

FOES OF THE SIXTH!

A Grand Long Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.



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FOES OF THE SIXTH!

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Wingate sprang to his feet, and grasped his soldier-brother warmly by the hand. "You've knocked me all of a heap, Bob!" he exclaimed. "You were the last person I expected to see!" (See Chapter 2.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Driven to the Wall!

LETTER for Master Wingate!" Trotter, the page-boy at Greyfriars, sprinted up to the captain of the school while the latter was engaged in shots at goal with other members of the first eleven.

"Thanks, kid!" said Wingate lightly.

Trotter went on his way, and the Sixth-Former glanced curiously at the envelope. It bore a military crest—that of the Loamshire Regiment—and the post-mark was Folkestone.

"My hat!" exclaimed Wingate, drawing a deep breath.

"Anything wrong, old man?" inquired Courtney of the Sixth, coming up.

"No; at any rate, I don't think so. This letter's from my brother Bob, who's been fighting in France for nearly a year. He seems to be home on leave."

"That's good!"

"Unless he happens to be wounded, poor chap," said Wingate, with a clouded brow. "He may be in hospital, for all I know. He hasn't written to me or to the people at home for a dog's age."

The captain of Greyfriars ripped open the envelope and read the letter. It was brief and to the point.

"Dear George,—I am home on leave for a few days, and am jolly hard up. Can you spring a fiver?—Your affectionate brother,
Bob."

That was all. No news of the recent fighting in Flanders; no kindly solicitude for his brother's welfare. Simply a terse demand for five pounds.

And George Wingate could ill afford such a sum. There were certain fellows at Greyfriars who simply rolled in riches, and to whom a fiver was an inconsiderable item; but these could be reckoned upon the fingers of one hand, and Wingate was not among their number. His father, hard hit by the war, had had no resource but to cut down his allowance; and this sudden call upon his scanty exchequer threw the captain of Greyfriars momentarily off his balance.

The game continued, but Wingate took no part in it. He assured Courtney that nothing was amiss, and then, with a short nod, turned on his heel and strode into the building.

"It's rotten!" he muttered to himself. "If only Bob really wanted the cash I'd stump up like a shot. But it strikes me he wants to paint the town red while he's home, and thinks I'm well off."

Wingate had good grounds for such a line of reasoning. Bob Wingate, the dashing, happy-go-lucky lieutenant in the Loamshires, was never at any time averse to what he termed a "little flutter." Now that he had been liberated for a brief spell from the grimness of the trenches, he was likely to dissipate more freely than ever.

But how could George Wingate refuse the loan, in the face of what his brother had been through in the firing-line? Who could condemn the dare-devil lieutenant for having a good time, when he had stood for weary weeks in mud and slush, and braved the hail of shot and shell and shrapnel which had accounted for so many brave fellows?

Wingate's mind was soon made up. When he reached his study, he drew out his purse, and extracted a number of gold and silver coins. They totalled just five pounds, and formed the whole of his savings for months past.

"It's rotten!" he said again. "And yet, how can I begrudge him? He's been keeping the Huns out, and his officer's pay isn't princely. It's a bit of a wrench for me, but, hang it all, he's my brother!"

Then a sudden difficulty presented itself. How could he send a collection of coins through the post? He must obtain paper money, if possible.

"I know!" he exclaimed. "Valence paid his subscription to the Games Fund yesterday. He gave me a fiver, as he's been letting his subs hang fire for several terms. I'll take the note out of the box, and substitute this cash."

He went over to the box, which was nailed to the wall, and unlocked it. Wingate was treasurer of the Games Fund, which was in a most flourishing state. The Greyfriars fellows—seniors and juniors, alike—were, as a whole, greatly enthusiastic concerning all manner of sports.

Wingate placed the handful of money in the box, and drew out the five-pound note. As he did so a couple of juniors entered the study. They were Skinner and Bolsover, of the Remove.

Wingate swung round with the note in his hand.

"What is it?" he asked.

Skinner glanced curiously at the captain of Greyfriars, and then at the open box. A rank outsider himself, it was only natural that Harold Skinner should be suspicious of others. However, Wingate was treasurer of the Games Fund, and if he chose to abstract a fiver from the box, it was probably for a sound reason. Even

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Skinner did not think it feasible, for the moment, that George Wingate was a thief.

"Excuse me, Wingate," he said. "Didn't know you were so busy. Can we have a pass out of gates?"

"For what purpose?"

"To get some tuck from Uncle Clegg's in Courtfield. It's my birthday."

"The third birthday you've had this year—what?" laughed Wingate. "Here you are! Don't go getting into mischief!"

He signed the necessary pass, and the two juniors quitted the study.

"Rather queer, Wingate taking banknotes out of the Games Fund," said Skinner thoughtfully.

"Queer! Why, what d'you mean?" asked Bolsover.

"It struck me as being jolly funny," Skinner went on. "What could he want a fiver for?"

"To get some new footers, or something, I expect."

"Rats! Only yesterday he got new supplies of everything. I heard him tell Courtney it wouldn't be necessary to draw on the Games Fund any more this season. If that's the case, why should he suddenly take a fiver from the box?"

"Ask me another!" said Bolsover. "Still, I shouldn't think there was anything fishy about it. If it had been Loder we saw, that would put a different complexion on it."

"Anyway, it's pretty mysterious," said Skinner. "I know Wingate's been short of tin for some time. He doesn't stand treat to the other prefects, like he used to. Praps he wanted a fiver badly."

Bolsover stared.

"Do you suggest," he said, "that Wingate's a thief?"

"Not exactly. I expect he helped himself, intending to replace the money as soon as it was convenient."

"That would amount to stealing," said Bolsover. "There's not a great gulf between the two things, that I can see. But Wingate wouldn't be such a worm as that, and you know it, Skinny! Dry up!"

And Skinner dried up. He didn't like the look on Bolsover's face at that moment. But although the cad of the Remove chatted of other things as they tramped along the road to Courtfield, the incident of the fiver was not likely to be forgotten.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Hears Something!

"W HAT cheer, George, old fellow!"

Wingate, who was in the act of writing a letter to his brother enclosing the remittance, looked up in astonishment as he recognised the old familiar voice.

"Bob!" he exclaimed.

