his hand. As far as he could judge in the flickering light of the match, the letter was in the Bounder's writing. "How much do you want for it?" he asked. "Two quid down, and more when I choose to ask for it!" answered Hawke coolly. (See Chapter 5.)

as he plunged into the spinney. The red glow from the bowl of a pipe caught his eye. A dark form detached itself from the shadows, and started towards him, at the sound of his hurried breathing.

"So that card fetched you, did it, Master Smithy? You've come?"

"I've come!" said Wharton quietly.

He heard a startled oath.

"Who are you?" A match scratched out, and a dark, stubby, liquor-coarsened face peered into his under the dark trees. "What game's this?"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Straight From the Shoulder!

THE match went out, and Mr. Jerry Hawke became a black shadow once more.

He stretched out his hand, and grasped Wharton by the shoulder.

"Wot game's this? I know you—Harry Wharton! Wot

Wharton jerked his shoulder away from the rascal's touch.

"Don't touch me!" he rapped out angrily.

"'Igh and mighty, ain't we?" said Mr. Hawke. "Mustn't

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be touched, wot? Well, I don't want no words with you. Where's my old pal Smithy?"

"I've come instead."

"And why can't Smithy come?" demanded Mr. Hawke, evidently angry and disappointed. "I don't want no truck with you!"

"He can't come; it's too risky!"

"No more risky for him than for you, fur as I see," replied Mr. Hawke. "Howsumever, so long as you talk business, I'm your man. I suppose Smithy's told you?"

"He's told me that you hold a letter of his, not written to you, but to Mr. Cobb, and that you are holding it over his head to squeeze money out of him," said Wharton sternly.

Mr. Hawke chuckled.

"Well, that's about the size of it," he agreed. "If Smithy chooses to go back on his old pals, he's got to pay the piper. I got 'old of that bit of paper, and I fancy it's going to be worth a little income to me—wot?"

"You have been in prison, I understand?" said Harry.

"I've 'ad trouble!" snarled Mr. Hawke. "Wot's that to you? Anybody might 'ave a little trouble, owin' to a misunderstandin'—a matter of signin' a letter."

"You may find yourself back there, if you're not careful, that's all," said Harry. "But I've come to make terms with you."

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"Now you're talking," said Mr. Hawke, in a tone of satisfaction. "My old pal Smithy knows my price—two quid down to begin with. 'Ave you brought the quids?"

"I've brought nothing!"

"Then wot's the good of your coming at all?" demanded Hawke. "By gum, I've a mind to go straight up to the school this very minute, and 'and my paper over to the 'Ead!"

"In the first place, you've got to prove that you have the paper," said Harry. "Vernon-Smith has told me what it should be like, and if you have it, I shall recognise it. You must show it to me. You won't be paid for nothing."

"And if I show it——"

"Then we can make terms."

"No snatchin', mind!"

"I shall not snatch it," said Wharton contemptuously.

Mr. Hawke fumbled in an inside pocket, and there was a sound of crackling paper.

"I'll strike a match, so that you can see," he said.

Hawke struck a match, and Wharton glanced at the letter Hawke held in his hand. So far as Wharton could judge in that flickering light, and in that hasty glance, it was in the Bounder's hand. And he remembered the wording of it—as the Bounder had described it to the best of his recollection, it ran:

"Dear Cobb,—You can expect me at half-past eleven; I can't make it earlier, as Quelch is very wary lately, and I'm afraid he's smelt a rat. But he goes to bed at eleven, so after that the coast will be clear. I shall bring the cash with me to settle. By-bye! V. S."

It was but seldom that the Bounder, even in his most reckless days, had been reckless enough to commit anything to writing. But the circumstances at that time had been unusual; he had lost money, and Mr. Cobb was pressing hard for a settlement, and hinting that if the debt were not speedily liquidated, trouble would follow. Vernon-Smith had obtained money from his father in time to avoid trouble. But the letter he had written had survived, to cause him worse trouble later. Cobb, the landlord of the Cross Keys, blackguard as he was, played what he called a "square" game, and he would never have used the letter against Vernon-Smith—unless the Bounder had refused to settle his debts. But the debts had been paid, and the account with Cobb cleared off. By some trick, Hawke had obtained possession of the letter apparently; and as he did not, like Mr. Cobb, pride himself upon being a "sport," he was making use of it to blackmail the son of the millionaire.

The light flickered out, and Mr. Hawke replaced the letter in his pocket, with a hoarse chuckle.

"Satisfied, my pippin?" he asked.

"Yes. How much do you want for that letter?"

"Two quid."

"And you will hand it over——"

Jerry Hawke chuckled again.

"Don't you make any mistake," he said, with emphasis.

"I ain't handing over this here letter. I'm keeping this. Mister Smithy will kindly 'and me a small sum hevery now and then when I want it. That's the programme."

"That is blackmail," said Harry.

"You can call it by any fancy name you like," said Hawke insolently. "I call it business. If my old pal turns his back on me, he can take the consequences. See?"

"Will you take ten pounds for the letter?"

"No; I won't!"

"What will you take?"

"Two quid down, and more when I choose to ask for it," said Hawke coolly. "I've got 'im under my thumb, and I'm goin' to keep him there. That's my game."

Wharton drew a deep breath.

It was as Vernon-Smith had said; the scoundrel did not intend to part with the source of his power. Vernon-Smith's reckless folly had placed him under that dirty thumb. Unless the letter could be recovered, there seemed no way out of the difficulty.

Wharton clenched his hands.

In the light of the match, he had looked the scoundrel over—he was a little man, in a far from fit condition. He was bigger, of course, than the Greyfriars junior, and much stronger, naturally; but he was in a flabby condition from excessive drinking. Harry Wharton would not have feared to try conclusions with him. And now a bold idea flashed into his mind. They were alone in the spinney—and the letter which meant ruin to the reformed Bounder was in the rascal's pocket. There was no one to interfere! Wharton's hands clenched harder, and his eyes gleamed. If the man would not give up the letter——

"Listen to me," said Harry, as calmly as he could; "you have no right at all to ask Vernon-Smith for money—you know that."

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A husky chuckle was the only reply.

"But he is willing to pay you ten pounds for that letter. Will you accept the offer?"

"No!"

"Very well, then. I shall take it from you."

"Wot!"

"You hand me that letter," said Harry determinedly, "or I shall take it!"

"Why, you cheeky whipper-snapper——"

"That's enough!! Will you hand over that letter?"

"I won't 'and over the letter!" said Mr. Hawke. "But I'll give you the 'iding of your life, if you tork to me!"

"I won't talk to you any more!" said Wharton, between his teeth. "I'll do something more than talk. For the last time——"

An oath was the only reply. Jerry Hawke's arm went up, and for the first time Wharton realised that the man was armed. He sprang back just in time as a thick stick swept downward through the air.

The blow missed him by a foot or more, thanks to his speed. The next instant, he leaped forward, and his right came out, straight from the shoulder.

Crash!

Wharton's clenched fist crashed right into the brutal, drink-soddened face. Jerry Hawke gave a low gasp, and reeled back, and bumped on the ground.

Wharton was upon him in an instant. He grasped the cudgel from the rascal's relaxing fingers, and tossed it away among the trees. Then his knee was planted upon the fallen man's chest.

The back of the rascal's head had struck the ground with a heavy thud, and he lay half dazed under the gripping knee.

He wriggled, but made no resistance as the junior dragged open his foul coat and tore the letter from his pocket.

Wharton sprang to his feet. Hawke still lay, mumbling, on the ground. The junior struck a match and took a hasty glance at the letter. One glance was enough. He thrust it into his pocket.

Jerry Hawke was scrambling to his feet, cursing savagely. He made a lurch towards the junior, and Wharton darted away in the shadowy trees. He was not afraid of Jerry Hawke, but now that he had obtained possession of the letter there was no further purpose to be served by handling him. He ran quickly through the spinney, the ruffian cursing and stumbling clumsily after him, and leaped into the lane. Then he hurried away in the direction of Greyfriars, and the voice of Jerry Hawke, mumbling threats and cathes, died away behind him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Narrow Escape!

HARRY WHARTON halted, breathing hard, at the school wall.

He paused for a few moments there to recover his breath before climbing. It was getting towards midnight, and the precincts of the school were quiet and still. Wharton's heart was throbbing, but he felt a keen sense of satisfaction. The rascally blackmailer was disarmed now. He had refused to make terms, and the letter had been taken by force, and Jerry Hawke was left with the mark of Wharton's fist upon his beery face. The captain of the Remove had good news for the Bounder, and he did not regret the risk he had run. He slipped his hand into his pocket to assure himself that the letter was safely there. Then he climbed the wall and dropped into the Close.

Late as the hour was, more than one window gleamed with a light from the direction of the School House. The Head's study was lighted, and Mr. Quelch's. Wharton came through the elms and scanned the House as he drew towards it, and was relieved to see that Loder's window was dark. It was not likely that the cad of the Sixth would be up so late, but he had feared it. He knew how keen the prefect was to catch the Bounder tripping since Vernon-Smith had turned his back upon him.

Wharton scudded towards the wall under the dormitory window, and then suddenly he darted into the shelter of an angle of a building. A low footfall had caught his ear. A figure loomed up in the gloom.

A gleam of starlight fell momentarily upon the face of Gerald Loder of the Sixth. The prefect was on the watch.

Wharton crouched back behind the corner of the gym. He understood why the prefect's light was out. Loder suspected that a junior was out of bounds, and he had turned

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out his light before going out into the Close to keep watch and ward. Wharton's heart sank at the thought that perhaps the prefect had already been to the Remove dormitory and discovered his absence.

If so, it was useless to conceal his return. And yet, if Loder knew that he was out of doors, why was he keeping watch in the Close? Having once proof that he was out of the dormitory, that lonely vigil would not be necessary.

Why he should keep watch under the dormitory window instead of looking into the dormitory itself was a puzzle. But that was evidently what he was doing. Wharton peered round the corner as the footfalls ceased. He caught a view of Loder's back. The Sixth-Former was standing away from the House, and looking upwards at the windows of the Remove dormitory. He remained in that attitude for some minutes, and Wharton heard a faint mutter from him in the stillness of the night. Then the prefect moved again, and disappeared into the shadow of the thick ivy clustering on the wall. After that no sound came from him, and he was invisible in the shadows.

Wharton remained in cover, his heart beating. He wondered what had happened during his absence. Loder had evidently some grounds for suspicion, and his suspicions were directed towards the dormitory, not towards the junior who was out of bounds. So long as he remained watching there, it was impossible to climb to the window. Wharton thought of skirting the house and climbing in through a back window. But the windows were all fastened inside, and the thought immediately occurred to him that probably Carne or Walker was on the watch inside the House, in case the Remove dormitory door should open. Loder was quite likely to have the assistance of his associates in his self-imposed task.

Wharton set his teeth.

"I've got to get in at the window! But how?"

He waited. Twelve o'clock struck from the old tower. There was no sound or movement from Loder. He was silent and concealed at the ivied wall.

If Wharton had returned a quarter of an hour later—at this moment—he would have walked fairly into the arms of the hidden prefect. He gritted his teeth at the thought. If it had been Wingate or Courtney, it would have been different. But Loder was not actuated by any sense of duty as a prefect. It was not a sense of duty, but personal malice, that kept him out of bed at that hour; and although it was the Bounder he suspected, he would certainly have been better pleased to "bag" his old enemy, the captain of the Remove. But the junior, fortunately, had escaped so far. But how was he to get back into his dormitory?

There was only one way. Loder did not move. He seemed to have settled down on the watch, with the patience of a lynx watching its prey.

Wharton deliberately coughed.

A rustle of the ivy followed as Loder detached himself from the wall at the sudden sound in the stillness of the Close.

Wharton coughed again.

There was a sound of rapid though cautious footfalls. Loder was hurrying in the direction of the unexpected sound. Wharton scudded away under the elms, his footfalls being quite audible to the prefect. There was a sharp exclamation from Loder:

"Stop!"

Wharton had no intention of stopping. He intended to lead the prefect in pursuit, to get him away from the dormitory wall, trusting to good fortune and his own resource to be able to elude him and double back in time to climb to the window. Loder caught a glimpse of the scudding figure, but of course had no chance of recognising him in the darkness.

"Stop!" he called out again. "I know you! Stop, Vernon-Smith!"

Wharton grinned to himself. The prefect fancied that it was the Bounder he was pursuing under the shadows of the old elms. Wharton did not stop, and the prefect came dashing at top speed on his track. The junior left the trees, and dodged round the gymnasium, with the prefect hot on his track. Wharton paused, and flattened himself in the darkness against the wall of the gym, and he heard the prefect pause too, and listen for a guiding sound. The junior had picked up a stone. Keeping in the shadow, and making no sound, he hurled the stone towards the school wall, at a distance.

Clink!

The stone struck the wall and fell to the ground.

Loder swung round, and dashed away towards the school wall. The fall of the stone there had had the desired effect. The prefect jumped to the conclusion that the fugitive was climbing the wall to get outside.

Wharton, on tiptoe, stole round the gym again, and hurried to the School House. In a minute more he was climbing the ivy with desperate haste towards the dormitory window.

Loder was groping along the school wall at a distance of fifty yards or more.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"LOOKING AFTER UNCLE!"

EVERY
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ONE
PENNY.

Wharton did not lose a second. Panting and breathless, he clambered up, the ivy swaying and rustling under his weight. He reached the sill and tapped softly on the window.

It opened from within. The face of the Bounder peered at him in the darkness.

"Have you—"

"Not a word!" whispered Wharton.

"But Loder—"

"It's all right."

Wharton dropped silently in at the window, and closed the sash without a sound. He stripped off his clothes in haste.

"Quiet!" whispered Vernon-Smith. "I think Carne's keeping watch on the dorm at the end of the passage. Did you see Loder?"

Wharton chuckled softly.

"He's hunting me in the Close."

"He didn't see you?"

"Not to know me."

"Good!"

Wharton undressed rapidly. The Bounder was already between the sheets. The rest of the Remove were fast asleep. No one had awakened.

"You've had a close shave," came the whispering voice of the Bounder. "After you were gone Loder came in, spying. He thought I intended to get out, you see. He spoke to me."

"Did he see I was gone?"

The Bounder chuckled.

"No fear! Look at your bed."

Wharton was pulling back the bedclothes to turn in. He started as he dimly made out the figure of a sleeper there.

"Why—what—"

"It's a dummy," whispered Vernon-Smith. "I made it up after you were gone. Loder only suspected me. But he looked round the dorm, and didn't see that you were out, of course. He knows you don't break bounds at night." The Bounder chuckled again. "But if I hadn't put the dummy in your bed—"

"Good egg!" said Harry. "It was a close shave."

He drew out the bolster and the cushion and folded coat that, arranged in the form of a sleeper under the bedclothes, had deceived the eye of the prefect. A moment's examination, of course, would have revealed the deception; but Loder's suspicions had not been turned towards Wharton's bed.

Wharton turned in and drew the clothes over himself. He was safe enough now. He wondered how long Loder would keep up the search.

"Loder suspected something," went on the Bounder. "He's very anxious to catch me napping. I fancy he must have got some hint from Hawke, he's so keen on it. He's not usually quite so watchful as this. I dare say he's seen the man at the Cross Keys, and Hawke may have blabbed out something to him. He's always squiffy when he has any money. But we've done the cad this time. He was quite surprised to find me in bed. And I was on tenterhooks for you. I looked out of the window afterwards and spotted him in the Close."

Wharton laughed softly.

"He was watching for you to get out of the dorm, then?"

"Yes. Carne was with him when he came in here; and I fancy Carne is keeping watch indoors, and Loder outside. They were going to nab me when I got out. I was afraid you would run right into Loder's arms when you came back. I fancy he'd be even more pleased to catch you than me."

"I jolly nearly did," said Harry. "But I led him a chase, and dodged him, and got back to the window. I suppose he's still on the hunt. Now about Hawke—"

"What luck?"

"I've got the letter."

"What?"

The Bounder's voice was sharp and loud in his surprise.

"Hush! I've got the letter."

"He gave it to you?" the Bounder exclaimed breathlessly.

"No; he refused to give it up on any terms. I pitched into him, and took it away from him," said Harry.

"My only hat! I never thought of that!" Vernon-Smith chuckled. "What a sell for Jerry Hawke. You're sure it's the right one?"

"It's the one he showed me; and it's in your hand, and worded as you told me."

"Good! I'd like to see it; but it would be too risky to strike a light. I— Hush!"

The door of the dormitory opened, and a light gleamed into the darkness. Loder, carrying a lamp, strode into the room, with Carne at his heels. He strode directly towards the Bounder's bed.

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"Come here, Carne! I want you to witness that he's gone out. Why—what—My hat! He's in bed!"

Loder almost dropped the lamp in his astonishment.

The Bounder lay there before his eyes, his head on the pillow, his eyes closed. He seemed to be sleeping calmly. Loder rubbed his eyes, and gazed at him again. He was certainly there. Carne's face was equally startled.

"Then who—who was it you chased in the Close?" he demanded.

"I—I thought it was that young hound! But—but it can't be!" stammered Loder. "Whoever it was, cleared off over the school wall. I distinctly heard him. I heard a stone drop as he was climbing over. He can't have doubled back in the time. It—it can't have been Smith!"

"One of the others—"

"They're all here," said Loder, lifting the lamp higher and looking up and down the row of white beds.