"Myself, in the flesh!" said the young warrior boisterously. "Don't look so startled, man! I'm not Hamlet's ghost!"

Wingate sprang to his feet, and grasped his soldier-brother warmly by the hand.

"You've knocked me all of a heap!" he exclaimed.

"You were the last person I expected to see, especially as it was only half an hour ago that I got your letter."

Bob Wingate tossed his cane into the corner, and availed himself of the comfortable armchair.

"This is topping!" he said. "Got a fag?"

The captain of Greyfriars flushed.

"I don't smoke, Bob," he said shortly.

"What! Oh, of course! I might have known. Fancy headmasters not allowing fellows of seventeen to enjoy an occasional whiff! We're too old-fashioned in this country, George."

George Wingate laughed.

"It would be a poor sort of example to the kids if the captain of a school was in the habit of strolling about with a cigarette in his mouth," he said. "Discipline would be at a discount."

"Oh, well!" said Bob. "We won't come to blows over it. You always were a stickler for law and order, George. I prefer a life of freedom myself. Look here, can you manage that fiver all right?"



Kildare broke through, and the Greyfriars backs quailed before his fierce rush. The ball went whizzing in from his foot, and crashed into the net. "Goal!" (See Chapter 8.)

"I—I think so."

"That's the style! You couldn't make it a tenner while you're about it?"

"I'm afraid not. I can only just run to five. They don't give one five hundred a year for being skipper of Greyfriars, you know."

"But you always used to be in funds."

"Times have changed," said George Wingate, rather bitterly. "You've been at the Front, and haven't guessed what's going on at home. The pater's come a considerable cropper financially, and I feel the draught as well."

"I s'pose I shall have to content myself with a fiver, then," sighed Bob. "It's not much for a fellow to have a fling on."

The Sixth-Former looked serious.

"Look here, Bob, old man," he said, "you're a couple of years older than me, and I don't want to sermonise. But really I shouldn't go the pace, if I were you. I know just how you feel, after being stuck in the trenches for nearly twelve months; but there's not much fun in going on the razzle."

"Isn't there, though! Eat, drink, and be merry, is my motto. What in thunder's the good of being a Puritan? I like to get the best out of life."

"Very well," said the captain of Greyfriars, with an air of resignation. "I sha'n't mind, so long as you don't

go getting into trouble. There's no harm in a game of cards or billiards, but for Heaven's sake don't get mixed up in a tavern brawl, or anything of that sort!"

Bob Wingate laughed heartily.

"Great Scott, George! I'm not a kid now, and I know how to look after number one. Got any grub to offer a chap?"

Wingate went to the cupboard. Luckily, he was well supplied. A cake, a tin of sardines, and plenty of rolls and butter were placed on the table, and the kettle was already boiling over.

"I came along now," explained Bob, "because I was absolutely stony—broke to the wide. The few bob I had went in railway fare. I s'pose you couldn't raise another fiver from one of your affluent chums?"

Wingate looked his brother straight in the eyes.

"Look here, Bob!" he said. "This note—which I took from the Games Fund—is all the money I've got in the world. Surely you don't expect me to start sponging on other chaps? I should never be in a position to pay them back!"

Bob Wingate grunted.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "I must endeavour to scrape along on a measly fiver. Hand it over, there's a good sport!"

The captain of Greyfriars obeyed. It was a cruel

wrench to him. He had saved assiduously for several months, and now he would have to start all over again.

"Thanks!" said Bob lightly. "It's awfully sportin' of you, begad! By the way, you don't keep a dog, do you?"

"A what!" gasped Wingate.

"A dog. I thought I felt one rub against my leg just now. Must have been imagination. No, it wasn't, though, by Jove! The little brute's there again! I heard him shuffle this time."

The Sixth-Former sprang from his chair and dived under the table. There was a smothered roar from underneath, and then the senior's hand gripped something, and, to the unbounded astonishment of the two brothers, Billy Bunter, the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars, was hauled forth.

"Bunter!" gasped Wingate, in amazement. "You fat young toad. You've been hiding under the table!"

"Ow!"

"Explain yourself!" roared the incensed captain, his grip tightening on the fat junior's collar. "What have you been up to?"

"I—I got under the table to—to dust the carpet," said Bunter feebly.

"My stars!" gasped Bob Wingate. "What a whopper!"

"You lying young cormorant!" exclaimed Wingate. "You've been eavesdropping, as usual!"

"I—I haven't! I swear to it, Wingate!"

As a matter of fact, Billy Bunter had not entered the study with the intention of hearing as much as he could that was not intended for his ears. His object had been to raid Wingate's cupboard. The captain of Greyfriars had come in unexpectedly, and Bunter, moved to fright, had sought subterfuge under the table. Here he had remained, dusty and half suffocated, until Bob Wingate's legs had been sprawled out, coming into contact with Bunter's fat body, and causing him to gasp. The fat was in the fire now with a vengeance!

"You might hand me over that cricket-stump, Bob," said Wingate grimly.

"Only too pleased!" grinned the lieutenant. "Anything to oblige!"

Wingate took a firm grip of the stump, and hoisted Bunter across the table, heedless of the damage to crockery which the action caused. The Sixth-Former was in royal rage. He could not stand an eavesdropper at any price. It was pretty certain that Billy Bunter had heard every word of the conversation, and it was equally certain that the affair of the five-pound note would become common knowledge.

Whack, whack, whack!

Wingate was a wonderful wielder of the willow in summer-time, and he also knew how to wield a cricket-stump. The dust rose in a cloud from Bunter's tight trousers, and the Owl of the Remove wriggled and roared. Bob Wingate roared, too, with laughter.

"Stick it, George!" he exclaimed. "This is better than a pantomime! Carpet-beating isn't it!"

Wingate laid about him right lustily, and by the time the castigation was over Bunter looked as if he had just emerged from a mangle. He sank to the floor in an ungainly heap.

"Ow-ow-ow! Yaroooooh!"

"Stop making that ridiculous row!" said Wingate. "And get out of my study, before I punt you out like a footer!"

With a good deal of groaning and grunting, Billy Bunter picked himself up and waddled out into the passage. The door closed behind him with a slam.

"Wow! Beast!" he muttered, caressing his injured parts. "The rotter's bruised me all over! Never mind. I'll make him sit up for this. He told that drunken beast of a brother of his that he'd taken five quid from the Games Fund, did he? Then I'll jolly well expose him as a thief, and get him sacked from the school! Yow!"

And Billy Bunter, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, rolled away to partake of tea in Hall.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Battle Royal!

"MATE!" said Harry Wharton, who was playing chess with Bob Cherry in the Rag that evening. The rest of the Famous Five were looking on, and had been giving advice from time to time.

"The matefulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Singh. "You should have shiftfully moved your esteemed knight, my worthy Bob!"

Bob Cherry grunted.

"I never was much of a hand at chess," he said.

"Footer's more in my line. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's our old pal Bunter!"

Billy Bunter's entry into the Rag was dramatic, to say the least of it. He fairly stampeded into the room, his little round eyes positively gleaming behind his spectacles.

"I say, you chaps!" he panted, puffing like a very old bellows. "I've got news—amazing news!"

"Another German submarine gone to pot?" inquired Frank Nugent.

"Blow the German submarines! Blow the war! I say, you fellows, Wingate's a thief!"

"What!"

The Famous Five sprang to their feet as if electrified, and glared at the fat junior.

"Say that again!" said Harry Wharton.

"Wingate's a thief!" repeated Bunter, in shrill tones. "He's a second Raffles. I didn't tell you chaps before, because the evidence against him wasn't complete."

"He must be mad!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"Mad as a hatter!"

"The ludicrous toad should be deportfully sent to an asylum!"

"I tell you it's a fact!" howled Bunter. "Wingate's brother came to see him this afternoon. He's a lieutenant in the Loamshires. I happened to be in the study when this officer johnnie cadged for a fiver. Wingate said he'd be pleased to pinch one out of the Games Fund."

"You fat fibber!" roared Bob Cherry, with such a ferocious look on his usually sunny face that Billy Bunter hastily retreated a few steps. "What a frightful whopper! I've a jolly good mind to wring your neck!"

"There can't be anything in what he says," growled Johnny Bull. "The fat fraud is romancing, as usual!"

"Really, Bull! I happened to see Wingate actually hand the note to his brother!"

"Then it was his own note, of course!" said Wharton, with a contemptuous glance at the fat, oily Owl of the Remove. "Fancy accusing old Wingate of theft! My hat, it fairly makes a chap's blood boil!"

"I tell you I saw him hand the fiver over!" persisted Bunter. "I—"

"Hallo, what's that about a fiver?" asked Skinner, coming upon the scene with Bolsover major.

"Bunter's come here with a cock-and-bull yarn about Wingate having stolen a fiver from the Games Fund," said Wharton. "Did you ever hear such piffle?"

"I'm not so sure about it being piffle," said Skinner. "We saw Wingate take the fiver out of the box with our own eyes, didn't we, Bolsover?"

"That's true," said the bully of the Remove. "But that doesn't prove Wingate to be a thief. He's treasurer of the Fund, so there's nothing very suspicious about it."

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"I should think not!" said Wharton warmly. "Wingate's a real white man! He'd sing in the streets rather than stoop to theft."

"Hear, hear!" said the rest of the Famous Five together.

Skinner grinned knowingly.

"It's no good trying to stick up for Wingate," he said. "He's stepped over the traces this time, and got bowled out. He's always posed as a high-falutin sort of chap, with honest motives, and all the rest of it, but this affair shows him up in his true light."

"Why, you rotter—" began Harry Wharton indignantly.

"Come to think of it," said Bolsover major, thoughtfully, "there's a good deal in what Skinney says. Wingate's been broke to the wide for months. He never has big study celebrations like he did before the war, and he hasn't bought any new togs. It's plain as a pikestaff now. This brother of his paid him a surprise visit, and tapped him for a fiver, and the only course open to him was to pinch one from the Games Fund. I don't say it was deliberate theft. Old Wingate probably means to replace the money as soon as he can raise it."

"I guess that hits off the situation some!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"Hear, hear!" agreed Snoop and Stott.

"My hat!" said Johnny Bull. "This is the limit—to make out that the skipper's a common or garden thief. Are we going to stand idly by and hear Wingate spoken of like this?"

"Rather not!"

"Rush the rotters!" roared Harry Wharton.

The next moment a wild and whirling fight was in progress. Fellows who had not the slightest inkling of what the row was about joined in on whichever side took their fancy. Forms were overturned, inkpots and rulers whizzed through the air, and all was pandemonium.

The Famous Five had their hands full. Bolsover's sledgehammer fists were doing tremendous havoc, and not until reinforcements arrived, in the form of Mark Linley, Peter Todd, and a few other stalwarts, did the tide of battle turn.

Billy Bunter made a wild stampede towards the door, but Johnny Bull was ready for him. He shot out his fist, and Bunter sat down with a wild howl.

"That's for spreading a false report, you young rotter!" said Johnny. "Get up and have some more!"

But Billy Bunter, for once in a way, was not greedy. He lay where he was, emitting groans of dire anguish.

"Buck up!" yelled Bolsover. "Skinner, you rotten funk, you're leaving it all to me! Yow-ow-ow!"

Bob Cherry's fists came like battering-rams upon the bully's chest and jaw, sending him spinning. Snoop and Stott backed away in alarm, but were followed up and floored, and Trevor and Treluce shared a similar fate.

Bolsover was on his feet again in a twinkling, however, and pounding away at his aggressors. For a time nothing was heard in the Rag save the thudding of hard body-blows and the incessant tramp, tramp of the combatants.

Just as the fight was at its hottest, Gerald Loder, the obnoxious black sheep of the Sixth, broke in upon the scene with an ashplant. The senior wasted no time in words. Striding into the fray, he lashed out right and left, and the juniors dispersed like chaff before a cyclone.

"Ow-ow-ow!" groaned Bob Cherry, nursing his elbow.

"Grooh! My thigh's fractured!" grunted Johnny Bull, hobbling to a safe corner.

Loder desisted at last.

"You young sweeps!" he panted. "How dare you cause such a disturbance? You will each take a hundred lines, and bring them to my study by Wednesday afternoon!"

"Oh!"

Loder then approached Bunter, who was still grovelling on the floor, and applied his boot to the fat junior's ribs. Bunter gasped like a very old bellows.