"What rotten luck!" said Carne. "It must have been a fellow from one of the other dormitories that you spotted."

"I—I suppose so," Loder was still amazed. "I—I thought it was that young cad, and that he'd got out somehow without my seeing him. But—but I suppose it must have been somebody else—not a Remove kid at all. It's queer."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a sleepy voice from Bob Cherry's bed. "Who's that? Burglars?"

Bob sat up in bed, blinking at the light. One or two other fellows had awakened also at the sound of voices and the gleam of the light.

"Begad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer. "What a row! I don't like being woke up like this, Loder, my dear fellow."

"I'm losing my beauty-sleep!" said Johnny Bull. "If you come disturbing us like this, Loder, I shall complain."

"What do you want, Loder?"

"Faith, and it's like your cheek to come here waking us up!" growled Micky Desmond. "Sure, I'll complain of ye, Loder!"

Loder gritted his teeth.

"Have any of you young rotters been out of the dorm?" he demanded.

"Eh?"

"Has anybody here been out?"

"Is that a conundrum?" asked Bob Cherry calmly. "I'm too sleepy to guess conundrums at this time of night. Try me to-morrow morning."

Loder made a movement towards him, and Bob grasped his pillow with both hands. Carne pulled his companion back.

"No good making a row at this hour!" he whispered. "Cheese it!"

Gerald Loder realised that that was true. He quitted the dormitory with Carne, and the door closed. There was an indignant buzz of comment from the awakened juniors, but Harry Wharton and the Bounder did not join in it. They were apparently still asleep; and ere long they were asleep in reality. And they did not awaken until the rising-bell clanged out in the fresh summer morning.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Bitter Blow!

VERNON-SMITH was the first out of bed in the Remove dormitory.

He had not slept till after midnight, and so he lay in sound slumber till the clang of the rising-bell awakened him. But the moment he was awake he thought of the letter. Harry Wharton's expedition had been a success, but the Bounder could not feel sure of it until he had seen the tell-tale document with his own eyes.

But he controlled his impatience. Only the Bounder and the Famous Five knew that the Remove captain had been out of bounds the previous night. The existence of the letter was a secret from everybody else, and Vernon-Smith did not run the risk of exciting curiosity by examining the letter in the dormitory.

He bathed and dressed as usual, and did not even speak to Wharton. But they were the first out of the dormitory. Wharton understood what was in his mind, and immediately the Bounder went down he followed him.

It was not till they were in the Close—which they had to themselves at that early hour—that the Bounder held out his hand for the letter.

Wharton handed it to him.

Vernon-Smith opened it and read it over eagerly. Then a bitter exclamation broke from his lips.

"Fooled!"

Wharton regarded him anxiously.

"Fooled? What do you mean, Smithy?"

"That's not the letter!"

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Wharton started.

"Not the letter?"

"No!" said the Bounder, grinding his teeth. "He's spoofed you!"

"But—but it's the letter he showed me. It's in your hand. It's the wording you described to me!" stammered Wharton, utterly taken aback by that unexpected development.

Vernon-Smith gave a bitter laugh.

"It's only a copy, all the same. It's not in my hand; it's an imitation. That's what Jerry Hawke was sent to gaol for—imitating another man's hand. He's an old hand at that kind of thing. I suppose he was afraid of something of that sort—something like what you did. He knows I'm a tough customer. So he had this copy all ready to show—it was near enough to pass by the light of a match. I dare say I should have been taken in if I'd met him instead of you. One reason why he was determined to meet me by night perhaps; in the daylight it wouldn't have passed. But it's only a copy. You can see now it's not written on my paper. It's a good imitation. The scoundrel left the original safely locked up somewhere, in case of accidents—"

"I—I couldn't guess that," faltered Wharton. "I thought it was the right letter, Smithy. I never thought—"

"Don't think I'm reproaching you," said the Bounder.

"You couldn't know. I think I should have been deceived myself, seeing it by the light of a match, as I've said. I might have taken it by force, just as you did. And, of course, he suspected that something of the kind might happen; that's why he had this ready. But there it is! This isn't the letter, and he's still got it. And now—My hat, he will be wild at what you did to him, and—Did you hurt him much?"

"Well, I gave him one good drive," admitted Wharton. "It floored him."

"He will be ratty about it. He's a spiteful brute!" The Bounder's face was clouded with anxiety now. "He may give up the idea of making money now, and have his revenge instead. It would be like him."

Wharton's brows contracted. He had done his best, as he believed at the time. But it looked as if he had made matters worse, instead of better. In his rage at the way he had been handled, it was quite likely that Jerry Hawke would throw his hopes of profit to the winds, and revenge himself instead. And if that was his decision he might arrive at the school with the fatal letter at any moment; or it might be sent to the Head by post.

"You see, he's made nothing out of the letter so far, and he knows now that we'll stop at nothing to get it away from him," said Vernon-Smith, compressing his lips. "And once he feels sure there's nothing to be made, he'll do his very worst. He may come straight here—"

"We must stop him somehow!" said Harry desperately.

"How can we?" said the Bounder moodily. "Oh, what awful luck! He may send it by post to the Head or Quelchy. We can't stop it then. We can't even see their letters, to see whether one's addressed in his hand. My word, I shall have a pleasant time this morning, waiting for the chopper to come down!"

"I'm sorry, Smithy!"

"That's all right! You did your best," said the Bounder wearily. "I should most likely have done the same in your place. By gad, it's enough to make a fellow chuck up—Hawke would be all right if I would be pally with him again."

And a hard look came over the Bounder's face. The struggle to do the right was difficult; the shadow of the past lay too darkly upon his path. By force of circumstances, it seemed that by persisting in the straight path, he would bring ruin upon himself; and that he could only save himself by going back to the old bad ways. It was a grim temptation to one whose conceptions of right and wrong were by no means firmly fixed.

Wharton understood his feelings, and he laid his hand on the Bounder's shoulder.

"Don't think of that, Smithy," he said quietly. "Play the game. We'll find some way yet of settling that scoundrel. But don't go back on your word, and on yourself. Play the game!"

"And get the sack!" said the Bounder sardonically.

"It's a rotten position, I know. But there must be some way out."

"Blessed if I see it, then! The fellow may get tipsy, and come here. That's the greatest danger. He must have been tipsy, and blabbed something out before Loder some time. That's what put Loder on the track last night. He doesn't care what he says or does when he's been drinking. He thinks I've given him the go-by, and he's ratty about it. It's natural in a way. If he comes here—"



"Good luck!" said Harry Wharton. "Better burn it while you've got the chance!" Vernon-Smith nodded, and taking a match from his pocket, struck it, and applied it to the letter. He watched it burn until only a fragment remained between finger and thumb, and then he heaved a deep sigh of relief. (See Chapter 16.)

set his teeth. "I'm not going to be sacked from the school for the sake of playing the game, as you call it! If there's no other way, I shall pal on to him again, and stave it off that way."

"Smithy!"

"I'm not going to be ruined!" said the Bounder savagely. "Haven't I done my best? There isn't a fellow in the school has been straighter than I've been this term. I've had Loder and Carne down on me because of it—and you know how much a prefect can make a junior squirm. I've chucked it all up—betting, smoking, breaking bounds—everything—and if you want to know, I've found it precious dull at times, too. But I've stuck to it. I've even gone out of my way to help others do the same. Haven't I looked after that fool Hazeldene like a Dutch uncle, and kept it dark that he took my money to gamble with? I've done more than most fellows would do. Now I've got to be shown up and ruined, because I'm trying to do the decent thing. Well, I'm fed up with it!"

"I know. But it all comes of your breaking your promise to the Head," said Harry quietly. "That's the cause of it, and you've got to pay for it, Smithy. You ought to stick to your guns, and play the game—whatever comes of it!"

"That's easy enough for you to say; you're not in the soup. I tell you a chap's whole career is ruined by being sacked from a school like this—and for such reasons! I can't be expected to stand it! I've got to save myself, and I'll save myself any way I can!"

The chapel bell rang, and no more was said. During THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 334.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"LOOKING AFTER UNCLE!"

chapel and during breakfast the Bounder's face was dark and moody, and he did not speak to Wharton again.

After breakfast he avoided the captain of the Remove. He had come to a desperate resolution, and Wharton, much as it troubled him, could hardly find it in his heart to blame the wretched junior. But even that resolution of the Bounder's might have come too late—for at any moment now the blow might fall!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Hawke Looks In!

BOTH Harry Wharton and the Bounder passed a very uncomfortable morning. They had to go through lessons as usual in the Remove Form-room, and never had they felt less inclined for the daily routine. At every step in the passage without the Bounder started. Every moment he expected to hear the husky voice of Jerry Hawke.

When Trotter, the page, looked into the Form-room the Bounder turned quite white. But the page only had a message from the Head. Lessons finished at last, after what seemed an age to the tortured Bounder, and the Remove was dismissed.

As it was Wednesday, a half-holiday at Greyfriars, the Remove were free for the rest of the day, until evening preparation. Wharton joined the Bounder as the Remove streamed out.

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"Nothing so far," he said. "It doesn't look as if he's coming, Smithy."

The Bouncer's gloomy look did not change.

"The rotter wouldn't get up till ten or eleven," he said. "If he's coming, he may come any time. He hasn't sent the letter by post, at all events, or I should have heard something of it by now. The worst of it is, that I can't see him until to-night—I shall have to go down to the spinney on the chance."

"You're going, then?" asked Harry.

"I must! I've got to keep him quiet somehow. I've been on tenterhooks the last three days. I knew I should have to see him sooner or later, but I was putting it off," said the Bouncer restlessly. "It was decent of you to go instead of me last night; but it hasn't done any good, you see."

"If you had been out, Loder would have nailed you."

"Yes, that's true; it's done that much good. But I've got to risk it to-night."

"If Loder has had a hint from Hawke, he will be as much on the look-out to-night as he was last night."

"I know. But—but I can make my peace with Loder, in the same way as with Hawke. He's only down on me because I've given him the go-by. If I'd join him in a game of nap again, and give him a chance to win my money, Loder would be all right. It isn't his sense of duty as a prefect that's troubling Loder."

"What about the match this afternoon?" said Harry, changing the subject. "Do you feel up to playing?"

"Yes, if you want me—unless you're going to give me the cold shoulder now, because I'm chucking up!" said the Bouncer bitterly.

"I'm not going to give you the cold shoulder, and I hope you'll think better about chucking up," said Harry quietly. "I think there must be some other way out—"

"Can you see one?"

"Well, no—but—"

"It's no good trying to fight against circumstances. I thought I could throw the past behind, and have nothing more to do with it; but it clings. It's not so easy to live it down," said the Bouncer. "I've done my best, and I've been beaten! But I'm going to play this afternoon, anyway; no need to let cricket go with the rest."

The Remove eleven were playing the Shell that afternoon. Very soon after dinner, Harry Wharton and his team were on the junior ground. The Shell were an older team, of course, than the Remove, and Wharton would have missed Vernon-Smith from the ranks of the Remove eleven. He had come to depend upon the Bouncer as a cricketer. When Vernon-Smith was at his best, he was very good indeed.

Hobson & Co. of the Shell came down to Little Side later, with the lofty looks the Shell fellows generally wore when they were playing the Lower Fourth. Their good opinion of themselves was not especially well founded, for the Remove won quite as many matches as they lost with the Shell.

Most of the Removes and Shell who were not playing gathered round the field to look on, and pass remarks on the game. Billy Bunter found himself a seat before the pavilion, and blinked discontentedly at the players through his big spectacles. Bunter was very much dissatisfied. There was no shaking his conviction that he was "top-hole" in the cricketing line, and that he was kept out of the Form eleven by the jealousy of fellows who did not want to be outshone. Bunter sniffed as the Bouncer came down along with the others.

"Actually playing that rotter, who ought to be booted out of the school," Bunter growled to Alonzo Todd. "Sickening I call it."

"My dear Bunter," said Alonzo, in his gentle manner, modelled upon that of his celebrated Uncle Benjamin, "I am far from approving of Vernon-Smith's character in a general way, but he is a good cricketer."

"What do you know about cricket?" snapped Bunter.

"Very little, it is true," admitted Alonzo. "I prefer reading serious literature, and meditating thereon. I have a volume here, my dear Bunter—"

"Rats!" growled Bunter. "Now, look at me!"

Alonzo looked at him.

"I'm a cricketer," said Bunter. "Look at me! If you were captain of the team, wouldn't you jump at putting in a player like me? Look at my form!"

"Your form is somewhat rotund, my dear Bunter—"

"Fathead! I mean my form as a cricketer!" howled Bunter.

"Oh! Pray excuse my misapprehension, my dear Bunter; I supposed you were alluding to your physical form, which is certainly decidedly rotund—"

"Silly ass!" said Bunter. "I suppose you mean plump. Thank goodness I'm not a bag of bones like you and Peter—"

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another silly ass who can't play cricket for toffee. Of course, the Shell will beat them hollow."

"My dear Bunter," said Alonzo soothingly, "come with me, and we will read this volume together. It is most interesting—a graphic description of missionary work in the Gooby-Booby Islands. The statistics concerning the number of tracts and pairs of trousers that have been distributed in the native language are very interesting—I mean the tracts are in the native language, of course. Let me see, one million pairs of tracts—I mean trousers—"

"Oh, shut up, for goodness sake!" said Bunter. And he rolled away, leaving Alonzo Todd to enjoy his statistics by himself.

Hobson won the toss, and the Shell batted first. Hobson and Gunn opened the innings. Hurree Jamset Singh went on to bowl. The game was soon going merrily; but it was noted that the Bouncer was not in his usual form. More than once he glanced round in the direction of the distant school gates, when he should have had his eyes on the bats. There was a groan from the Removes as an easy catch from Hobson's bat was missed by the Bouncer at cover-point. The Bouncer clutched at it too late, and the ball dropped.

Billy Bunter gave a yelp.

"Yah! Butter-fingers!"

The Bouncer coloured as he threw the ball in. He made an effort to pull himself together as Wharton's eye turned upon him. The other fellows looked at him with surprise. It was not like the Bouncer to miss a catch like that, and it had given Hobson's innings a new lease of life. And the captain of the Shell was making the most of it—he did not give cover-point another chance.

The Bouncer kept his eyes on the game after that, and so he was not the first to see a disreputable figure that joined the spectators. The public were allowed to come on the playing-fields to watch the matches, when the spirit moved them to do so, and for First Eleven matches there was frequently quite a crowd of townfolk from Courtfield and villagers from Friardale. Junior matches were not often honoured by spectators from outside the school. And the stranger who had now arrived was not exactly the kind of figure that was welcome within the precincts of Greyfriars. The fellows stared at him when he came slouching on the ground, and he returned their stares with impudent familiarity. Two or three recognised him.

"My hat!" said Bolsover major, who was lounging outside the pavilion. "That's Smithy's pal—the chap who sends him tips on postcards, you know."

"Jerry Hawke, by Jove!" said Skinner.

"Sure, he's got an awful cheek to come here!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "Gosling will soon shift him off if he sees him hanging about."

"I don't know; the public are admitted, you know," grinned Bolsover major. "The esteemed Hawke is within his rights, though he really might wash himself before he came here. My hat, he's coming this way!"

The disreputable rascal lounged towards the pavilion. Jerry Hawke had never been a respectable character in his best days; but what decency he had ever possessed had disappeared since his term in prison. His clothes were shabby and dirty, his chin was stubbly, and had apparently not been shaved for two or three days; his face was dirty, having been in want of a wash as long as his chin had been in want of a shave.

He wore a battered bowler hat on one side of his head, and a short pipe stuck from the corner of his mouth. A more disreputable figure it would have been difficult to imagine. But there was impudent confidence in his manner, and in his leering grin. The fellows he passed drew back, as if disliking to come into possible contact with the dirty ruffian. He did not seem to mind their unconcealed distaste. He bestowed a familiar nod upon Bolsover and his companions.

"Afternoon!" he said cheerily.

Bolsover major sniffed and drew back.

"I come to see my pal Smithy playin'," Mr. Hawke said confidentially. He caressed his nose, which was very red, and looked a size larger than usual, with a dirty hand. Wharton's blow had left its mark upon him. "Wot, too proud to speak to a gentleman wot's had misfortunes? My pal Smithy ain't too proud—you'll see?"

"Don't talk to me!" said Bolsover major shortly.

"I say, you fellows, tell Smithy his friend's come!" chuckled Billy Bunter.

"Hold your tongue, you fat brute!" growled Bolsover major.

"Oh, really, Bolsover!"

The bully of the Remove made a gesture, and Bunter promptly backed away. Bolsover major was on friendly terms with the Bouncer, and he was a little alarmed for him. At any moment a master or a prefect might come along to

inform Mr. Hawke that his presence was not desired within the limits of Greyfriars. And if Hawke claimed the friendship of the Bounder, it would be decidedly awkward for Vernon-Smith. Bolsover major overcame his repugnance to speak to the blackguard.

"Look here, Hawke," he said, "you'd better clear off. It will get Smithy into trouble if you hang about here."

"You don't say so!" grinned Mr. Hawke.

"Yes, I do. People of your sort aren't wanted here. Go home and get a wash," said Bolsover in great disgust.

"Oh, my pal Smithy ain't proud?" said Mr. Hawke calmly. "He'll own an old pal, you'll see. It won't be well for 'im if he don't!"

The Bounder had not seen him yet. He had gone on as a change bowler, and he had his back to the pavilion, and he was trying to devote all his attention to the game, and forget his personal worries. He sent down a ball that took Gunn by surprise, and there was a shout from the Removites as the wicket fell.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Bravo, Smithy!"

There was a ripple of hand-clapping, and Mr. Hawke joined in it ostentatiously. His big, dirty hands came together with loud claps like pistol-shots.

"Bray-vo!" he shouted. "Bray-vo!"

Vernon-Smith heard his voice among the rest, and swung round. The ball had been fielded, and was tossed back to him. He did not see it. His eyes were fixed upon the rough, bloated face of his persecutor, and the ball dropped unheeded at his feet.

Jerry Hawke caught the Bounder's startled gaze, and waved his hand to him.

"Bray-vo!" he called out again. "That's the style! Bray-vo!"

The Bounder's flushed face had gone quite white. He cast a hunted look round him.

"There's the ball, Smithy."

"Waiting for you, old man."

Hoskins had gone on to the wicket. He was waiting for the ball. But the Bounder did not take it. He gave Wharton a quick look.

"I've got to get off," he muttered. "You understand, I must get that man away from here. I—I'll try to get back for the innings."

Wharton nodded shortly; there was nothing else to be done. Vernon-Smith hurried off the ground. Every eye there followed him. Wharton, anxious to draw attention off the Bounder and his disreputable acquaintance, hurried on the game.

"Get on, Inky—quick!" he said abruptly.

Hurree Singh nodded as he took the ball; he understood. He went on to finish the over, and knocked Hoskins's middle-stump out of the ground in great style. There was a shout from the onlookers. Jerry Hawke was forgotten for the moment.

"Well bowled!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Cash Down!

VERNON-SMITH had drawn his unwelcome visitor into the pavilion. He was feverishly anxious to get him out of sight. For the moment now, at all events, Jerry

Hawke was safe from being seen from the windows of the School House, or by any master who might happen to be out of doors. The Bounder's heart was throbbing; his face was white and set. His eyes burned as he looked at the impudent, leering face of the man in whose power he was; in whose power his past folly had placed him.

"You scoundrel!" said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. "You villain! What are you doing here?"

"Better language, please," said Jerry Hawke. "Don't you go calling an honest man names, Mister Smithy, because he's 'ad trouble over a mistake in 'andwriting. This 'ere ground is open to the public, ain't it?"

"Not your sort."

"If they don't want my sort 'ere they've only got to say so," said Jerry Hawke coolly. "I'll wait 'ere till somebody fetches a master, and we'll see. I'll explain that I've come to see an old pal play cricket. They wouldn't stop me do' that when they know 'ow friendly you and me 'ave been, would they?" And he chuckled.

"Will you go?" breathed the Bounder.

"No, I won't!"

Vernon-Smith clenched his hands hard. But for the fatal letter he could have dealt easily enough with the rascal. He would have called half a dozen fellows to pitch him bodily off the school grounds. Mr. Hawke's claim to old acquaintance would not have mattered but for the letter. No one would have listened to the accusations of a half-tipsy blackguard. But the letter—The Bounder dared not quarrel with him, and Jerry Hawke was quite aware of that.

"What do you want?" Vernon-Smith panted at last.

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ONE
PENNY.

"You know wot I want. I've let you know. You sent a 'igh and mighty young gent to see me last night, and he slogged me in the chivvy," said Jerry Hawke, rubbing his inflamed nose. "He collared a letter. Much good may it do 'im and you!"

"I know it was a copy."

"I wasn't trustin' too much to you. I know you too well, you see. I know your tricks!" grinned Mr. Hawke. "I know about a little game like that wot was played on a pal of mine, who had some paper signed by young Hazeldene—a relation of mine, 'e was, and he told me about it—how he was ragged by Greyfriars kids, and made to give it up. Catch me taking risks—not likely. That there letter's in a safe place."

"Will you go?" said the Bounder desperately. "I'll meet you—I'll follow you out, if you like. I'll bring you a couple of pounds—"

"The price 'ave gone up," said Hawke calmly. "This 'ere lump on my nose 'ave got to be paid for. It's four quid now. And on the nail."

"I haven't any money in my flannels, you fool. Get out now, and I'll follow in ten minutes."

"With the four quid?"

"Yes."

"Right-ho!" said Jerry Hawke. "Now you're talking. I'll amble erlong, and I'll wait for you over the road. I'll wait ten minutes. If you ain't there by then, I'll come back. You savvy?"

"I shall be there!"

"Look out for squalls if you ain't," said Mr. Hawke.

He lurched out of the pavilion, and sauntered away. Vernon-Smith watched him with burning eyes. He would have given very nearly everything he possessed to see the rascal well off the premises. His heart beat almost to suffocation as he saw Wingate of the Sixth bearing down upon the disreputable rascal. The captain of Greyfriars had spotted him, and he spoke to him at once.

"What are you doing here, my man?"

"Ain't the public allowed 'ere to see the gimes?" demanded Mr. Hawke.

"Well, yes; but not tipsy tramps," said Wingate. "You'd better go home and get sober, and get washed, if you want to come here. Now, travel off."

Jerry Hawke leered, and moved away. The Bounder drew a deep breath of relief. The rascal had not mentioned him; but he had closed Hawke's mouth only in time. And if he did not keep his promise, the rascal would come back. The Bounder did not stay to change out of his flannels. He hurried across to the School House, and to his study; and then went down to the gates. He had no time to waste. Jerry Hawke would not wait longer than the stipulated time.

The Form match went on on Little Side, Wharton calling in a substitute to field in the Bounder's place. Thinking very little of the match he had abandoned, Vernon-Smith hurried out of the school gates, and crossed over the road. Within easy distance of the gates of Greyfriars, Jerry Hawke was leaning against a tree by the roadside, refilling his black pipe.

"Come!" muttered the Bounder.

He led the way down the road to where an opening in the palings gave admittance to the wood. Jerry Hawke followed him in a leisurely manner. The Bounder did not pause till they were out of sight under the trees. Then he turned fiercely upon the rascal.

"Have you got the letter about you?"

"Arter last night?" grinned Jerry Hawke. "I ain't quite sich a mug as that. No, I ain't got it."

"Where is it—at the Cross Keys?"

"No, it ain't. It's in a safe place—a good distance from 'ere if you want to know," said Hawke. "But I can lay my 'and on it any minute I choose. It's in the keepin' of a pal of mine, and you ain't goin' to know his name, nor yet his address. Where's those quids?"

"How much will you take for the letter?"

"I won't take nothin'," said Jerry Hawke stubbornly. "You've gone back on an old pal, and I ain't lettin' you off. You got plenty of money. Ain't I 'eard you swankin' many a time about yer father, the millionaire? Well, I'm goin' to squeeze you regler. That bit of paper will be a regler income to me. When I'm 'ard up, I drops you a line, and you drops me a quid or two—see?"

"And you think I shall stand that?"

"I think you've got to!" grinned Hawke. "I don't see no way out of it for you. Not unless you want to be kicked out of Greyfriars. And I know you don't want that. 'Thinkin' of a college career to foller, and all that—wot? I know jest wot it means to you, my pippin, and I mean to put on the screw! Wot did you go back on your old friends for? Not a word to say to a feller when he comes out arter 'aving a little trouble—sich as any man might 'ave 'ad, owin' to a

misunderstandin' about a signature. Well, my gentleman, I've got you under my thumb, and I'm going to squeeze you—see?" He held out a dirty hand. "Where is that four quid?"

The Bounder dropped the sovereigns into his palm. Jerry Hawke's eyes glistened at the sight of the golden coins. He felt each of them in turn, and then transferred them to his waistcoat-pocket.

"That's business!" he said, eyeing the clouded face of the Bounder with an amused grin. "I'm off now. I can make this last some time—only be ready for a little reminder from me!"

"You won't part with the letter?"

"No fear!"

"Very well," said the Bounder quietly, but with a glitter in his eyes that might have alarmed Jerry Hawke if he had not been quite so self-satisfied. The Bounder of Greyfriars was a dangerous customer to drive into a corner, but Hawke was only thinking of his triumph. "You've done me this time, Jerry. You've got me!"

"I fancy I 'ave," said Mr. Hawke, with emphasis. "All your own fault. If I hadn't got 'old of that letter of Cobb's,

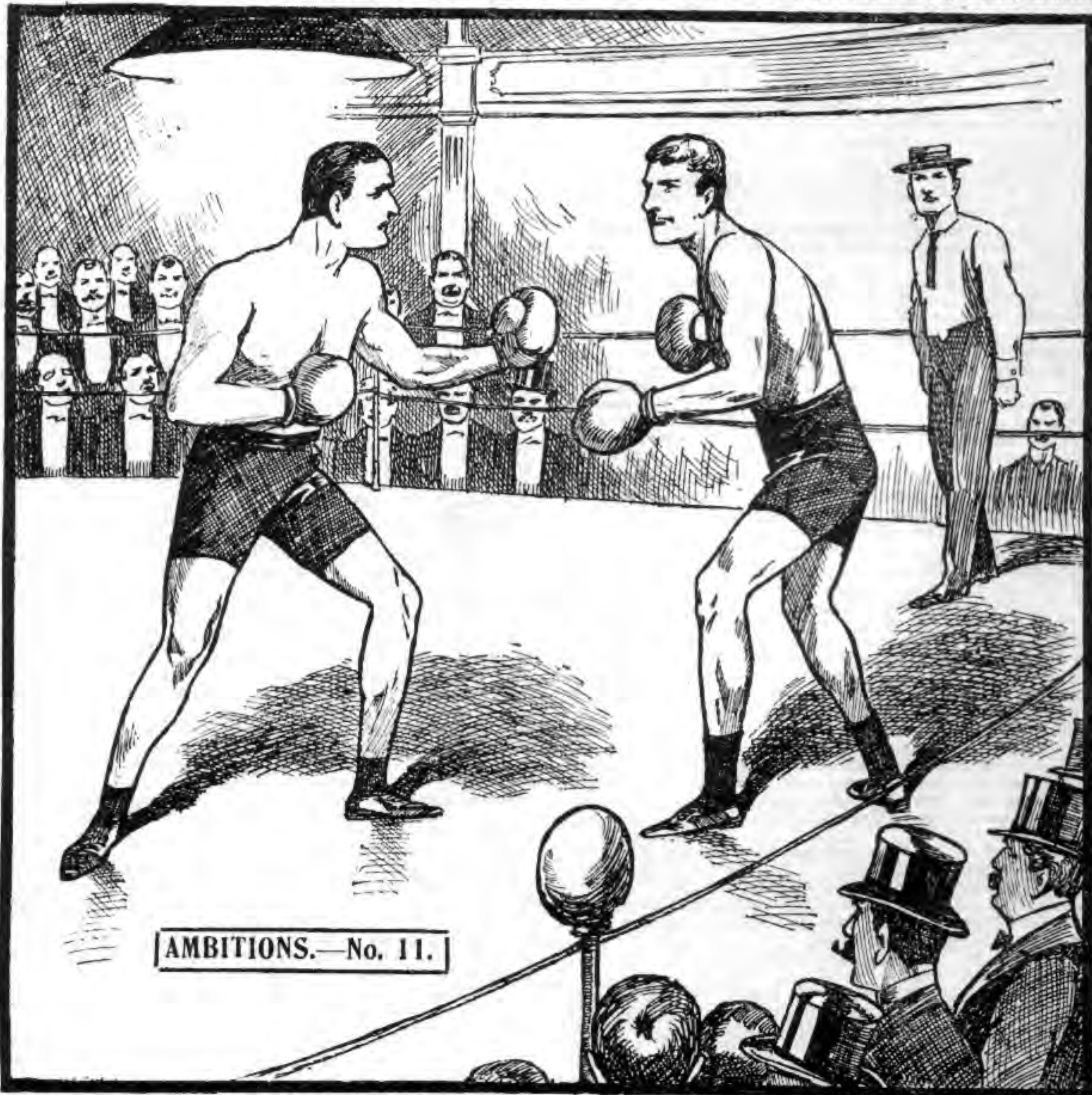
and saved it up for a rainy day, 'ow much 'elp would you 'ave given to a poor chap wot 'ad been in trouble? Shell out to your old pals—that's what I say!"

"Perhaps I've not done quite the right thing, Jerry," said the Bounder, in a more friendly tone, but still with that strange glitter in his eyes. "After all, we've had many a little game together!"

"That we 'ave," said Mr. Hawke; "and 'tain't my fault that we ain't on friendly terms now, old pal. They're all down on me since I've been in trouble—even Mr. Cobb don't make me over welcome at the Cross Keys. But I'll show 'em. I've got a tip for the Lantham Plate that will bring me in a handful of tin. Might put you on to it, if you was pally like you useter be!"

Vernon-Smith looked at him curiously. True, Mr. Hawke had been much more presentable in his palmy days, before he was "in trouble," as he called it; but it seemed amazing to the Bounder now that he had ever been on friendly terms with such a man. The change in Vernon-Smith had gone deeper than he was himself aware.

"The Lantham Plate?" said the Bounder. "That's next Tuesday. Have you got good information?"



AMBITIONS.—No. 11.

The manly and essentially British sport of boxing has many devotees among "Magnetites," some of whom, without doubt, have the makings of a boxing champion in them. It is safe to say that with this ambition to fire them, British lads will not allow the prestige of the "noble art" to diminish.



Jerry Hawke sat up, propping his back against the cold stone wall of the cell. His eyes seemed to burn as he fixed them on the Bounder. "Wot's this 'ere game?" he demanded. "Let me loose, do you 'ear!" Vernon-Smith nodded coolly. "Yes, I hear!" he said. "But it's my turn to make terms now!" (See Chapter 14.)

"Straight from the 'orse's mouth!" boasted Mr. Hawke. "Then I'll tell you what. Can you meet me somewhere on Saturday, and we'll have a talk about it?" said Vernon-Smith.

Mr. Hawke's small, beady eyes glistened. He felt that he had succeeded in bringing the millionaire's son to heel sooner than he had anticipated.

"Come down to the Cross Keys when you like," he said.

Vernon-Smith shook his head.

"It's too risky. I'm being watched in the school now. Two or three of the prefects are suspicious about me. I can't get out at night. But I'll tell you what. Make it Saturday afternoon, towards evening. It doesn't matter so much if I'm only late for calling-over. You know the old Priory?"

"I've met you there afore in the old days."

"So you have. I'll get there at dusk on Saturday," said the Bounder. "You be there, and I'll tell you what I've decided about the Lantham race. If I'm going to find money for you, I may as well try to get it out of the bookies—what?"

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Jerry Hawke chuckled hoarsely.

"Good idea, old pal! I'll be there right enough. And bring along another couple of quid for me; I shall want it by then."

"Don't forget the latest snip for the Lantham race!"

"Rely on me," said Mr. Hawke; "and I'll get your money put on for you. You treat me well, and you'll find me a real old pal!"

"That's settled, then. Mind, no more letters or postcards, and don't come to the school. Nothing till I see you on Saturday!"

"Done!"

And they parted. The Bounder hurried back to Greyfriars; and Jerry Hawke took out the four sovereigns, and chuckled over them, and then sauntered away towards Friardale at a leisurely pace.

"Brought to 'eel!" he muttered gleefully. "Fair brought to 'eel! Tryin' to make friends and be pally agin, because there's no gettin' out of it. But that don't make any difference to my 'old on 'im. I've got him under the screw, and I'll give 'im a squeeze now, and a squeeze then, and a

squeeze whenever I choose, and at every squeeze out come the shiners! Jerry, my boy, you're in clover!"

But if Mr. Hawke had known the dark and desperate thoughts that were working in the Bounder's mind, he would probably not have felt quite so certain about the clover.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Comes Out Strong!

THE Shell were all down for ninety runs, when Vernon-Smith came on the cricket-ground once more. The last wicket had just fallen as he came up to the pavilion.

"Got rid of your friend?" asked Skinner, with a grin.

"Yes, thanks!" said Vernon-Smith calmly.

"Lucky for you Wingate didn't spot you together," remarked Snoop.

"Yes, wasn't it?"

"You seem to take it pretty coolly, anyway."

"Why not?"

The Remove fieldsmen came off the ground. Harry Wharton joined the Bounder.

"You are going to bat?"

"Yes, rather."

"And—and that fellow——"

"He's gone."

"Good!" said Harry.

He did not ask any more questions.

The Remove innings opened with Wharton and Vernon-Smith. After the form—or, rather, lack of form—that the Bounder had shown in the field, the fellows did not expect his batting to amount to very much.

But they were agreeably disappointed. Vernon-Smith seemed to have thrown off entirely the trouble that had been preying on his mind. His face was clear and cool; his step was light and elastic; he had seldom been in better batting form.

In the first over he swiped away Gunn's bowling all over the field, and the over brought a dozen runs to the Remove.

"Oh, good!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Smithy is in form again! The Shell are going to catch a tartar this time!"

Bob Cherry proved a true prophet. The Shell had indeed caught a tartar. Vernon-Smith's innings was brilliant, even for him. The Shell bowling was quite unable to touch him. Harry Wharton secured twenty before he was bowled out by Gunn of the Shell, and Bob Cherry joined the Bounder at the wickets.

Bob's wicket fell, and Nugent's, and Tom Brown's followed, and then Peter Todd's, and then Hazeldene's. But the Bounder was still going strong, and by that time his individual score was fifty runs. With Wharton's twenty, and a dozen taken by the other bats among them, the Remove figure was now 82.