"Ow-w-w!"

"Get up!" said Loder, tersely.

Billy Bunter struggled to his feet.

"Now tell me what all the row was about."

"It's like this," said Bunter, in a loud, shrill voice. "Wingate's been caught pinching money out of the Games Fund, and these fellows won't believe it."

Loder gave a start.

"Are you trying to pull my leg?" he said sternly.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE!"

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PENNY.

"Nunno! It's a fact, Loder. Ask Bolsover and Skinner."

The prefect turned to the juniors in question.

"Is Bunter's extraordinary statement correct?" he asked.

"Yes," growled Bolsover. "We saw Wingate take a fiver out of the box with our own eyes. He gave it to a spendthrift brother of his."

"The officer who came here this afternoon?"

"That's it."

"It's a pack of lies!" exclaimed Harry Wharton hotly.

"Surely you don't believe such piffle, Loder?"

"I'm not so sure," said Loder thoughtfully. "Everyone knows Wingate's been in low water lately. However, we don't want a scandal. Perhaps Wingate may be able to give me a satisfactory explanation of the matter. Meanwhile, you juniors had better keep your mouths shut."

And with that Gerald Loder turned on his heel and quitted the common-room. Strange and startling thoughts were passing through his mind at that moment. It had long been his fond ambition to undermine George Wingate's authority, and to deprive him of the captaincy, but hitherto Wingate had left him no loophole. Not for an instant did Loder give credence to Skinner & Co.'s amazing story. At the same time, events might shape themselves in such a way as to bring black suspicion upon the captain of Greyfriars; and then, Loder reflected, with a grim chuckle, he would strike, and strike hard.

Loder saw himself, in his mind's eye, ruling the roost at Greyfriars, and exercising supreme authority. He saw Wingate packing up his trunks and preparing to quit the old school, within whose walls he had worked and played for so many years. The prospect which opened up before the unscrupulous prefect looked rosy in the extreme, and there was an anticipative gleam of triumph in his eyes as he puffed at a cigarette in the privacy of his study.

Were Loder's dreams destined to come true?

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. The Only Way!

GERALD LODER'S elation was short-lived. As he sat in his study, immersed in thought, he became suddenly aware of the fact that he was in debt.

This was by no means an unusual position for the black sheep of the Sixth to find himself in, but this time he saw no way of extricating himself. He owed the landlord of the Cross Keys two pounds, and his worldly wealth at that moment consisted of barely twopence. Mr. Cobb, to whom the money was due, might at any moment adopt a threatening attitude towards the prefect, and if this happened, Loder would be driven into a tight corner.

There was only one way out. Loder must redeem his losses by defeating Cobb at cards. The publican had offered him his revenge, and it would be advisable to strike while the iron was hot.

Accordingly, the prefect waited until the juniors' bedtime, when he saw lights out for the Remove; then he quitted the school by way of the Head's garden, to the gate of which he possessed a private key.

Loder's little excursions to the Cross Keys were common knowledge. The fact that the nation was at war—that betting and gambling were not conducive to beating the Hun—didn't trouble Loder a little bit. He was "all out" for a good time, and any scruples which might have entered his mind speedily went by the board.

The little inn was closed to the public, but a light gleamed in the parlour window. The prefect rapped sharply on the panes, and was admitted by the amiable Mr. Cobb, who puffed industriously at an evil-smelling cigar.

"Evenin'!" he said affably. "In funds—wot?"

Loder shook his head.

"I sha'n't need to be," he said, with forced jocularity.

"I mean to get my revenge to-night. You'll accept my IOUs?"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Cobb looked thoughtful.

"It ain't like 'ard cash," he said. "Still, as you and me are old pals, Mr. Loder, I won't raise no objection. You owes me two quid at present, and I'm prepared to let it go up to five."

"Good biz!"

"Loder followed the landlord into the parlour. Then he gave a violent start. Seated by the blazing fire was Mr. Banks, a bookie who frequented the locality, and a young officer in the uniform of the Leamshire Regiment, who could have been no other than Bob Wingate.

Mr. Cobb waved a grimy hand towards the lieutenant. "That's Bob Wingitt," he said to Loder, by way of introduction. "He's a norficer, as you'll see, and he'll be pleased to meet you. We're all merry and bright 'ere—quite a family party—eh, Banks?"

"Wot-ho!" said the bookmaker cordially.

Bob Wingate rose from his chair, and shook hands with Loder in great astonishment.

"You're a Greyfriars cove?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"Great Scott! I admire your nerve, to break bounds like this! It's a wonder you're not bowled out."

Loder grinned.

"I'm pretty fly!" he said knowingly. "They'd have all their work cut out to nail me."

"That they would!" assented the landlord. "Besides, wot's wrong with a gent like Mr. Loder 'aving a little flutter now and again?"

"Nothing at all," said Bob Wingate. "I wish old George would be a sport, and come on the spree. But he simply stared at me when I asked him. Said it was dishonourable, and all the rest of it."

Loder nodded sympathetically.

"That's just like him," he said. "He seems to model himself on Good Little George. However, p'raps I ought not to run him down behind his back. Let's have a little game."

Chairs were drawn up to the table, and Mr. Banks produced a greasy pack of cards, and took up his position next to Mr. Cobb. Loder and Bob Wingate lighted cigarettes, and then the game began.

For the first half-hour the honours were fairly even. Banks and Cobb, scoundrels both to the finger-tips, did not wish to attract suspicion at the outset. They played disinterestedly, and had no more of the game than the two younger and less experienced players.

As the evening wore on, however, Bob Wingate's uneasy glances and Loder's haggard face proved that the lieutenant and the prefect were in a tight corner. That corner became even tighter as the game progressed, until, shortly before eleven o'clock, Cobb threw down his cards with a yawn.

"You've reached the five pound, Mr. Loder," he said. "And cheese!"

"Oh, hang it all! Let's play on!" insisted Loder, the gambling lustre showing in his eyes.

"I think I'll drop out of the running now," observed Bob Wingate. "I'm three quid to the bad. Change this for me, Cobb, there's a good fellow!"