Harry Wharton rubbed his hands as he looked on.

"Blessed if we don't declare!" he exclaimed. "If Smithy goes on like this, we'll declare, and let the Shell bat again! Hooray! There goes another four!"

"Bravo, Smithy!"

The Bounder's fine performance at the wickets was drawing general attention now. Several seniors had strolled over to look on—a very rare honour for a junior game.

Wingate himself, the captain of the school, came along with his chum Courtney, and cheered heartily for the Bounder's latest hit. The Shell bowlers bucked up for all they were worth, but they could not touch the Bounder. It seemed certain now that he would make his century. Centuries were sufficiently rare in junior matches, and the Bounder was the cynosure of all eyes as he continued to pile up the runs.

Penfold's wicket went down, with the score at 110. The Shell first innings was hopelessly eclipsed already. Harry Wharton's eyes danced. The Shell had taken ninety runs on their first innings, and the Remove were already 110 for seven wickets.

"What about declaring, old scout?" asked Bob Cherry, giving the captain of the Remove a dig in the ribs as Bulstrode went to the wickets.

Wharton looked thoughtful.

"If we have to bat a second time, I fancy there won't be time to finish the match," he said, with a glance up at the clock tower. "The light won't last, I'm afraid. We don't want an unfinished match if we can help it. If Smithy keeps on like this, we may pile up a total to beat the Shell without batting again—what?"

Bob chuckled.

"Beat the Shell by a whole innings! Oh my hat!"

"Why not? Smithy seems to be set, and we've still got some good bats to go in. Johnny will stonewall to him—won't you, Johnny?"

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"What-ho!" said Johnny Bull. "You bet!"

"Good egg!" said Bob. "They can't shift Smithy, any way. He seemed off his form, too, in the field; but he's going like wine now!"

"I can't quite catch on to it; he seems better than ever. Something must have happened to relieve his mind," said Harry. "He was worried about that rotter. Perhaps he's managed to get rid of him for good. I hope so. It looks like it, anyway. There goes another—that's three at least! Hooray!"

"Bravo, Smithy!"

Clap! Clap! Clap!

Bulstrode's wicket fell to Hobson's bowling, and the score was at 150. Ninety belonged to the Bounder. He was making most of the running.

"Eight down for 150," said Nugent.

"Now then, Inky!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was securing his pads.

"Ready, Inky?"

"The readyfulness is terrific, my esteemed chum!"

The nabob passed Bulstrode, coming out. But Inky's luck did not hold good; he was clean bowled by Hobson at the end of the over for a couple of runs. The dusky junior made a grimace and walked out.

"Last man in. Now, Johnny!"

And Johnny Bull walked to the wicket in his slow and steady way. Johnny Bull was famous as a stonewaller, and he was quite content to keep his end up, and leave the game to the Bounder. And that was what was wanted now.

"One hundred and fifty-two for nine," said Tom Brown.

"It's ripping! We sha'n't have to bat again, unless the Shell do much better next time, I fancy."

"They can't touch Smithy, and Johnny will stop 'em for a bit," grinned Bob.

"Bravo! Well hit!"

The Bounder had the bowling again, and he was making hay of it. There was a roar as he topped the century. The Shell fellows, who were being given much more leather-hunting than they were accustomed to, were red and panting. The Bounder had made his hundred, the total score being now 164. And he looked almost as fresh as ever. The crowd round the ground was thickening. Wingate was still watching and cheering, and Coker of the Fifth had come to look on with an approving eye.

Mr. Lascelles, the mathematics master, who was a keen cricketer, was seen standing by the ropes, keenly watching that fine innings. But the fact that the eyes of half Greyfriars were upon him did not fluster the Bounder in the least. He was as cool as ice.

It was pretty certain by this time that the bowling could not touch him, and that he would be not-out at the finish, barring accidents. And Johnny was presenting a stone wall to the Shell that they could not break through. Every now and then he stole a run or two, but he took no risks; he left the hitting to Smithy. And Smithy was giving plenty of it, enough to satisfy the most exacting spectator.

"Two hundred!" roared Bob Cherry, as the figures went up. "Hurrah!"

"And the finish," said Nugent.

Johnny Bull had been caught at last. With the score of 200—of which 135 belonged to Vernon-Smith—the innings closed. There was a yell of enthusiasm from the Removites as the Bounder came off—not-out. It was the innings of his life; a higher figure than had ever been scored even by Harry Wharton, the champion bat of the Remove. Wharton clapped him on the shoulder joyfully.

"You're a giddy wonder, Smithy! It's ripping—ripping!"

"The rippingfulness is terrific, my esteemed and ludicrous Smith!"

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

"Jolly good, kid!" said Wingate cordially. "I've never seen anything quite up to that in a junior match before. Simply topping!"

The Bounder fanned himself negligently. He was feeling pleased enough; he dearly loved the limelight.

"I was lucky," he said.

"Good play all through," said Wharton. "You never gave them a chance. We sha'n't have to bat again."

That was very probable. The Shell fellows had done so much leather-hunting that they did not look very fresh for taking runs. Hobson had very little hope of winning the match now, but he hoped to make the Remove bat a second time, at least; and in that case the light was not likely to last, and the match would remain unfinished.

But even that consolation was denied to the Shell.

The Remove bowlers were in good form—Hurree Singh and Tom Brown and the Bounder. Vernon-Smith was only a change bowler, but he accounted for a couple of wickets, and he caught Hobson at cover-point. The Shell had lost heart, and their wickets went down at a rapid rate. The

score for their second innings was 70 when last man went in. And last man sent the ball, hot from the bat, right into the waiting hands of the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith tossed up the ball, and it came down with a smack again into his palm.

"All down for 70!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Hurrah!"

"Well caught!"

Hobson & Co. looked glum. They had been beaten, by an innings and forty runs. It was a crushing defeat, and no wonder that the Removites gloated. But Hobson contrived to grin at the Bounder in a sickly way.

"You've done us!" he said. "I didn't know the Remove had a giddy Jessop and Hayward and W. G. Grace rolled into one, to play for them. Blessed if I don't think Wingate ought to play you in the First, Smith!"

Which was really taking it very handsomely.

A cheering crowd accompanied the Bounder back to the School House. For that day, at least, he was the hero of the Remove.

The Bounder joined the Famous Five at tea in No. 1 Study. The chums of the Remove were in great spirits, and the Bounder seemed as cheerful as any of them.

"What a rod in pickle for St. Jude's, when we play them next Saturday!" Bob Cherry remarked.

The Bounder started.

"Next Saturday!" he repeated.

"Yes, rather; we're going over to St. Jude's," said Wharton. "They beat us last time, but you weren't in the team. You'll make them open their eyes on Saturday."

"I—I'm sorry. I can't play on Saturday."

The Co.'s faces fell.

"Can't play!" said Harry.

"No. I—I've got something on. I'm sorry!"

"Oh, rats!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "You can put it off, to play for the Form. We can't spare you, Smithy. Dash it all, you ought to feel flattered at being so much in request!"

"I do," said the Bounder, with a faint smile; "but—but I can't put it off. I can't play on Saturday."

Harry Wharton looked at him keenly, but he asked no questions. It was pretty certain that the Bounder would play if he could, and Wharton guessed the cause of his refusal—it was in connection with Jerry Hawke. Evidently the Bounder's trouble was not over yet.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder's Resolve!

HARRY WHARTON had expected that the Bounder would tell him what had happened, after the interruption of his play by Jerry Hawke that afternoon. But Vernon-Smith did not mention the matter in No. 1 Study, and after tea he did not seek Wharton. It was not till nearly bed-time that Harry found an opportunity of speaking to him. It seemed to him that Vernon-Smith was avoiding him, and that increased his uneasiness. He knew what the Bounder was capable of when he was in an extremity.

Vernon-Smith was in the common-room, reading, when Wharton found him. He put down his book, a shade coming over his face, as Wharton came up.

"I understood that I was in your confidence about this affair," said Wharton, rather abruptly.

"That's all right. What do you want to know?"

"Nothing," said Harry tartly. "I was going to ask you how you had got on with Hawke; but if you'd rather not tell me, it's no affair of mine."

"It isn't that," said the Bounder, very quietly. "I've settled what I'm going to do, that's all; and it's better for you not to know. I've given that rascal money to-day, and he refuses to give up the letter, or to tell me where it is. Some precious friend of his is taking care of it; that's all I could find out. I am still under his thumb, to have money squeezed out of me whenever he chooses, so he thinks. But he'll find me rather a dangerous customer to play that game with."

"I fancied it was all over, from the way you bucked up when you came back," said Harry. "You seemed to be in high feather."

"So I was—and am. I'd decided what was the only thing to be done, and made up my mind to do it."

"You do not mean being pally with him and his gang again?"

"No; only so far as serves my purpose."

"You mean, you are fooling him?"

"Yes."

"But that can't last long. He will screw you all the same, too—"

"I know that. But he thinks he's brought me to heel, and I'm letting him think so. He will find out his mistake."

"What are you going to do?" asked Harry uneasily. The glitter in the Bounder's eyes startled him.

"I'm going to have that letter from him."

"But how?"

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"LOOKING AFTER UNCLE!"

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ONE
PENNY.

"That's what I think I'd better not tell you. Trouble may come of it, and I don't want you to be mixed up in it."

"Can't I help you?"

The Bounder laughed.

"You could, perhaps; but I don't think you would if you knew the plan."

"You mean, it's something that you think I wouldn't have a hand in?"

"Something like that."

Wharton looked very disturbed.

"I wish you'd tell me what it is, Smithy."

"Better not. If there's trouble, the less you know about it the better. I've got my plans cut and dried. Nothing will stop me from carrying them out. If I don't succeed, I'm done for. Hawke will never give me another chance. And—and it's a risky business. Much better for you to keep out of it."

"You—you don't mean that it's anything—anything against the law?" faltered Wharton.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"I hardly know. I know that what Hawke is doing is against the law, only I can't nail him down. I think I'm justified in stretching a point to stop his blackmailing me. I'm going to risk it, anyway."

"For goodness' sake, think what you do! You—you can't be thinking of—of violence—" Wharton's face was paler now.

"I'm not going to knock him on the head, if that's what you mean," said the Bounder, laughing. "Not quite so thick as that. No—but it's a little game you wouldn't care to have a hand in—you are a little too soft to deal with a man like Jerry Hawke. What he needs is the iron hand, not the velvet glove. I've been under his thumb—now he's going to be under mine, and I'm going to put the screw on till he parts with the letter."

"Well, I suppose you'll go your own way, whatever comes of it," said Wharton uneasily. "Don't tell me if you'd rather not; but, my mind would be easier if I knew."

"It wouldn't!" said the Bounder drily.

"You are meeting him again?"

"Not till Saturday—and not at night, either."

"That's why you can't play in the St. Jude's match?"

"Yes. I'm sorry; but you understand that this comes first. I've got to get out of this fix, at any price. I'm sorry to miss the St. Jude's match, too," the Bounder reflected. "Look here, if our side bats first, I could come over and bat—but I couldn't stay for a second innings. It's a single-innings match, isn't it? Well, if we bat first, I can play—and you can have a substitute to field for the St. Jude's innings!"

"But if they win the toss—"

"Then I shall have to stand out. But I'll come over with you, anyway, if you like, on the chance."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Good enough," he said. "I know you'll do your best for us. I can't say how sorry I am you're in this rotten scrape. We've gone ahead in cricket since we've pulled together, haven't we?"

"Right enough; and we shall keep on pulling together, so far as it depends on me," said Vernon-Smith. "This affair with Hawke has made me see plainer than I ever did what an utter, crass idiot I was—at that time. Once I get clear of this, there won't be any danger of my playing the giddy goat again. I'm not a weak-kneed ass like Hazel. I mean what I say. And I think—I hope—I shall get clear!"

"And you'll be able to play on Saturday—with that on your mind—whatever it is you are planning for Hawke?"

"Why not? Didn't I play up right this afternoon?"

"You did, by Jove! I think you must have nerves of iron—or rather, you haven't any nerves at all," said Harry.

"Then it's settled; you come over with us on Saturday, and if we bat first, you play for the Remove!"

"Done!"

And Wharton had to be satisfied with that. That the Bounder's secret plan, whatever it was, did not worry him, or weigh on his mind, was very plain that evening. That was very like Vernon-Smith's hard and determined character; while the matter was unsettled, he was troubled; but, as soon as he had come to a decision, however desperate, he was quite himself again. All the hardness, all the evil, in his complex nature had been roused by Hawke's persecution; and it was pretty clear that the measures he had decided upon were hard and pitiless. And once the matter was decided, the Bounder threw it aside from his thoughts. He was cheery enough that evening; he beat Hurree Singh in a game of chess, and then beat Wun Lung, the little Chinese, who was a master of the game. Never had he seemed to be in better spirits. The very danger of the

resolve he had come to, seemed to have an exhilarating effect upon his curious nature. The Bounder was never more thoroughly master of himself than in the hour of stress or peril.

He hummed a tune as he went upstairs with the Remove at bed-time. He smiled genially at Gerald Loder, when the prefect came to see lights out. Loder looked at him surlily and suspiciously. The happenings of the previous night still puzzled the prefect, and he had by no means given up hope of catching the Bounder yet.

"Going to give us a look-in to-night, Loder, old chap?" asked Vernon-Smith, with a laugh, as he caught the senior's eye upon him. "Always a pleasure to see you, you know!"

And the Removites chuckled.

Loder did not reply; but his face was grim as he left the dormitory. He intended to keep his eyes open that night; and not to be baffled a second time. He was assured that the Bounder had tricked him somehow the previous night, though in exactly what manner he could not say.

"Poor old Loder!" chuckled Bob Cherry, when the prefect's footfalls had died away down the passage. "It seems a shame that he should stay up so late without catching any fish. I really think we ought to take pity on him!"

"What are you thinking of now, ass?" asked Wharton.

"Well, Loder's pretty certain to drop in to-night—I could see it in his eye. He won't be happy till he's caught somebody. Why shouldn't he make a catch, if it will make him happy? You are the bird he's after, Smithy—and, I think it's up to you. As soon as you hear his boots creak outside, all you've got to do is to slip under your bed—and let Loder find your bed empty. He'll jump for joy—and call Quelch—and denounce your wicked goings on—or rather goings off—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And then all you've got to do is to show up, and explain that you did it to please Loder!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" chuckled the Bounder. "You're getting quite brilliant in your old age. I'll do it—like a shot—if I hear him coming. And I shall hear him if he comes!"

"I'll guess I'll stay awake to see it," chuckled Fisher T. Fish.

"Same here!"

"Yaas, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer.

And most of the Removites determined to stay awake and see the fun. But by the time half-past ten had sounded, most of them were deep in the arms of Morpheus. But the Bounder was not asleep. He was assured that the prefect would look in; and the chance of tricking and humbling his old enemy was too good to be lost.

Eleven o'clock rang out.

The Bounder listened intently.

Creak!

In the deep silence of the house, at that late hour, the slightest sound was audible. That creak from the passage, faint as it was, was enough for the Bounder. He whipped out of bed, and whipped underneath it, in a twinkling, leaving the bedclothes in disorder.

Creak! Then silence! The creeping prefect had stopped outside the door to listen. Two or three minutes passed; and then the door softly opened. A light gleamed in.

The Bounder lay close, scarcely breathing. He saw the trousers and boots of Loder, of the Sixth, as the prefect came quietly in, and cast his light upon the bed. Then he heard the sharp, triumphant exclamation of the prefect.

"Caught out, by thunder! I've got him at last!"

And the Bounder smiled softly.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Not a Triumph!

LODER'S loud, sharp voice had awakened several of the Removites. One or two of them had been awake already. Harry Wharton sat up in bed and blinked at Loder. The Sixth-Former's eyes were gleaming with triumph.

"Hullo, hallo, hallo!" yawned Bob Cherry. "You again, Loder! Blessed if you don't haunt the dormitory like a giddy ghost!"

"Anything wrong, Loder?" asked Wharton drowsily.

The prefect grinned.

"Get up, Wharton!"

"Eh!"

"Get up!"

"Taint rising bell, is it?" asked Wharton innocently. "What do you waat me to get up in the middle of the night for, Loder?"

"Get up at once, and go and ask Mr. Quelch to step here. Tell him I've sent you!"

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FRANK RICHARDS

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"CHUCKLES," 1st

"Oh, rot! If you want Quelch, why can't you go and fetch him?" demanded Wharton warmly.

"Because I'm not going to give Vernon-Smith a chance to sneak back into the dormitory while I'm gone, and pretend that he was in bed all the time," grinned Loder. "He would lie till he was black in the face if he got a chance. I dare say he won't be back for hours yet, but I'm not taking risks. Go and call Mr. Quelch!"

"But I say—"

"I order you. Don't you know I'm a prefect, you young sweep! Go and call Mr. Quelch at once!" said Loder harshly.

"Oh, all serene—give a chap time to get his clothes on," remonstrated Wharton. "You don't want me to go down in my pyjamas, do you?"

"Hurry up, then!"

Wharton dressed himself calmly. The rest of the Remove were sitting up in bed now, and trying to suppress their chuckles. Loder was not only caught in the trap; but he had fairly jumped into it. Harry Wharton was not in the slightest degree reluctant to call the Remove-master on the scene. The result might be a lesson to Loder, on the subject of prowling about junior dormitories in the night.