As he spoke, the young lieutenant drew from his pocket-book a five-pound note, and laid it on the table before the landlord. Loder's eyes gleamed. This must be the selfsame note which the captain of Greyfriars had taken from the Games Fund box. He looked thoughtful as Cobb counted out the change.

"Time I was goin', gentlemen, I think," said Mr. Banks, somewhat hastily. "I've got to get right over to Wyland to-night. So-long, everybody!"

And, having taken his share of the plunder, the bookmaker withdrew.

Bob Wingate rose to his feet. He congratulated himself that he had not been completely cleaned out, as might easily have been the case had he played on. As it was, he still had a couple of pounds in his pocket, with which he would be able to improve the shining hour at his home before returning to the Front.

"Good-bye, Cobb!" he said shortly. "Don't s'pose I shall see you any more. Furloughs aren't as plentiful as blackberries. Good-bye, Loder! Hope you get back to the school all right."

Loder shook hands with the soldier, who strode from the inn and proceeded to the railway-station, humming a merry tune.

When he was left alone with the Greyfriars senior Mr. Cobb rubbed his hands.

"You'll excuse my mentionin' it, sir," he said, "but I'm in sore need of that fiver. You'll try an' let me 'ave it to-morrow, won't you?"

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Loder, aghast.

"Suttinly! I've bin 'ard 'it by the war, I 'ave, wot with the noo drink restrictions and one thing an' another. Matter of fact, I've got a little bill to settle in Courtfield, and shall want the ready cash."

"You shall have it all right, Cobb," said the Sixth-Former, "but not to-morrow. Great Scott, man! Where d'you think I can raise such a sum? It won't fall from the skies!"

"Any'ow, 'ave it I must!" said Mr. Cobb firmly. "Otherwise I shall feel constrained to—ahem!—lay a report before your 'Eadmaster!"

Loder clenched his hands hard.

"You—you'd serve me a shabby trick like that?" he exclaimed.

"Needs must when the devil drives!"

The prefect looked almost savage.

"I'm blessed if I'd come here any more if you showed me up!" he muttered.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Cobb. "Strikes me you wouldn't get the chanst!"

"Look here!" said Loder desperately. "I've owed you money before, but you haven't cut up so rusty about it. Can't you let it rip for a bit?"

"'Fraid not," replied the landlord, with the air of a man who has said the final word on a subject.

"Very well, then," said Loder, with a haggard look. "I'll try and raise the wind somehow."

Mr. Cobb nodded, and went to the billiard-room. Loder, bemoaning his ill-luck, buttoned up his overcoat and passed out into the deserted village street.

His teeth were set as he tramped back to Greyfriars under the starlit sky.

The prefect's thoughts were black as midnight. Five pounds was to be raised in a day! Had it been a month he could not have hoped to amass such a sum. But a day! It was absurd—utterly impossible!

Loder had friends of a sort in the Sixth, but those who would fain have helped him out of his pickle were in a bad financial way themselves; and those who had plenty of money, like Ionides, the Greek senior, would not be disposed to settle debts incurred through gambling. There was only one way by which he could obtain the money, and Loder almost shivered at the mere thought. He must steal it!

With all his faults—and they were many—the cad of the Sixth had always scorned the idea of theft in any shape or form. He was not all bad, and rank dishonesty he viewed with repugnance. But desperate situations require desperate remedies. He must have the money!

He tried to conjecture, as he swung along the hard, white road leading to Greyfriars, what would happen if the crafty Cobb exposed him before Dr. Locke. Ignominy, shame, and expulsion would ensue—and such a state of affairs must be avoided at all hazards!

"I must do it!" he muttered over and over again. "It's rotten, but—but there's no way out!"

His thoughts turned instinctively to the affair of the Games Fund, and a gleam came into his eyes. Supposing he were to appropriate five pounds, and the loss were discovered? It would naturally be laid to the door of

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Wingate, who was seen to take money out of the box by two juniors.

"They won't possibly suspect me," he said to himself. "How can they? Wingate's guilt will be as clear as noonday, and then—then he'll get sacked from the captaincy, if not from the school; and there's a sporting chance that I shall be made skipper in his place."

This sudden possibility quite clinched the matter, so far as Loder was concerned. He entered the school by stealth, and proceeded cautiously to Wingate's study.

Although the room was in darkness he knew every inch of it, and only a few moments sufficed for him to obtain the key from Wingate's drawer and unlock the box. He plunged his hand in, and gave a murmur of relief as it encountered a pile of coins.

Even at that instant, however, the senior hesitated. He realised the terrible gravity of his offence. Not only would he be a thief, but he would be the means of laying the guilt upon another.

But the prospect of the oily Cobb coming to Greyfriars to make a scandal soon settled Loder's scruples. He remembered that he carried a small electric torch in his pocket, and, drawing it out, he flashed it upon the box.

There was gold and silver in plenty inside. Loder guessed now what Wingate had done. He had placed five pounds in cash there, and had taken, in exchange, a five-pound note.

The window-blind rustled, and Loder started violently. To be caught red-handed at that instant, robbing the Games Fund at dead of night, would be the last straw. He must hurry.

With deft fingers he counted out the money, and then, locking the box and replacing the key, he stole noiselessly away to his own room. He was almost staggered by what he had done, and tried hard to turn his mind from the distasteful subject and think of other things. But the knowledge of his guilt remained to haunt him, and the night was far advanced ere Gerald Loder sank into a troubled and uneasy slumber.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. A Loyal Chum!

AFTER breakfast next morning Mr. Quelch rustled along the Sixth-Form passage with a frowning brow. He paused outside Wingate's study, and rapped sharply.

"Come in!"

The Remove-master entered. Wingate was seated at the table with his head between his hands, thinking—wondering what his brother Bob was doing at that moment, and if his "mild flutters" had landed him into trouble.

"Wingate!"

The captain of Greyfriars looked up surprised, as he saw who his visitor was. It was not Mr. Quelch's custom to invade the senior studies thus early in the morning.

Wingate's face was pale, and dark rings beneath his eyes clearly showed that he had slept but little the previous night.

"You want me, sir?" he asked politely.

"I am worried in my mind, Wingate," said the Form-master, "on account of a strange rumour which is going the rounds of the school, casting aspersions upon your good name."

Wingate gave a start.

"This is news to me, sir," he said. "I was quite unaware of the fact."