But as he glanced at Vernon-Smith's unoccupied bed, Harry Wharton gave a start worthy of a leading member of the Remove Dramatic Society.

"Hullo! Where's Smithy?" he exclaimed.

"That's for him to explain to Mr. Quelch—when he comes in," said Loder. "Get off, and fetch your Form-master here!"

"If you really mean it, Loder—"

"If you waste another minute, I'll give you a hundred lines!"

"Oh, all right."

Harry Wharton left the dormitory, and descended the stairs. The Remove master was still up, and Harry Wharton tapped at his study door and opened it. Mr. Quelch rose from his table in surprise at the sight of the junior, at that hour of the night.

"Wharton! What is it? Why are you out of bed?"

"Prefect's orders, sir," said Wharton meekly. "Loder's sent me, sir!"

"Loder! Why, what—"

"He's in our dormitory, sir, and he wants you to step there, he says."

"Oh! Very well!"

Harry Wharton returned to the Remove dormitory, the Form-master, puzzled and annoyed, following close behind. Loder had turned on the electric light in the dormitory now, and set down the lamp. His face showed the malicious triumph he was feeling; but, as Mr. Quelch entered, he composed his features into an expression of grave concern.

"Well, Loder, what is it?" asked Mr. Quelch tartly, not for the moment noticing the fact that Vernon-Smith's bed was empty.

"I'm afraid it's rather a serious matter, sir," said Loder.

"I have had reason to suspect lately that someone has been breaking bounds at night from this dormitory. For that reason I looked in just now, and I'm sorry to say that one of the Remove is absent."

"Absent! At this hour! Bless my soul!"

Loder pointed to the empty bed.

Mr. Quelch looked at it. There was no doubt that it was empty. A dark frown gathered upon the Form-master's brow.

"Whose bed is this—Vernon-Smith's? You are sure he is absent, Loder?"

"He was gone when I came in, sir. I found his bed empty. I considered it best to report the matter to you at once."

"Quite right! Quite right! Where can he be gone? I am loth to believe—"

"It is common talk in the House, sir, that he received a communication from a bookmaker on Tuesday. He may have had to meet the man, and he would scarcely venture to do so by daylight—"

"But Vernon-Smith explained that matter to me satisfactorily—at all events, I regarded his explanation as satisfactory at the time. This, however—" Mr. Quelch frowned more darkly than ever. "But his clothes are here, Loder."

"He had other clothes in his box, sir. Probably he would not wear his everyday attire when breaking bounds at night, in case he should be seen out of doors."

"Yes, yes, very probable. This is a very serious matter. If Vernon-Smith has deceived me it will go hard with him. Wharton and the rest of you, were you aware that Vernon-Smith had broken bounds to-night?"

"Certainly not, sir!"

"Begad, no, sir!"

"Faith, and we don't think he's done it, sir!"

"He is certainly not here," said Mr. Quelch. "Wharton, I ask you now, as head-boy of the Remove, and captain of the Form, and it is your duty to answer me frankly. Do you know where Vernon-Smith has gone?"

"Yes, sir!" said Wharton unexpectedly.

"Ah! You know where he is at the present moment?"

"Yes, sir!"

Loder thought he saw his chance.

"I may say, sir, that I am not at all satisfied with Wharton's innocence in this matter. He is very probably Vernon-Smith's confederate in this kind of thing—"

"Pooh! Nonsense!" said Mr. Quelch sharply. "You have no right to make such a statement, Loder, without a shadow of proof. I have the most implicit faith in Wharton. He has answered me quite frankly, too. Now, Wharton, if you know where Vernon-Smith is, it is your duty to tell me."

"I have no objection, sir."

"Very good! Then where is he?"

"Under the bed, sir."

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"Under the bed, sir," repeated Wharton calmly.

There was a loud and prolonged chuckle from the Removites. They could restrain it no longer.

Mr. Quelch stared at Wharton, dumbfounded. Loder looked as if he were going to fall on the bed.

"Under—under the bed, did you say, Wharton?" stuttered the Remove-master.

"Certainly, sir!"

"Vernon-Smith!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. "If you are there, show yourself at once!"

The Bounder crawled out from under the bed and stood respectfully before the Form-master.

Loder gave a gasp. The Bounder was there in the flesh—there was no doubt about that. The trick that had been played upon him dawned on Loder's mind at last, and his look was almost murderous.

Mr. Quelch's frown was quite terrific.

"So you were hiding under the bed, Smith?"

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder calmly.

"Silence, boys! This is not a laughing matter—it is not a laughing matter at all! Have you been out of bounds, Smith?"

"No, sir."

"How long have you been under the bed?"

"Ever since I heard Loder sneaking along the passage to spy on us, sir."

"Ahem! You must not speak of a prefect in those terms, Vernon-Smith. Pray explain why you have been guilty of this utterly ridiculous and incomprehensible action. What possible motive could you have had for hiding under your bed?" demanded Mr. Quelch sternly.

"Only to give Loder a treat, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! What do you mean, Smith? Explain yourself!"

"You see, sir, Loder's got into the habit of sneaking and prowling about, looking for a chance to catch us napping," said the Bounder, with perfect calmness. "He was so keen to catch me, that I took pity on him and gave him the chance."

"Vernon-Smith!"

"You see, sir, it rather worries us, having Loder dropping in at all hours; and I thought I would let him make his catch, and have done with it."

The Bounder made this statement in the most matter-of-fact manner, and with a perfectly grave face, as if he were in the most serious earnest.

The Removites could not restrain their merriment. Loder's face, as he listened to Smithy's explanation, was quite a study. Mr. Quelch looked astounded at first; and then a smile broke over his face, though he suppressed it immediately.

"A most ridiculous proceeding, Vernon-Smith!" he said. "You should certainly not have played this trick on a prefect. Loder, it appears that there is nothing wrong, after all—nothing but a practical joke, I am glad to say. Vernon-Smith should not have done this. Ahem! But I must remark, Loder—ahem!—that it must be annoying to a junior to be suspected without cause; and certainly you should have some tangible grounds for setting a watch upon any boy as you appear to have done. You may go back to bed, Smith."

"Yes, sir."

"Isn't—Isn't the young rascal going to be punished, sir, for this—this impudent trick?" demanded Loder, almost choking.

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"Under the circumstances, no; as you have undoubtedly provoked it, Loder. And I do not approve of these surprise visits to junior dormitories, unless for some really adequate reason. I trust you will remember that, Loder!"

Loder did not reply; he could not trust himself to speak. He marched out of the room, taking his lamp. Mr. Quelch bade good-night to the boys, and followed. The door closed, and then a loud, long chuckle ran from end to end of the dormitory.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Loder!" said Bob Cherry, wiping his eyes. "Did you see his face? It was worth a guinea a box, at least!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fancy Loder will think twice before he calls Quelch in again!" grinned the Bounder. "Perhaps we've done with his spying now. Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Removites chuckled themselves to sleep.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Match at St. Jude's!

AFTER lessons the next day Harry Wharton & Co. were busy with cricket practice, but the Bounder did not join them. Immediately after the Remove were dismissed the Bounder pedalled away on his bicycle towards Courtfield by himself. Bolsover major, who asked him where he was going, received the information that he was going to do some shopping in the market town.

He did not return until close on time for locking-up, and he did not bring any of his purchases with him, if he had made them; he came back quite empty-handed.

Neither did he say a word concerning that curious shopping expedition.

Billy Bunter had overheard his remark to Bolsover, and he made it a point to see the Bounder when he came in. Shopping to Bunter meant laying in a supply of tuck, and he fully expected to see the Bounder come in laden with good things in a bundle. He blinked at him in disappointment as he wheeled his machine in at the gates.

"Where's the grub?" he asked.

"What grub?" said the Bounder testily.

"Haven't you been shopping?"

"Not for grub, you fat duffer!"

"What have you got, then?" Bunter demanded inquisitively. "You don't seem to have got anything."

"Mind your own business!"

"You're up to something!" said the fat junior, shaking his head. "You said you were going to Courtfield; but you've come back from the opposite direction."

The Bounder had, indeed, ridden in from Friardale Lane. He must have made a very long detour on his bicycle before coming back to Greyfriars. He did not vouchsafe the inquisitive Owl of the Remove any explanation, however. He wheeled his bike straight at Bunter; and the fat junior hopped out of the way just in time.

Vernon-Smith put up his machine, and went into the School House, looking a little tired and dusty, but with a satisfied expression on his face.

That night the Removites wondered whether there would be another visit from Loder; but it did not come off. The prefect had apparently had enough of looking after Vernon-Smith.

The next day was Saturday.

It dawned bright and fine, with the promise of a glorious July day, and the Removites who were members of the Form eleven looked forward keenly to the afternoon and the match at St. Jude's.

The match there was a new fixture which Wharton had secured. They were playing the St. Jude's junior eleven—a team which averaged older than Wharton's team, who were all in the Lower Fourth. But Wharton looked forward to the match with confidence, especially if he had the Bounder in the ranks.

After dinner the brake came round to carry Harry Wharton & Co. to their destination. Vernon-Smith mounted into it with the rest. It was understood that the Bounder was to bat for the Remove if Wharton won the toss, and leave after the innings; and there was some curiosity among the Remove cricketers as to that mysterious engagement which was to call the Bounder away. But Vernon-Smith kept his own counsel about that.

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The brake arrived on the St. Jude's ground, and found the opposing team ready for them. Wharton felt an unusual anxiety as to the result of the toss when he spun the coin with Murphy, the St. Jude's junior skipper. The other fellows looked on, quite sharing his feelings. Upon the result of the toss the match probably depended, for it depended upon that whether the Bounder played or not.

Wharton's luck was in; and there was a buzz of satisfaction from the Greyfriars juniors when he won the toss.

"Good luck!" said Bob Cherry, slapping the Bounder on the shoulder. "You're going to bat, Smithy, old man."

Vernon-Smith nodded. He was very satisfied, too.

Wharton lost no time in opening the innings. He sent in the Bounder first, with Bob Cherry at the other end.

He watched the Bounder with some anxiety as he took his position at the wicket. That afternoon, he knew, Vernon-Smith was to carry out his scheme, whatever it was, for dealing with Jerry Hawke and "choking him off." That the scheme involved danger, Wharton knew; and he wondered whether the anticipation of it would have any effect upon the Bounder's nerves and affect his play. But he was soon relieved in his mind. The Bounder's nerves were of iron.

He started his innings with a four and a two, and then a three, and the waiting batsmen gave him a cheer.

"Top of his form, bedad!" said Micky Desmond, who had come over to act as the Bounder's substitute in case of need. "Sure, the Saints are going to have their eyes opened this time!"

Micky was right. The Bounder was at the top of his form, and that innings was a surprise to the St. Jude's fellows.

Murphy, who was in the Upper Fourth at St. Jude's, went on to bowl, and the looks of the field showed that they had great faith in him. He was a good bowler; but to the surprise of the field and himself, he could make no impression upon Vernon-Smith's wicket. Bob Cherry was dismissed for a dozen runs, but the Bounder held his ground. And he did not seem to be playing a cautious game, either. Some of his hits verged upon recklessness. But there was always a margin of safety, as it were. There were no catches for the fieldsmen, keenly as they were on the look-out for chances.

The Greyfriars wickets went down at an average rate, but the Bounder survived. When Harry Wharton joined him at the wickets, they proceeded to make the fur fly, as Bob Cherry joyously expressed it.

The Remove were seven down for 100 runs, of which 60 belonged to Vernon-Smith, when the Bounder was bowled at last.

The Removites gave him a ringing cheer as he came off the pitch.

"Good for you!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, joyfully digging him in the ribs. "Of course, we didn't expect a century again. Sixty's a good figure."

"Yes, rather," said Nugent.

"The ratherfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy."

Vernon-Smith smiled.

"I'm glad I've done pretty well for the side," he remarked. "Wharton seems to be well set, too. It will be a good figure for the innings."

"Off now?" asked Bulstrode, as Vernon-Smith moved towards the pavilion.

"I'm going to change, but I'll see the innings out. Wharton will have to ask Murphy to let Desmond field for me."

Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull were at the wickets when Vernon-Smith came out after changing. Wharton was piling up the runs; and his score was 55 when he was caught out at last in the slips. The total now was nine down for 144.

"Last man in!"

Hazeldene was last man in, and he joined Johnny Bull. Hazel was in unusually good form; and he kept his end up well against the St. Jude's bowling. He was clean bowled at last, but the Remove score had jumped to 166.

"They won't find it easy to beat that," the Bounder remarked to Wharton.

"No fear. I don't know whether I shouldn't have declared earlier," Wharton said thoughtfully. "We've been a long time in. Still, I think the light will last. I wish you were staying to bowl."

"I know it's rotten."

"Never mind. I'll speak to Murphy."

The St. Jude's skipper had no objection to a substitute fielding on account of the Bounder's engagement. Indeed, he remarked humorously that if Smithy's bowling was anything like his batting, he'd rather have a couple of substitutes together than Smithy. Vernon-Smith looked at his watch; it was nearly five o'clock, and he had a good distance to go. He waited to see the start of the St. Jude's innings, and had the satisfaction of seeing the first wicket fall to Hurree Singh's bowling, and then hurried away for his train.

An hour later, he stepped from the train in Friardale Station, and walked out of the village, taking a devious path to the ruined priory in the heart of the wood, where he had made that appointment with Jerry Hawke.

The sun was setting by the time he reached it, and the shadows lengthening in the woods. Vernon-Smith sauntered carelessly into the ruins. The place was very lonely and secluded. In the afternoon it was sometimes visited by picnic-parties; but towards night the vicinity was always deserted. Not a sound broke the stillness of the old priory as the Bounder sauntered among the massive ruins of the ancient buildings, save the hollow echo of his own footsteps. Jerry Hawke had not arrived yet.

The Bounder stopped outside the opening which led to the vaults under the priory. Those deep and damp recesses were well-known to the Greyfriars juniors, who had explored them more than once. It was not very long since an escaped convict, fleeing from the police, had hidden himself there. There was a subterranean passage leading to the ruined chapel at Greyfriars, now carefully blocked up at the Greyfriars end. And in the passage was a secret chamber, entered by a stone door that moved upon a pivot, which the Greyfriars juniors had discovered long ago when exploring the place. It was of that secret cell that the Bounder was thinking, as he stood there in the growing dusk waiting for Jerry Hawke. He lighted a cigarette as he waited. A sound of footsteps broke the silence of the lonely place at last.

"'Ere you are, old pal!" said a hoarse voice.

And Jerry Hawke came slouching through the ruins towards the spot where the Bounder of Greyfriars awaited him.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Turning the Tables!

JERRY HAWKE'S face was flushed, and the Bounder, as he looked him over, could see that he had been drinking. He was not intoxicated; he had drunk enough to make him quarrelsome and intractable, that was all. There was a bullying expression upon his stubby face which the Bounder affected not to notice.

"Yes, here we are," said Vernon-Smith pleasantly.

Jerry Hawke held out a dirty hand.

"Where's the quids?"

"What about the tip for the Lantham?" asked the Bounder.

"That's orlright. I'll give you a dead cert—straight from the stables," said Jerry Hawke. "But business first. Look 'ere, I been too moderate. I said I'd let you orf with a couple of quid for to-day. But it ain't good enough."

"No?"

"No!" said Hawke, with an oath. "Wot the deuce! Your father's a millionaire; and you can always get what you want from 'im."

"Only within limits," said Vernon-Smith quietly.

"Tell him you're in danger of being kicked out of your school, and I fancy he'll part—wot?" said Hawke, with a chuckle. "You tell him that from me! I've thought it over. I ain't going to fool round with a pound or two at a time. With a lump sum I could make something on the races, and if it goes—well, I know where there's plenty more."

The Bounder looked at him coolly. He understood what was passing in the brutalised mind of the blackmailer. Once he had obtained money from the junior his appetite was whetted for more. The four sovereigns had gone in brutish excess, and Jerry Hawke was hard up again. And he did not mean to be hard up while his victim had money. The first payment he had received had made him realise clearly his power. And now he was going to "put the screw on."

"A lump sum!" said Vernon-Smith. "Well, I've offered you ten pounds in a lump for that letter."

Jerry Hawke laughed mockingly.

"That there letter's worth 'undreds to me," he said—"yes, 'undreds! You'd give me ten quid! Wot's that! Look 'ere, Master Smithy, I'm 'ard up. You say you'll give me ten quid for the letter. You'll give me that ten quid to 'old my tongue. Savvy? You're goin' to 'and me that ten quid 'ere and now."

"And after that?"

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"After that," said Mr. Hawke. "Well, after that you'll 'and me as much as I choose to arsk for. Five quid next week, and as much as I choose the week after. See? Tell your father you'll be kicked out of Greyfriars if you don't part, and I reckon he'll pony up. He's a millionaire, ain't he? Well, I'm goin' to 'elp him spend his money. Ten quid now, and five next week—that's for a beginning."

"And a hundred the week after?" asked the Bounder, smiling.

"If I arsk for a 'undred, you'll 'and out a 'undred, or you'll smart for it!" said Jerry Hawke threateningly. "Strike me! If you don't 'and out that tenner now and sharp, I'll make it a 'undred on the spot."

And the rascal lighted his pipe.

Vernon-Smith laughed, but his eyes were glittering. If he had felt any remorse for the way he had planned to deal with the blackmailer, it was banished now. Jerry Hawke's price had gone up. To stave off exposure, if his demands were yielded to, large sums were required, and when all resources were exhausted the danger remained. But Jerry Hawke did not quite know the hard and determined character he was dealing with.