"Let it be clearly understood, my boy," said Mr. Quelch, "that I attach no faith to what is apparently a trumped-up story. I have always had great regard for your integrity and uprightness."

The Sixth-Former looked astonished. He wondered what on earth Mr. Quelch was driving at.

"To be quite frank," said the Remove-master, "you are being accused of theft."

Wingate leapt to his feet.

"Sir!"

"I am sorry to wound your feelings in this way, Wingate, but the matter must be sifted to the bottom. Bunter and one or two more boys in the Form have been chattering. They have not spoken to me personally, but I accidentally overheard their conversation. You are

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EVERY
MONDAY

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ONE
PENNY.

accused of having appropriated money from the Games Fund."

Wingate looked incredulous for a moment; then he laughed lightly.

"I think I can explain matters, sir," he said. "Yesterday, my soldier brother wrote to me, making a request for five pounds. I possessed that sum in cash, but in order to send it through the post it was necessary for me to procure a note. I therefore placed the money in the Games Fund box, yonder, and took out a five-pound note. Now I come to think of it, two juniors—Skinner and Bolsover—saw me with the fiver in my hand. The young rascals must have jumped to the conclusion that I stole it."

Mr. Quelch's brow cleared. He appeared to be greatly relieved.

"Ultimately," proceeded Wingate, "my brother actually paid me a visit, when I handed him the five-pound note."

"Have you the key of the box?" inquired Mr. Quelch. "It is as well that the matter should be satisfactorily settled, once and for all. You, of course, understand that I trust you implicitly?"

Wingate nodded, and produced the key from his drawer.

"How much money should there be in the box?" asked Mr. Quelch as he unlocked it.

"Six pounds, sir, in gold and silver."

"Then we will check the amount, and I will flog those juniors soundly for their impertinent insinuations. I consider—Why, goodness gracious!"

Mr. Quelch broke off suddenly. He stared into the box, and then swung round and confronted the senior.

"Wingate!"

"What on earth's the matter, sir?" asked the captain dazedly.

"That box contains one sovereign only!"

"What?"

Wingate could hardly believe the evidence of his ears. He strode forward, and his glance fell upon the interior of the box. Mr. Quelch was correct. It contained only a sovereign.

"Then—then there's five pounds missing!" he stammered.

"Precisely," said Mr. Quelch coldly.

"I—I can't understand it!" stuttered the Sixth-Former in dismay. "I'll swear the six pounds were there last night. And now—"

"Now it has gone," said Mr. Quelch. "There can be little doubt that five pounds have been stolen. The statements of those juniors cannot be entirely devoid of foundation. An inquiry must be held at once."

"You—you surely don't think I stole the money, sir?" gasped Wingate.

"I scarcely know what to think, under the circumstances."

Wingate staggered. The room seemed to be revolving before his eyes, and he was obliged to clutch at the table for support.

"I must acquaint Dr. Locke of the matter without delay," said Mr. Quelch. "The affair is serious in the extreme."

Wingate opened his mouth to speak, but Mr. Quelch had vanished.

Minutes passed; then Courtney of the Sixth put his head in at the doorway.

"Made out the team for the Abbotsford match?" he asked. Then he paused abruptly, as he caught sight of Wingate's haggard face.

"Wingate, old man! What's the matter?"

"Matter enough," replied Wingate heavily. "You see that box?"

"What the merry dickens—"

"Five pounds have been stolen from the funds!"

"Good heavens!"

"Quelch has just been here," pursued Wingate, "and he thinks I'm the thief."

"Oh, come off!" said Courtney incredulously. "You must be romancing!"

"I'm not, Courtney; I'm dead serious. Because I happen to be treasurer of the confounded Fund, and keep

NEXT
MONDAY—

"SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE!"

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the key, Quelch naturally imagines that I'm responsible for the theft. To give colour to the situation, two kids in the Remove saw me take a fiver out of the box yesterday."

"But you didn't—"

"No, of course I didn't steal it, if that's what you mean! I put five quid in cash into the box and took out the note. I was going to post it to Bob, my brother, but he turned up shortly afterwards, and I gave it to him instead."

"I twig," said Courtney. "But who in thunder's taken this money?"

"Ask me another. It's all a dream to me."

Courtney wrinkled his brows, and availed himself of the armchair.

"Hang it all!" he exclaimed at length. "It's scandalous that they should think of accusing you! I never heard anything like it! You've borne a ripping reputation all the way through, and it's monstrous that they should put you on a level with the Crown Prince!"

Wingate smiled faintly.

"You believe in me, Courtney?" he asked.

"With all my heart!"

"Thanks!"

That was all Wingate could say just then. He experienced that deep and profound sensation which comes of a loyal pal's devotion. Arthur Courtney, at any rate, believed him innocent; and the thought was as balm of Gilead to the harassed captain at that moment.

The door opened, and Gerald Loder looked in. There was a malicious gleam of triumph in his eyes as they dwelt upon George Wingate.

"You're wanted!" he said shortly. "Both of you! There's to be an assembly in Big Hall at once!"

And, having delivered himself of this statement, Loder swung off down the passage, whistling "The Death of Nelson."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

When a Boy's Down!

"BOWLED out!" chuckled Billy Bunter. "He, he, he!"

"What the dickens are you cackling about, porpoise?" demanded Vernon-Smith, who, with the Famous Five, was punting a footer about in the Close, preparatory to morning lessons.

"Wingate's been convicted of stealing five quid from the Games Fund," said Bunter, "and there's an assembly in Hall now. I was right in what I said yesterday, after all."

"You fat fibber!" roared Bob Cherry wrathfully.

"Are you looking for a thick ear?"

"Nunno!"

"Well, dry up, then!"

"You'll jolly soon see that it's true!" said Bunter, backing away to a safe distance. "Wingate's boned the cash, right enough! I heard Quelch telling the Head!"

Bob Cherry strode forward, with fury in his face. Things would have gone hard with the Owl of the Remove had not Loder come on the scene at that moment.

"Into Hall at once, you kids!" he commanded.

Greatly wondering, the juniors obeyed. Could there be any truth in Bunter's story? they asked themselves. It was ridiculous to suppose that the captain of Greyfriars was a common thief. Yet, if such were not the case, why this sudden assembly in Big Hall?