"You won't part with the letter on any terms?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Not on no terms!" said Mr. Hawke emphatically.

"And are you going to squeeze money out of me whenever you feel inclined, without limit?"

"That's the game."

"And you think I shall stand it?"

"I think you've got to."

"That's where you make a little mistake," said the Bounder. "I suppose you know you can be put in prison for blackmail?"

Jerry Hawke chuckled hoarsely.

"I knows it. But not without that letter being sent to your 'eadmaster!"

"That letter is going to be given up to me," said the Bounder steadily, "and, after that, I shall be able to have you arrested for extorting money by threats."

"After!" grinned Jerry Hawke. "But you ain't got the letter yet! And I ain't got it about me, neither—it's safe in a pal's 'ands, fur from 'ere. So don't you think of playin' any little game like your pal did the other night. 'Ere, 'hands off—I tell you I ain't got the letter about me!"

The Bounder was upon him with the spring of a tiger.

Jerry Hawke grappled with him with his left hand, and swung back a stick with his right. But, before he could strike, the Bounder had hooked his leg, and he fell heavily. Vernon-Smith came down heavily on the top of him. From under his jacket he whipped out a short, loaded stick, and whirled it in the air over Jerry Hawke's head.

"Keep quiet!"

"I'll smash yer!" grunted the ruffian, and he made a desperate effort to rise.

The effort would have succeeded, too; but the loaded stick came down with a crash, and Jerry gave one gurgling gasp, and fell back insensible.

The Bounder gave him a quick look, and then glanced round in the gathering shadows. Then he thrust the stick into his jacket again, and rose.

He did not waste a moment. Taking the insensible ruffian by the shoulders, he dragged him into the opening of the vaults. Then, exerting all his strength, he raised him from the ground, and half-carried, half-dragged him down the stone steps in the darkness.

There was a moan from Jerry; he was beginning to come to. In the vaults all was darkness—darkness so intense as to be almost visible. But the Bounder knew his way well.

He dragged the ruffian on, and felt over the stone wall, and the secret door swung back on its pivot.

Vernon-Smith dragged the rascal into the secret chamber, and flung him down. Then a sudden gleam of light penetrated the blackness. The Bounder had taken an electric lamp from his pocket.

The light gleamed on Jerry Hawke's face, showing now the signs of returning consciousness. But he was safe for at least five minutes yet; not that the Bounder would have scrupled to use his loaded stick again if necessary.

He set the lamp down on the stone flags of the floor. On a corner of the secret cell lay a rusty pair of handcuffs, and a still more rusty pair of old leg-irons, such as were at one time carried on ships for recalcitrant seamen. The Bounder picked them up, and bent over the ruffian.

Click, click, click!

The irons were rusty, but they were in good order, and very strong. A more powerful man than Jerry would have found himself helpless once in that iron clutch. The irons clicked fast on the limbs of the blackmailer, and Vernon-Smith, breathing hard, stepped back.

Jerry Hawke's eyes opened at last.

He blinked about him dazedly, and tried to rise, and fell back heavily, the irons clinking noisily on the stone floor.

As his fuddled brain cleared, Jerry realised his position. He sat up, propping his back against the cold stone wall of

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the cell. His eyes seemed to burn as he fixed them on the Bounder. The latter was smiling—a cold, hard smile, that boded ill to the rascal who had persecuted him, now that the tables were turned.

"Crikey!" said Jerry Hawke, grinding his teeth. "Wot's this 'ere game? Let me loose! Do you 'ear—let me loose!"

"I hear," said the Bounder quietly.

"Let me out of this!"

"It's my turn to make terms now, Jerry. You've made me pay you to keep your evil mouth shut. Now it's my turn. If you want your liberty, you've got to pay for it!"

"Pay for it!" mumbled Hawke.

"Exactly. And the price is—my letter to Cobb!"

"Wot!"

"Take time to think it over," said Vernon-Smith. "Try to get loose if you like. I don't think you will be able to do it. But try!"

Hawke was wrenching savagely at the irons. But it was useless, and he soon realised it. He panted as he gave up the effort.

"Wot 'ave you done this for? I ain't got the letter about me. I ain't going to give it up. You can't keep me 'ere!"

"Can't I?" said the Bounder. "You will learn better, my friend. You came to the school yesterday; I paid you to clear off. You refuse to give up my letter; you intend to keep it, and keep a hold over me for good—as long as I stay at Greyfriars, at all events. Do you think I'm the sort of fellow to be handled like that? You fool! I made you meet me here to deal with you. The bribe I gave you was the first—and the last! Yesterday I went to Courtfield, to old Lazarus's secondhand shop, and bought this set of old ship's irons. I brought them here, and left them ready. You understand what for?"

"You can't keep me 'ere."

"You could be sent to prison for blackmail. Circumstances won't let me send you to prison, so I've taken the law into my own hands. I'm imprisoning you on my own," the Bounder explained, with icy coldness. "You will remain here, in irons, until that letter is in my hands!"

"You won't get it!"

"Very well. Then you stay here. I've put a bottle of water and half a loaf in the corner there. That will last you till Monday."

"Monday!" shrieked Hawke.

"Yes. I shall be back on Monday to see you, and ask you whether you have decided to hand over my letter."

Jerry Hawke looked at him with growing terror. There was a merciless hardness in the Bounder's face; it was only too clear that he meant every word he said. The blackmailer had had no mercy on him; and he was to receive none.

"You—you goin' to leave me 'ere?" gasped Hawke. "I shall catch my death of cold in this 'ere freezing place!"

"That's your look-out!"

"I—I can't stop 'ere. I'll 'ave the law of you!"

The Bounder burst into a laugh.

"I like that! I fancy the law won't help you very much, when you'll have to say you were blackmailing me! You see, that letter will be in my hands by that time, for you won't be out of this hole till you've handed it over!"

"I—I ain't got it."

"I'm prepared for that. I've got a fountain-pen and paper in my pocket. You're to write to your pal, and tell him to send that letter to me, to Friardale Post Office, to be called for. I won't risk having it sent to the school."

"And—and if I write that letter, you will let me go?" asked Jerry Hawke, with a cunning gleam in his eyes.

"Yes; when I have received that letter to Cobb, and seen it, and made sure that it is the genuine article, and destroyed it," said the Bounder calmly. "Not before."

"I won't do it!" yelled Hawke.

The Bounder picked up the electric lamp.

"Very well; good-night!"

The rascal watched him with burning eyes as he went to the doorway. He was stepping through the narrow aperture when Hawke's courage failed him, and he called him back.

"'Old on, Master Smith! You don't reelly mean as 'ow you'll leave me 'ere a 'ole day and night, with nothin' but a bit o' bread to eat?"

"I do!"

"You're a 'eartless villain!" groaned Hawke. "That's wot you are—a 'eartless young villain! You ain't got no pity for a man wot's 'ad trouble. Look 'ere. I—I—I'll let you 'ave that letter for the ten quid you was talkin' about."

"Not a brown," said Vernon-Smith calmly. "It's too late for that. You'll let me have that letter for nothing. It's mine, anyway. You've had four pounds from me, and if you had it left I'd take it away from you now. Now, for the last time. You've got to stay here until I get my letter."

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anyway. The longer you put it off, the longer you'll have to stay here. Yes or no?"

"You don't mean it!" faltered Jerry Hawke.

"Very well; I'll see you again on Monday."

The Bounder stepped through the narrow aperture into the passage, and the heavy stone creaked as he pushed it shut.

But that was too much for Jerry. He burst into a wild shriek.

"Old on! Come back, come back! I'll do it—I'll do anything."

The stone was almost shut. A thin streak of light came from the passage without. The ironed rascal yelled again and again in abject terror, fearful that, in spite of his surrender, the Bounder meant to leave him there unheard. But the stone swung open again, and Vernon-Smith stepped into the cell once more.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Whip Hand!

VERNON-SMITH looked down contemptuously at the white, scared face of the ironed rascal. Jerry Hawke was leaning back against the stone wall, gasping. Gone was now the truculent, bullying manner of the black-mailer. His face had lost the flush of strong drink, and was of a sickly, hideous pallor. The cold of the stone was already striking into his limbs, and colder terror was chilling his very heart.

His look was abject; but there was no pity in the Bounder's glance. He knew only too well that if he had relented towards the rascal and freed him, Jerry Hawke would have become his old self again immediately, and the fatal letter would be as far off as ever.

"You ain't leavin' me 'ere, Master Smith!" Jerry Hawke's voice was low and whining now, a strange contrast to his former bullying tones. "I tell you, I shall 'ave the 'orrors if I'm left 'ere in the dark!"

"You'll be let out as soon as I have my letter back, and not before," said the Bounder calmly. "Now, do you mean business? I've got no time to waste on you. I shall be late for calling-over, anyway!"

"You won't leave me 'ere?"

"Until I have my letter, yes. Write at once as I shall dictate to you, and I shall get my letter on Monday. Then I shall come here and let you loose—not before!"

"But I—I can't stay 'ere!" groaned Jerry Hawke. "I tell you, I shall 'ave the 'orrors! I—I can't stand it, Master Smith! Don't be 'ard on a poor chap!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"It's not much worse than prison, and that's where you ought to be—you've earned it," he said. "It's your own look-out. If there's any quicker way of getting the letter, I'm ready to take it. Where is it?"

"It's at Lantham," groaned Hawke. "I—I couldn't trust it at the Cross Keys; Cobb was ratty about my gettin' 'old of it. It's in the 'ands of a pal of mine at Lantham!"

"His name?"

"Jimmy Doane," groaned the wretched man, the words seeming to be wrung from him. "He keeps the Peal o' Bells pub in Cross Street. Course, he don't know nothing about the letter. It's in a little box, wot he's minding for me, 'long of some other papers. I left it there when I was took to the stone jug, you see!"

"Will he give it up on a note from you?"

"I s'pose so."

"Very well; write the note, and I'll bike over there to-morrow morning," said Vernon-Smith. "If all goes well, I'll come straight back here and let you out!"

"You let me out now if I give you the note," whined Jerry Hawke. "I tell you, I shall 'ave the 'orrid 'orrors if I'm left 'ere in the dark!"

"I'll leave you the lamp," said the Bounder contemptuously. "After this you'd better turn honest, Jerry. You haven't nerve enough for a criminal!"

"It'll go out!" said Hawke, with a nervous look at the electric lamp.

"It lasts three hours. I have a couple of refills in my pocket, too. I'll leave them. I'll do the best I can for you, if you play straight." The Bounder took a fountain-pen and a pocket-book from his pocket. "Here you are!"

"I can't write with my 'ands like this 'ere."

"I'll let your right hand loose; but no tricks, mind. You've had this loaded stick on your napper once; you don't want it again."

"Straight as a die," mumbled Jerry Hawke; but his eyes were gleaming now.

The Bounder did not give him a chance for treachery, however. He knew the man he was dealing with. He took a

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whipcord from his pocket, and bound Jerry's left arm tightly to his side, and then unlocked the handcuffs. Hawke clenched the fist of his free hand, and Vernon-Smith grinned, and made a motion with the loaded stick. The rascal groaned, and gave up the momentary idea of resistance. He was helpless in the hands of the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith placed the pen in his hand, and opened the pocket-book. Jerry Hawke hesitated. It was a bitter pill to swallow. He had dreamed golden dreams, once the Bounder was fairly under his thumb. The horn of plenty had scarcely begun to flow, when the supply was to be cut off. Jerry Hawke felt that it was very hard upon a man who had only been a few days outside the "stone jug"; but there was no help for it.

In blackmailing the Bounder of Greyfriars, he had "woken up the wrong passenger" with a vengeance. Vernon-Smith was not the kind of fellow to be victimised by a rascal of Jerry Hawke's calibre.

The rascal wrote unwillingly, muttering oaths to himself as the pen glided over the paper:

"Deer Jimmy,—Pless and my box wot youre minding for me to the young gentleman wot will and you this ere. And oblige your old pal Jerry Hawke."

"There you are, 'ang yer!" he muttered. "Blowed if you ain't built to make a criminal yourself, Master Smith! Wot honest kid would ever have thought of a dodge like this 'ere? You'll end up in prison—that's wot you'll do!"

"Now direct this envelope," said the Bounder, without heeding Mr. Hawke's prophecy.

Jerry Hawke scrawled on the envelope: "Jimmy Doane, Eskwire, Peal o Bells, Lantham."

"And when I hand that to Doane, he'll give up the box?"

"Yes."

"Mind, if there is any hitch about it, you'll stay here till it's set right," said the Bounder grimly. "You don't get out of these irons till my letter is safe in my hands!"

"It's all right; he'll 'and the box hover as right as rain!" groaned Jerry Hawke. "Now, Master Smith, you let me hout now. I've done all you arsked!"

"When I've got my letter, not before!"

The Bounder relocked the handcuffs, and untied the rascal's arm. He pushed the loaf and the bottle of water within reach of the prisoner with his foot.

"That's all. If this note is all right, I shall bring the box here to-morrow morning. Till then, you stay as you are. And you can be thankful it's no worse. After I've got my letter, I could send you to prison for blackmail if I chose!"

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"You won't do that, Master Smithy?" whined the wretched man.

All the truculence had been taken out of Jerry Hawke now.

"Not if this is square," said the Bounder. "Good-night!"

"Master Smith, I—ere—don't go—'elp!"

Thud!

The stone door closed. The unhappy rascal was left, blinking at the steady glow of the electric lamp. Probably no rascal ever repented of his rascality so sincerely as Jerry Hawke did at that moment.

Without giving the imprisoned blackmailer another thought, Vernon-Smith wedged a stone into the secret door, so that it could by no possibility be opened, and hurried out of the vaults.

He was smiling as he came out into the dusk of the old Priory.

While Jerry Hawke was groaning over his hapless fate in the hidden cell, Vernon-Smith strode rapidly away, and reached the Friardale road. It was well past the hour for locking up the gates at Greyfriars, but he knew that the cricketers would be late back from St. Jude's. He walked on lightly towards the school, and, as he expected, before he reached Greyfriars he heard the rumble of the brake behind him on the road.

He stopped by the roadside, and waited for it.

The brake came dashing up in great style, and the sound of a chorus, roared out by the cricketers, showed that the Removites were in great spirits. Vernon-Smith stepped out into the road, and held up his hand.

"Hold on!"

"Hallo—hallo—hallo! It's Smithy! Stop, driver!"

The brake halted. The cricketers looked down at the Bounder in surprise.

"Jump in!" said Harry Wharton.

Vernon-Smith climbed into the brake, and it rolled on towards Greyfriars again.

"Didn't expect to see you," said Wharton. "I thought you were back at the school long ago!"

"I've been busy," said Vernon-Smith, with a laugh. "I knew you wouldn't leave St. Jude's till dark, so I timed myself to catch you here. If I go back with the team, it's all right, and no questions asked. How did the match go?"

"Didn't you hear us tootling?" grinned Bob Cherry. "We've won!"

"Good egg!"

"By ten runs," said Frank Nugent. "They played a good game. We had just time to finish before the light went. Inky took the last wicket only in time, didn't you, you black tulip?"

"It was a close thing," added Wharton. "We couldn't have done without you, after all, Smithy." I don't think Micky would have made sixty against their bowling!"

"Faith, and ye're right!" remarked Micky Desmond. "A dozen would be nearer my mark. Sure, we owe the match to Smithy!"

"And your giddy engagement?" said Peter Todd, with a curious look at the Bounder. "Did your horse win?"

There was a chuckle from the cricketers. The Bounder joined in it.

"It wasn't anything of that kind," he said. "I had to see a man on business, that's all. I've seen him, and it's gone rippingly. Hallo! Here we are!"

The brake halted at the gates of Greyfriars. Bob Cherry rang a terrific peal on the bell. Gosling came grunting down to the gates to unlock them.

The team had leave to return late, as they had been playing at a distance, and, as the Bounder had rejoined them on the way home, there was no danger of questions being asked him as to his occupation that afternoon.

The brake drove away, and the Remove cricketers marched in, in great spirits. They had beaten St. Jude's, and they were joyful; but the most satisfied of all the crowd was Vernon-Smith. The shadow of the past was lifted from his path at last!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

HARRY WHARTON did not ask the Bounder any questions. He understood that all had gone well; and Vernon-Smith did not give him any information. Until the letter was safely in his hands, he intended to keep his own counsel.

On the morrow morning, after service, Vernon-Smith sought the captain of the Remove.

Sunday was a very quiet day at Greyfriars, the leisure hours being spent mostly in "Sunday walks." Harry Wharton & Co. had intended to ramble along the cliffs, and as the Bounder joined them in the Close, Bob Cherry genially invited him to join them. But the Bounder shook his head.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"LOOKING AFTER UNCLE!"

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ONE
PENNY.

"Sorry; I've got to go to Lantham," he said.

"Lantham!" said Bob. "That's a jolly good distance! You can't walk there!"

"No; I'm going on my bike. I want you to come with me, Wharton, if you will."

Wharton nodded.

"All right. You chaps don't mind?"

He walked away to the bike-shed with the Bounder. He was very silent as they took the machines out. The Bounder smiled slightly.

"I know you feel rather huffed at my not telling you how I've dealt with Jerry Hawke," he said abruptly.

Wharton coloured a little.

"Well—" he began.