Dr. Locke was already present, conversing with Mr. Quelch. Harry Wharton & Co. glanced instinctively towards the ranks of the Sixth. Wingate was there, his features pale, but his head held high. Certainly he seemed to be the last person in the world to be compared with the celebrated Raffles.

When the gathering was complete, the Head raised his hand for silence. A pin might have been heard to drop as Dr. Locke scanned the sea of youthful faces before him.

"My boys," he began, "I have called you together in connection with a very serious matter. As some of you doubtless know, the sum of five pounds is missing from the Games Fund."

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"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Bunter hasn't told a complete whopper, then!"

"He's told the complete truth!" jeered Skinner. "Wingate's a rotten thief, and now he's going to get it in the neck!"

"Shut up, you cad!"

"Silence!" roared the Head. "Wingate, stand forward!"

Wingate stepped boldly to the fore. He had recovered his self-possession now, and walked as one who has a clear conscience, and nothing to fear.

"This will doubtless prove as painful an ordeal for you as it is for myself!" said Dr. Locke. "But, in the interests of common justice, this affair must be threshed out! You are treasurer of the Games Fund, Wingate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you throw any light on this matter?"

"None at all, sir. The money was intact yesterday afternoon when I went to the box for the purpose of exchanging a number of gold and silver coins for a five-pound note."

"For what purpose did you perform such an action?"

"I wished to send the note through the post to my brother, sir."

"Where is the key of the box kept?"

"In my desk, sir."

"And no one has access to it besides yourself?"

"No, sir."

The Head looked grave.

"You are aware that things look very black against you, Wingate?"

"I—I suppose so, sir. Mr. Quelch seems to think I helped myself to the money, but Heaven knows I'd never stoop to that! I'd starve in the streets first!"

"This is not the time to indulge in heroics!" said the Head stiffly. "I should hesitate to denounce you as a thief, yet I cannot imagine how anybody else could have taken the money. Perhaps you appropriated it to give to your brother, in the hope of being able to replace it in the near future?"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Wingate hotly.

The Head coughed.

"Mr. Quelch tells me," he went on, "that two boys in the Remove Form saw you take a five-pound note from the box."

"That is quite correct, sir. It was the note I told you of, that I got for my brother."

"The boys, I understand, were Skinner and Bolsover. Will they stand out?"

Skinner and Bolsover did so.

"Now," said Dr. Locke, "describe to me exactly what took place!"

"It was yesterday afternoon, sir," explained Skinner.

"We wanted a pass out of gates, and when we reached Wingate's study, to ask him for it, we saw him take the note. He turned as red as a beetroot when he saw us, and looked just like a—chap who's been caught in the act of doing something fishy, sir."

"That's a lie," interposed Wingate, "and you know it, Skinner!"

"Pray keep silent, Wingate, while I cross-examine these juniors!" said the Head. "Did either of you see Wingate place any cash in the box before taking out the note?"

"No, sir," replied Skinner and Bolsover together.

"Is it your impression that Wingate stole the money?"

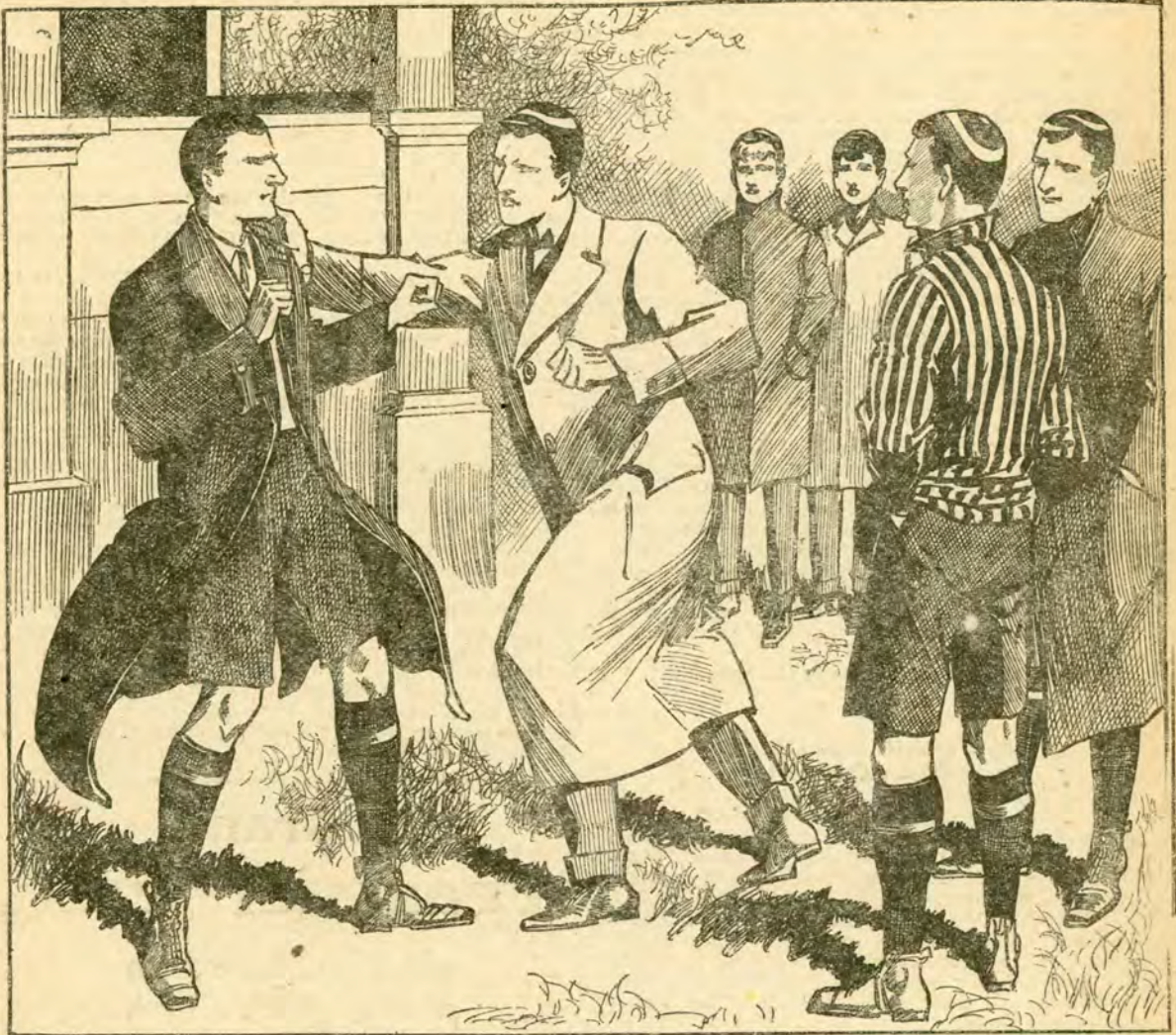
"Absolutely, sir!" said Skinner.