"If I haven't told you, it's because it was better to keep it dark till it was all over. You wouldn't have approved of my plan; and there was a certain amount of danger in it. It might have led to trouble. But now I've got the rascal fixed I intend to explain."

"I don't ask—" began Wharton.

"That's all right; you're entitled to know. Besides, it isn't finished yet; and I shall be glad of your company," said Vernon-Smith. "It's a ripping morning for a ride, too!"

"But what are we going to Lantham for?"

"For my letter—that letter to Cobb."

"Is Hawke going to give it up, then?" asked Harry, in amazement.

"Yes. I've persuaded him."

"Good! I'll come with pleasure, then."

It was a long ride to Lantham, but the juniors covered the ground quickly in the fresh summer morning. Vernon-Smith spoke hardly a word on the ride. Wharton did not ask questions; he knew that the Bounder intended to explain in his own way.

Lantham was reached at last, and Wharton looked surprised when the Bounder led the way into a low quarter of the town. He stopped at last outside a disreputable-looking public-house, and jumped off his machine. Wharton followed suit.

"Is Hawke here?" he asked.

"No; but the letter is. Wait outside for me. This place would get on your nerves," said Vernon-Smith, with a grin. "My nerves are a bit tougher, and I can stand it. I shan't be long."

Wharton remained holding the machines while the Bounder disappeared into the building. Ten minutes later Vernon-Smith came out of the Peal o' Bells with a small box under his arm.

Wharton glanced at it.

"It's Hawke's," said the Bounder, in a tone of explanation. "The letter's in it. Come on!"

"But Hawke—" said the puzzled Wharton.

"He gave me a note for the landlord of this place, who was minding the box for him. I persuaded him to give me the note."

"How on earth did you do that?"

"That's what I'm going to show you."

They rode out of Lantham again, Vernon-Smith keeping the box under one arm. As soon as they were well out of the town he halted. They dismounted, and the Bounder examined the box. It was locked; but the lock was a common one, and presented no difficulties. He picked up a heavy stone and crashed it on the lock, and the box burst open.

The interior was packed with various articles—dirty old papers, two or three articles of cheap jewellery. The Bounder examined the papers carefully one by one, Wharton watching him in silence.

"Eureka!"

It was an exclamation of triumph from the Bounder.

He held up a letter. Wharton looked at it. It was almost a facsimile of the letter Wharton had taken from Jerry Hawke in Friardale Wood, on the night he had met the rascal in the spinney. But it was written on the Bounder's own notepaper, and it was in his genuine hand.

"That's the right one?" asked Harry.

"That's it!"

"Good luck! Better burn it while you've got the chance."

"What-ho!"

Vernon-Smith struck a match and applied it to the letter. The paper crumpled up in the flame, and the Bounder watched it burn, till only a fragment remained between his finger and thumb. He threw down the last fragment, and applied another match to it till that vanished, too.

Then the Bounder drew a deep, deep breath.

"Clear at last!" he said. "Not a shred left! Clear at last! That makes me feel as if I could forgive Jerry Hawke."

(Continued on page 27.)

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THE BLUE ORCHID

BY SIDNEY DREW

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READ THIS FIRST.

Ferrers Lord, the famous multi-millionaire, is engaged on one of his adventurous expeditions in company with Ching-Lung (the Prince of China), Rupert Thurston, Gan-Waga (the Eskimo), also Prout, Maddock, Barry O'Rooney, and the rest of the famous band of stalwart seamen. Their quest is a field of blue orchids, which is said to exist somewhere up the great Amazon River, and their craft is a small steam launch named the Blue Orchid, which has been captured from Lord's enemy in this enterprise, a German millionaire named Hausmann, who is continually pursuing the millionaire in his magnificent yacht the Medea. The adventurers stumble across a village which is reigned over by a beautiful woman, who is known as Althara the Merciless, and are captured and taken prisoners. Ching-Lung, however, tells her he is a wizard, and by simple, yet wonderful, conjuring, he earns a reward from the queen, and the whole party are eventually reunited. Hausmann attacks the village. Realising that their lives are in great jeopardy, Ferrers Lord and his party gain the confidence of the Indians by a clever ruse, and induce them to join forces against the Germans. During the attack several members of the party get separated, and as they are absent for several days it is believed they are dead. One day, however, a number of men are seen to be approaching the village, and Ching-Lung gives a great shout, "It's Prout and Co." (Now go on with the story.)

The Return of the Wanderers.

Ching-Lung, Maddock, O'Rooney, and Thurston made a wild dash for the door, upsetting a warrior in their haste, and nearly upsetting themselves. Outside in the glare of torches they saw a sight that made their eyes dance—Joe, Filson, Vasco, Prout, and the stoker. They were guarded by a squad of natives, but the rush broke the line, and for the next few minutes the excitement was intense.

"By honey, get us something to eat," said the delighted steersman, "and then we'll swap yarns! We're starving!"

Never was there such a swapping of yarns. They are already known to the reader, except what happened to Prout and company. Expecting little mercy, Prout had made a fight for it; but numbers prevailed. He had been marched across the plain, to find Joe, Filson, and the stoker also in custody. Some time later Vasco was brought in. Cunning as the Indian was, he had walked right into a picket.

"We thought it was a case," said Joe, "and we'd only our fists and feet and teeth to fight wi'; and our teeth warn't much good, for they'd got blunt and rusty for want o' use. They warn't rough wi' us, but they showed us pretty plain that they wouldn't have no nonsense. Vasco tried to patter their lingo, but they wouldn't speak. And just when we'd made up our minds that they were going to grill us for supper, we spots old Gan."

There was plenty to eat, but they were almost too excited to eat it. Every face beamed. They kept shaking hands over and over again, and slapping each other on the back.

"Phwat Oi want now," said Barry spitting on his palm, "is a smack at them German sausages, and, loike the kid wid the soap, Oi won't be happy till Oi gets ut."

Vasco had been the only silent one, and the only one who had been doing justice to his food.

"Hausmann is not dead, Excellency," he said.

"Then he's made of cast iron," said Ching-Lung. "How do you know, Vasco?"

"I got into the palace, Excellency. I saw the fat man. He lay on a couch in the outer court. Another man was with him—a doctor, I think. They spoke together. Oh, no; he is not dead!"

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"What luck!" said Ching-Lung. "I didn't mean to say I'm sorry I didn't kill him, for I'm glad. What luck for him, I mean! It must have been a weak cartridge. By the way he dropped I thought he'd take no further interest in orchids, or anything else except a funeral. Was he badly winged, Vasco?"

"I cannot tell, Excellency," answered the guide. "There was not much light. When he spoke to the other man his voice sounded weak. But I am sure it was Hausmann, for his face was big and fat."

"Ut would be big and fat av Oi got near ut," growled Barry. "To get near ut is the wan dhrame of me loife."

Then there was more chatter and swapping of yarns. Ferrers Lord had abandoned the garments of the defunct Mr. McNish and put on his own clothes. He stepped out, and bent over Gan-Waga to feel the Eskimo's pulse.

"Well?" asked Ching-Lung, who had followed.

"There is nothing to be anxious about," said the millionaire. "He will be as lively as a kitten again in a few days if we can keep him quiet. I want to see this stronghold the queen and Okarni speak about, for I dare not leave the Eskimo here. The famous Scotch warrior built this bungalow, and when Hausmann's fellows start exploring, they are almost certain to stumble across it."

"The stronghold sounds like the one Prout and Joe stumbled across," said Ching-Lung. "It has a musical well in it, from all accounts. For further information I'll refer you to the steersman."

Prout was called, and he gave a picturesque description of the stronghold of the caves. Then the millionaire asked to see the queen. Althara was very gracious.

"It is enough, stranger," she said. "Fear nothing. Your wounded comrade shall have my litter to carry him to the place of refuge. We go thither in an hour."

So Gan-Waga was borne to the stronghold of the caves in Althara's litter, and the gallant Eskimo slept all the way.

The Attack That Failed—The Treachery of Tarface, the Interpreter—Trouble Brewing.

Ferrers Lord had no sleep that night, for scouts and spies were continually going out and coming in. The most serious

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news was brought about dawn. A man who had been digging tapir traps in the forest had come across the tracks of about thirty men with a number of mules. They were white men, and they were making for the village.

"Reinforcements for Hausmann," said Ferrers Lord. "It must have been a sort of flying column that attacked the village." He looked at Tarface. The poor little native was nodding, for he had been shockingly overworked. "You had better be off to bed, interpreter," added the millionaire. "We can do nothing more."

Hausmann's force, if the statements could be relied upon, numbered about seventy men, all well armed. Althara had some sixteen hundred warriors. A sudden night attack might have ended in a complete massacre of every white man in the village. The millionaire's one idea was to avoid bloodshed of any kind. Had he hurled Althara's eager warriors at the village in the dead of night, nothing except machine-guns could have kept the Germans from annihilation. Ferrers Lord threw himself down on a heap of dry fern.

"Are you asleep, Ching?"

"No, just woke up," said Ching-Lung, with a yawn.

"What's the latest trouble?"

"Thirty men have joined Hausmann."

"Some people have queer tastes. He's the last person on earth I'd care to join."

"I am speaking seriously."

"So was I," said Ching-Lung. "Look here, old chap, I quite appreciate the seriousness of it all. You've been hoodwinking Althara, and, as a white man, you were bound to do it. It's quite right that if Hausmann was nicely entrenched or had picked out a position, he could kill these chaps down like flies, though the odds are about twenty to one. But I know jolly well we could rub all those Germans clean off the slate. They fancy they've got a pottering little tribe to deal with, and they're playing the fool generally. Oh, I know all about it! I only hope the niggers won't find out."

It was a curious position. Hausmann had proved himself to be a merciless foe, and here was the man whom he hated most and feared most, trying to save him and his men from massacre. The Germans by their carelessness were simply inviting destruction to fall upon them—that is, if they were acting carelessly. Who could tell?

"Yes, it is difficult," said Ferrers Lord, "very difficult."

"It just depends how long you can keep up the bluff, old chap. Some of these fellows are spoiling for a fight. I don't want to see the German gang carved up, and I don't believe in helping niggers against white men. I hate the thought of it. When I come to think of it, we made a blunder in promising anything at all."

"That was an unavoidable blunder, Ching. We cannot work miracles. We had lost our weapons and some of our comrades. I do not think I am a cruel man by nature, but I tell you, Ching, if harm had come to any of my men through Hans Hausmann, I should have turned all these savage warriors loose on him."

"And regretted it all your life, old chap. It would have been red murder."

He turned over and went to sleep again. The fire in the centre of the cave smouldered red, and threw fitful shadows across the walls. Still, the millionaire did not close his eyes, but lay puzzling his brains to find out how he could keep the men who were seeking to murder him from being murdered.

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He rose at dawn, and went out into the cool air. A herd of undersized cattle grazed in the hollow. They had plenty of provisions, and men had been sent to conceal the tracks as much as possible. The place was absolutely impregnable. Even if Hausmann could have dropped shells into it, the caves were naturally bomb-proof. There was an ample supply of excellent water. How long could he keep the natives quiet?

Okarni came out of the tunnel to meet him, and the unhappy Tarface was roused to interpret.

"My spies have counted the white men, stranger," said the chief. "That is their number."

He opened and closed his fingers seven times. Ferrers Lord's guess had been very near the mark.

"It is a large force," said Ferrers Lord.

Okarni spat contemptuously over his shoulder, and began to jabber rapidly.

"Say he eat 'em up, say you tell Queen lies," said Tarface.

"Say not afraid of firesticks. Warriors tell all same story. All want fight. Say go fight now. Say take four hundred men!"

Ferrers Lord whistled. He understood now. It was impossible to bring in the women and children on the previous night, and four hundred of the warriors had been drafted off in command of Okarni's son to guard them.

"So he has taken the law into his own hands, and told them to attack the village—eh?"

Tarface nodded.

"Say attack over now, and all white men dead," he explained.

"Tell him he's a fool," said Ferrers Lord.

Tarface was too diplomatic to do any such thing, for Okarni had rather a short temper.

"Say warriors come back bimeby wid white men's heads on spears," said the interpreter.

There was a grin of triumph on the old warrior's face. At that moment Ching-Lung came out of the cave.

"This maniac has sent the men who were supposed to be looking after the women and children to attack Hausmann, Ching," said Ferrers Lord. "The fight is supposed to be over by this time."

"M'yes," said Ching-Lung. "What was the strength of the force?"

"Four hundred."

"Then I expect it is over," said the prince. "If they weren't all asleep, it ought to be over. Hallo! What's all this?"

Okarni let his spear fall as a tramp of feet sounded hollowly through the tunnel. Ching-Lung was right, the fight was over. In single file the remnant of the warriors trooped through. Many of them were wounded, but they lined up. Four hundred had gone out, barely half that number returned. They had gone out to eat up the white men, but the white men had eaten them up instead.

"My son? Where is my son?" wailed Okarni. "Ye dogs! Where is my son?"

One of the warriors pointed to his bullet-riddled shield and to a bleeding wound in his arm. It was answer enough. Okarni squatted down and began to throw dust on his head.

"Poor old chap! I feel quite sorry for him," said Ching-Lung. "Perhaps this will teach them a lesson, and keep them quiet. We'd better start doctoring them and fix up some kind of a hospital."

Ferrers Lord soon gleaned the details of the disaster. Choosing the hour when men are supposed to sleep soundest and when most men die, they had attempted to rush the city from four points. Had the whole of Althara's army been there, the attack might have succeeded. To their astonishment they found that barricades had been erected across the roads leading to the palace. They were met by a terrific fire from all points and beaten back. Three times they charged, but none reached the barricades.

"They've got a couple of Maxims, Ching," said Ferrers Lord. "It was the 'firesticks on wheels' that the poor wretches could not face. I'm dreadfully sorry about all this, for, in a way, we're responsible for it. If we only had guns, we'd take to the forests, but without them it would be like going to certain death. Wake up the men, and let us do all the good we can. See if you can get any bandages and splints."

The Queen still slept. Aided by Joe, the millionaire was setting a broken wrist when Tarface, who was green with fright, came panting up to him with a letter.

"My brudder bring him. Brudder speak but English like me. He go in fight, and white men catch him. Put gun to him head and ax questions. Then send him back wid dis. Oh, shocking bad luck!"

The envelope was addressed to Ferrers Lord in pencil. The

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"LOOKING AFTER UNCLE!"

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note itself was written in German, and the writing was extremely shaky.

"From Hausmann," muttered the millionaire. "Oh, he wants to make terms. If I sign a bond pledging myself to say nothing about that little affair in the river, he will give up the hunt and let me have the blue orchids. He is getting amazingly generous. Unfortunately, I do not believe in these bursts of generosity." He thrust the letter into his pocket and went on with his work. "I would rather trust a hungry jaguar. Take this note to the prince—the pigtail man," he added, a moment later. "Where is your brother?"

The brother was a good deal better-looking than Tarface, but cowardice evidently ran in the family, for he was in a condition of such abject terror that the millionaire could not get two coherent words out of him. The disaster seemed to have stunned all the warriors. They stared at the wounded in a dull, vacant sort of way, and squatted about in little silent groups.

"What is your opinion of the fellow's letter, Ching?"

"I have the same opinion about his letter as I have about himself, old chap," answered Ching-Lung. "I dare say he's as sick of hunting us as we are of being hunted. How did he know we were here?"

"Through sheer bad luck. They happened to take our precious interpreter's brother prisoner, and he has a smattering of English. Hence the letter." He shook his head. "I don't know how this is going to end, Ching. I'd give fifty thousand pounds for half a dozen rifles and a few hundred cartridges. This is most unfortunate. You may depend Hausmann told that youngster that if they'd give us up the Germans would leave the village. Our one hope is that he was too frightened to understand what was said. If he spreads the story about, it will be awkward."

"M'yes, most awkward!" said Ching-Lung. "We ought to keep an eye on him!"

Thurston was a clever surgeon, and he worked with a will. When the millionaire's back was turned, Tarface slipped into a cave after his trembling brother. He seized his brother by the shoulder and shook him.

"What did the white men tell you?" he asked, in the native tongue.

"I cannot remember much," stammered the bold young warrior, his teeth still chattering. "They said they did not want to kill us, but these white men who are with us."

"Yes, yes!" said Tarface eagerly. "What else?"

"They will give me firesticks and knives if I will make the Queen send the white men to them."

"Yes, yes! What else?"

Tarface was not naturally ill-natured. He did not profess to be a hero; he was fond of the wine-cup, but his greatest vice was idleness. He had been overworked, and he hated work. So long as the white men were there he felt that he would have no peace. His one desire was to get rid of them, and at last he saw his chance to drink his fill and sleep in the sunshine again without being dragged here and there, and compelled to interpret. There was an ugly gleam in his squinting eyes as he glided out of the cave. He came face to face with Ching-Lung.

"Hallo, you ugly little rat! What mischief are you plotting now?" said Ching-Lung.

"Not plot noting," said Tarface.

"You'd better not, my sweet one," said Ching-Lung, "or I'll twist your neck round and round till you can see fifty ways at once. Don't be in such a hurry. Who's in here?"

"Only my brudder."

Scenting treachery, Ching-Lung looked him squarely in the face.

"If you play any games with us," he said grimly, "I'll pay you for it, my friend!"

Joe whistled to him. The carpenter had just cooked their breakfast.

"There's trouble coming, Lord," said Ching-Lung. "I can smell it in the air. That little beast Tarface is up to the neck in it. It's coming as sure as Christmas!"

It came even sooner than Ching-Lung expected it to come.

Ferrers Lord's Scheme.

"The Queen calls you, sares!" Tarface only put his head into the cave to shout his message, and then darted back behind an escort of armed warriors. The little, squint-eyed traitor knew that it would be highly dangerous to get too close to Ching-Lung.

"Just as I guessed," said the prince. "That little brute has given the show away!"

"Bedad, Oi'd have done ut myself," said Barry feelingly. "an Oi'd had to worrk at the same pace! Well, well! Oi've come to the stage whin Oi don't care phwat happens, as

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FRANK RICHARDS

Contributes a Splendid, Complete School Tale in our New Saturday Companion Paper—

"CHUCKLES," ½d.

Mick Mulvaney said whin they were going to hang him. And ut's wonderful how long we shall be dead!"

Ferrers Lord rose, and Thurston looked anxiously at him. His thin, bronzed face betrayed nothing. Rupert had half an inch of bristles on his chin, but the millionaire had shaved in some mysterious way, and looked spick and span and smart, as he always did.

"The high office of commander-in-chief is quickly transferred in this country," he said.

"You're right," said Ching-Lung. "I held it for about five minutes, and then resigned. You've got the sack!"

"I'm afraid I have."

"Better be quick," piped Tarface. "Okarni much savage temper. No like wait."

A gong sounded impatiently. Ferrers Lord went out, followed by the others.

"If I get near you, you little beast," said Ching-Lung, catching sight of their betrayer, "I'll pull your ear off!"—suiting the action to the word.

Tarface whined dismally.

"Take care not get near, den. Had to do him. No like work—kills me," said the native frankly. "Why I worry by you? No ax you come here. I fat and happy 'fore you come; now all thin, and ribs stick out. I tell Queen what other white mans say. No want all get killed for you!"

"There's a certain amount of reason in the argument," Ching-Lung admitted. "Now for the fun!"

Althara's army was drawn up in a semicircle. Surrounded by guards, they were placed in front of the column to await the arrival of the Queen.

"By honey, they ain't fond of us!" said Prout, watching the sullen, threatening faces.

"No, they ain't desperately in love wi' us," said the bo'sun.

"What a lot of ugly mugs! I ain't particular nervous, Tom, but I'd give more'n a year's wages to be a 'undred miles away, souse me if I wouldn't!"

"Unless a blessed airship comes along, your wages is as safe as a bank!" said Prout.

The absolute silence that reigned was even more ominous than the threatening aspect of the men. It seemed prophetic of tragedy. Nor was it broken when the Queen appeared. There was no crashing salute, no deafening roar of "Althara! Althara!" no hammering of shields.



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"We're done, Ru, I fear," said Ching-Lung. "The Queen has lost her influence!"

Ferrers Lord stepped forward and bowed. Okarni scowled at him over the Queen's shoulder.

"Stranger," said Althara, in a low voice, "my heart is full of sorrow. Well indeed did Charkoni, the devil-man, prophesy that your coming would bring evil upon me and my people. And yet, stranger, I cannot hate you. You are wise, I know, and you are honest and speak truth; but you carry a curse with you."

Ferrers Lord was rolling a cigarette calmly, and thousands of eyes were fixed on him.

"Blame not us, oh Queen, for the cruel thing that has come about this day," he said. "It has brought sorrow to me, as it has brought sorrow to you. I warned you, Queen; I told you that these white men would eat you up if you attacked them. I have kept faith with you. Our lives are in your hand, and you have given your word to us. I can say one thing, Queen, and it is no boast. Never did I give my word to a man and break my promise. Need I ask you to keep faith with us? Surely to do so would be an insult!"

"She's on our side, Rupert," said Ching-Lung. "I can see that by her face."

Althara stood in silence for a second, and then Okarni impudently touched her arm. Blazing with passion, she turned upon him.

"Dog!" she hissed. "Cur!"

The old man recoiled in terror, but not in time. Ferrers Lord's fist struck him between the eyes, and he dropped like a log.

"I thank you, stranger!" said Althara.

There was an odd rustling sound, caused by the slight movement of more than a thousand men, and then silence again. Okarni lay quiet on the grass. Barely twenty-four hours ago the man who had dared to even speak to Althara except on bended knees would have been hacked to pieces by the infuriated warriors. Now not a spear was raised to avenge her. One white man alone—a stranger who stood on the very brink of death—had done it. Althara looked at him, her dark eyes full of admiration and wonder.

"Stranger," she said, "I have commanded two thousand warriors, all brave and warlike, and yet till this very hour I have seen only one man. You are that man, stranger. It was a brave deed, and I thank you!"

Again her dark eyes blazed with fury as she faced the warriors and poured out a torrent of burning words. They could only guess at what she was saying. As Barry remarked: "She was giving them beans, bedad, and hot wans!" But her words seemed to make no impression.

"We've lost the game, souse me!" growled Maddock.

And Joe and Prout nodded.

"White man," said the Queen, "these warriors of mine are but a pack of beaten hounds!" Her tone was one of bitter scorn. "They have lost heart. Evil news—for you it is evil news—runs like fire on a hill. They say that the men yonder do not seek our goods and our cattle; that they do not wish to slay us. All they ask is that you and your comrades be given up to them."

"If you give us up, you give us up to death, Queen."

"Do you fear death, stranger? Nay, by the smile on your lips I see you fear nothing."

"Life is a precious thing," said Ferrers Lord, lighting a cigarette. "I am not even yet in its prime, and my comrades are young. The world is a good place for those with health and strength. Our lives are in your keeping."

"Yet it is hard," said Althara. "My warriors ask for their homes. They say you came unbidden, and brought evil with you. They say they are many, and you are few. They say you have cost us many lives."

"It is true, Queen."

"But after the deed you have done in striking down that cur, stranger, in the face of death," said Althara, "I would save you even at the expense of my throne. A Queen without power is but a jest. Perhaps I am throneless already."

"Do they, then, insist on this?"

"Yes."

"That we be given up?"

Althara inclined her head sadly. Once more came the strange rustling. The warriors were growing impatient.

"Think, stranger—think!" cried Althara. "You are wiser than I. Surely, I have pledged my word, and I would give my life to save you. I stand helpless, for, alas, a Queen is but a woman! Think—think!"

"All you have heard is true, Althara. The white men are hunning us; but do not trust their words. Once they have gained what they want they may turn and slay you all. This is my plan, Queen. Send—"

"Tarface is listening!" said Ching-Lung.

(Another splendid long instalment of this grand serial next Monday.)

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"LOOKING AFTER UNCLE!"

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST!

(Continued from page 23.)

"Well, he seems to have done the decent thing at last in letting you have it back," said Wharton, still perplexed.

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"Quite so."

"What about that box? You'll have to take it back."

"I'm going to take that to Jerry Hawke. Come on."

"Where now?"

"The old Friardale Priory."

"Are you meeting Hawke there?" asked Harry.

"Yes."

They rode on again. Friardale Wood was reached at last, and they left their machines on the footpath and walked into the ruins. There was no sign of anyone waiting for the Bounder there, and Harry Wharton was more and more puzzled. He uttered an exclamation as the Bounder led the way into the vaults.

"He's not there?"

"Yes. Come on!"

Vernon-Smith had provided himself with an electric torch, and he turned on the light as they descended the steps. He removed the wedge, and threw open the stone door of the secret cell.

There was darkness within. The lamp had failed long ago. From the darkness came a gasp:

"That you, Master Smith?"

"Yes."

"Come and let me loose, for Heaven's sake! I can't stand this 'ere! I tell you I've 'ad the 'oly 'orror!"

Vernon-Smith flashed the light upon Jerry Hawke. Harry Wharton gasped.

"Smithy, you—you've done this! You've kept that man here all night in irons!" The captain of the Remove could scarcely believe his eyes. "Smithy!"

"It was the only way," said Vernon-Smith calmly. "Jerry Hawke drove me to it, and he has himself to thank for it."

"Great Scott!"

"Let me loose!" whined Hawke. "I done all you asked. Let me loose, Master Smith!"

The Bounder stooped and unlocked the irons. Jerry Hawke, who was shivering, and quite limp, rubbed his limbs and whined. The Bounder had his loaded stick in hand in case of trouble; but there was evidently no trouble to be looked for from the cowed ruffian.

"There's your box," said Vernon-Smith. "I've opened it to get my letter. The letter's burnt now. I've drawn your teeth, Jerry Hawke! And, now, you've blackmailed me, and I can prove it. You can prove nothing against me, but I can prove enough to send you back to prison, to stay there for a couple of years this time!"

"You give me your word, Master Smith—"

"And I will keep it. But you've got to clear out of this neighbourhood. Let me set eyes on you once again, and I shall give information to the police, and you will get your deserts!" said the Bounder grimly.

Jerry Hawke shivered.

"I'm goin'," he said. "You won't never set heyes on me ag'in. I don't want to 'ave nothin' to do with you, Master Smith. You're a criminal—that's wot you are! You ain't got no consideration for a feller wot's 'ad trouble. You're worser nor me, by a long sight, you are. I got the cramp, I 'ave, and I've got a cold, and I—"

"And you'll have a thick ear, too, if you don't clear off at once!" interrupted Vernon-Smith.

Jerry Hawke took the hint, and vanished. The Bounder and Harry Wharton returned to their bicycles. They rode in silence towards Greyfriars. Vernon-Smith looked curiously at his companion, after a long silence.

"You know it all now," he said.

Wharton nodded.

"You blame me?"

"I—I don't know," Wharton hesitated. "It—it was—was rather thick, you know. It might have got you into trouble. Of course, that rascal's mouth is closed, as you could bring a charge of blackmailing against him. But—but I'm glad you didn't tell me what you were going to do."

"That's the finish," said the Bounder. "I'm clear now. Nothing more can be brought up against me. The past is dead and done with."

"That's good, at all events."

And as they rode back to the school the Bounder's face was very cheerful. Before him now lay the straight path, easy to tread, no longer darkened and troubled by the shadow of the past.

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next Monday, entitled "Looking After Uncle!" by Frank Richards. Order in advance. Price One Penny.)



My Readers' Page

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"LOOKING AFTER UNCLE!"

SOMETHING SPECIAL IN SERIALS.

A. S. Hardy's great sporting serial in "The Gem" Library is now drawing to a close, and a great deal of time and trouble lately have been devoted to the task of procuring a worthy successor to such a popular serial. My chums will all be pleased to hear that the right story has been found at last. The title of it will be

"A BID FOR A THRONE!"

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"A BID FOR A THRONE!"

represents the best of his work. This amazing, real-life, adventure story will commence very shortly in "The Gem" Library, and I will ask all my chums to keep a special lookout for it, and give it, when it appears, the rousing welcome it deserves.

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

G. Bushell, of 29, Hythe Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey, wishes to form a "Magnetite" Club among his fellow-readers living at Thornton Heath. Will all interested please write to G. Bushell?

S. Hyman, of Fenton Street, Commercial Road, E., would like to hear from fellow-readers of "The Magnet" Library and its companion papers with a view to forming a "Magnet" Book Club.

Joseph H. Robinson, of 21, Montague Place, off Home-ward Avenue, Toronto, Canada, formerly of Manchester, would be pleased to hear from girl or boy readers living in England with a view to forming a "Magnet" Club, for correspondence, etc.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

T. L. R. (Liverpool).—Many thanks for your most interesting letter. I am afraid that were I to do as you suggest it would bring discontent to many of my readers.

J. G. B. (Ireland), Walter Naismith (Bradford), and others.—Very many thanks for your letters and suggestions. "A Loyal Reader" (Marlow).—Write to Messrs. Glaisher, of 32, Charing Cross Road, W., who should be able to get you a book containing plays.

M. Hillman (London, W.).—Although many battles have been fought between Nugent and Wharton, it has never been decided who is the better boxer. G. W. Gate is 17½ years of age.

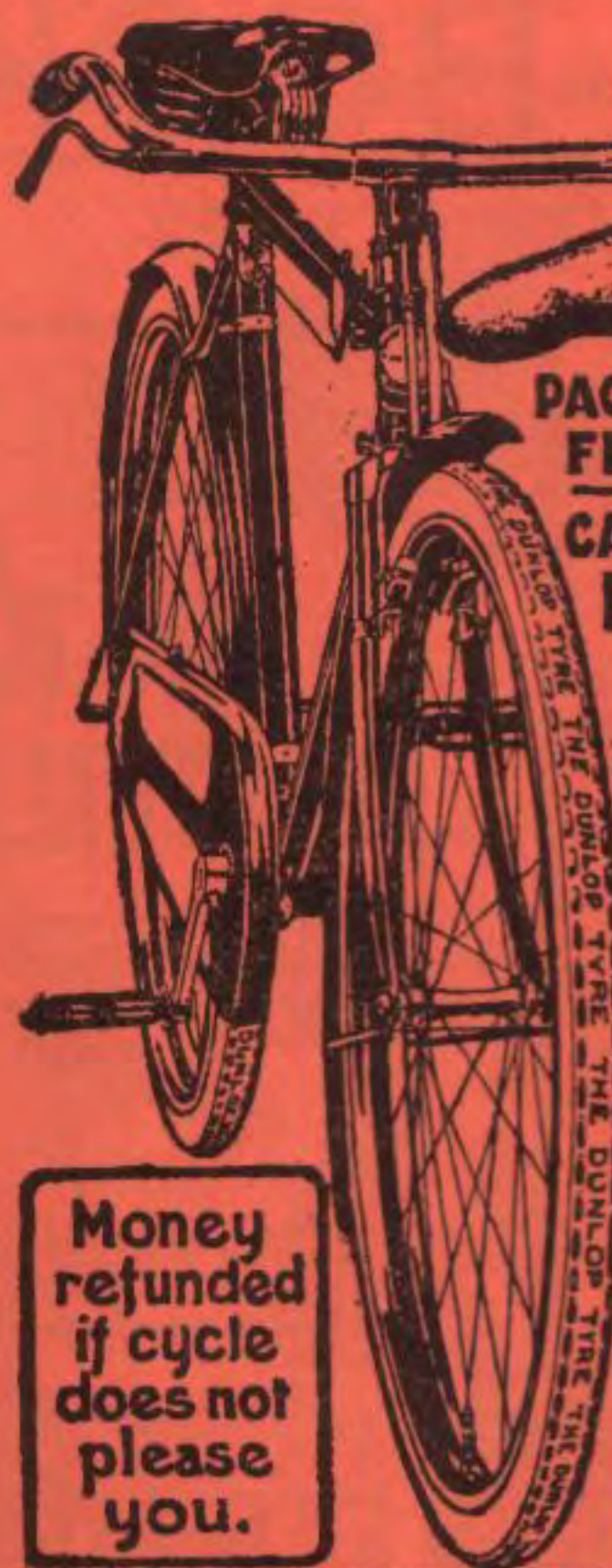
LITTLE-KNOWN CRICKET RECORDS.

There are many important and interesting records in the cricket world that are practically unknown to the majority of followers of the summer pastime, simply because they do not appear in "Wisden" or in ordinary handbooks on the game. For instance, very few people are aware of the fact that King Edward VII., when he was Prince of Wales, once took part in a match. The contest took place at Sandringham in July, 1886, and was between Norfolk gentlemen and I. Zingari, the Prince playing for the latter team. At that time cricket was very popular indeed in the Royal county, and the local magnates of the game thought that with a little management they might make an enthusiast of the Prince, and this match was arranged specially for his benefit. Before the play started, the captain of the Norfolk eleven, Mr. C. Wright, went round to each of his men and suggested that it would be a good thing to give the Royal batsman a chance of scoring, as it would conduce to that self-satisfaction so essential to enthusiasm in any pursuit. All went well until it came to the Prince's turn to bat, when Mr. Wright, who was the bowler, evidently succumbed to temptation, and beat his Royal Highness first ball, thus ending for ever the hopes of Royal patronage for the cricketing fraternity, for never again could the Prince be prevailed on to play. The local paper's report of the affair was an excellent one, and put the matter in a nutshell: "The Prince took up a position at the wicket. Mr. Wright delivered a ball. The Prince went back to the pavilion."

A Six Weeks' Innings.

Although it is fairly easy to discover the different teams certain famous batsmen have played for, such as their school, university, and county, it is not quite so easy to find out what player has represented most clubs in one season, being at the same time an actual member of them all. The honour, however, appears to belong to a Mr. Gregory, who in 1867 was a playing member of no fewer than eighteen London clubs, did active service for them all during the four months, and scored well over two thousand runs in local games that summer. For length of an innings the famous Barlow, who used to play for Lancashire, must be at the top of the tree if the story told of him be true. Before joining the County Palatine he was engaged as porter at a country station, where very little business was done, and which was visited by very few trains. Consequently he and the rest of the station officials—there were four altogether—had plenty of time on their hands. A passenger waiting for a train one day asked the stationmaster how they managed to utilise all this spare time, and he explained that they all played cricket in an adjoining field, "where we often have some good games. But our porter, Barlow, he's a very good player, and he's been batting now for six weeks, and we can't get him out!" The gentleman, who had some influence in the cricket world, judged that Barlow must be something above the average, and, after going to watch him, eventually obtained him a place in the Lancashire team. He certainly had many long innings afterwards, but there was nothing to compare with his "six weeks' feat."

(Another Grand
 Cricket Article
 next week.)



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