There was a hiss from Bob Cherry and his immediate companions. The Head frowned darkly.

"The next boy who makes that unseemly noise," he said, "will be severely caned! Now, Skinner, why do you suppose that Wingate stole the money?"

"His brother was desperately hard up, sir. He wanted money badly, and Wingate didn't have any. Everybody knows his remittances from home have been few and far between lately, and not sufficient to stand a sudden call for five pounds or more. And Bunter heard Wingate tell his brother that he'd robbed the Games Fund in order to make him the loan."

"Good gracious! Is that so, Bunter?"



Loder fairly bubbled over. "Don't speak to me!" he said passionately. "Keep your distance! I want no associations with a common thief!" Smack! Wingate's open palm came across his cheek with a crack like a pistol-shot. (See Chapter 9.)

"Yes, sir," piped the Owl of the Remove from his place.

"You actually heard Wingate tell his brother that the money was stolen?"

"Yes, sir; quite distinctly, sir."

There was an awkward pause. The Head hated to have to condemn the bluff, stalwart Sixth-Former; but what other course could he adopt in the face of such evidence?

"I can only conclude, Wingate," he said, "that in a moment of great stress and temptation you took the money, with the avowed intent of replacing it at the earliest opportunity. If you will make me a full and frank confession, I shall be lenient, under the exceptional circumstances, and shall not inflict the maximum punishment of expulsion."

Wingate clenched his hands, and a fierce light shone in his eyes.

"Dr. Locke," he exclaimed, "this is unjust—terribly unjust! You choose to accept the word of such notorious liars as Bunter in preference to my own!"

The Head looked troubled.

"I should not have believed Bunter's version if it were an isolated one," he said. "But it is supported by THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 417.

the statements of Skinner and Bolsover, and by the fact that you were known to be in poor circumstances. Without having received any substantial remittances from home, how could you possibly have been able to give your brother five pounds?"

"The sum I gave him constituted the whole of my savings for months past, sir."

"I am sorry I cannot bring myself to believe you."

Courtney of the Sixth sprang to the fore, his eyes flashing.

"Is Wingate to be accounted guilty of this outrage?" he exclaimed.

"Silence, Courtney!" rapped out the Head. "Resume your seat at once! You are not called upon to interfere in this unfortunate affair!"

"But Wingate's my chum!" persisted Courtney. "He's as straight as a die, and has been ever since he set foot in this school! This is a plot of some kind—a foul conspiracy—to undermine his position, and get him expelled from Greyfriars!"

"Do you suppose that I am likely to be influenced by such a wild and rambling asseveration?" asked Dr. Locke, more kindly. "Come, Courtney! You will do no material good by making a scene. It is hard for you

I know, to witness the downfall and exposure of such a close chum. It will be a lesson to you, also, inasmuch as it demonstrates the weakness of human nature."

But Courtney was not to be mollified. He was in a towering rage at the injustice which had been meted out to his chum, and scarcely knew what he was saying.

"It's infamous!" he flashed out. "Wingate never did this thing, nor would he ever dream of doing so. It's grossly unfair to believe such lying hounds as Bunter! I consider——"

"Enough!" said the Head austerely. "For this disgraceful exhibition of temper, you will be deposed from your position of prefect."

"I don't care!" said Courtney recklessly. "I should be a poor sort of worm if I didn't stand by a chum in a crisis like this. If Wingate's expelled, then I go too!"

"I shall not expel Wingate," said Dr. Locke quietly. "Whilst a single doubt remains as to his guilt, he shall remain at Greyfriars, provided he causes no disturbance of any kind. But he will forfeit the captaincy. It would be a scandal to allow him to retain the office, under the circumstances. You understand that, Wingate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. The matter of the theft shall be kept in abeyance for a few days, during which time fresh details may come to light. The school will now dismiss."

Wild excitement prevailed as the great throng filed out of Big Hall. Wingate was no longer captain of Greyfriars; Courtney was no longer a prefect. And Loder, as he made tracks for the Sixth-Form class-room, chuckled quietly. Wingate's guilt had been established without his aid, and no one would be likely to entertain the shadow of a suspicion that the black sheep of the Sixth had perpetrated the theft.

Verily, Loder's star seemed to be in the ascendant!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Old Order Changeth!

DARK days followed.

After Wingate had been deprived of the captaincy, Greyfriars missed his guiding hand.

The old school did not seem the same. Without a leader, the fellows did pretty much as they liked, and rags were frequent. They were not friendly rags, either. The school had split up into two parties. One—of which Harry Wharton & Co. were at the head—stoutly maintained Wingate's innocence; the other, led by Skinner and Bolsover, were strong in their assertions of the ex-captain's guilt; with the result that things were extremely lively.

A crisis was reached one evening, shortly after lights-out. Bolsover major had been making himself particularly objectionable.

"I've a good mind to get my pater to take me away from this den of convicts!" he growled. "Fancy having to rub shoulders with a rotten thief! Why on earth didn't the Head expel Wingate?"

"Shut up, you rotten cad!" said Bob Cherry contemptuously. "You know jolly well Wingate's streets above doing a thing like he's accused of!"

"The Head didn't seem to think so, anyway!" sneered Skinner. "I reckon it's a sin and a shame to keep an outsider like that at the school! We never know whether our gold watches are safe or not."

As Skinner was not the possessor of a gold watch, his statement was superfluous.

"Look here!" said Harry Wharton. "This has gone far enough. The next chap who opens his mouth to slander old Wingate will be made to sit up!"

"Here goes, then!" said Bolsover. "Wingate's a rotten thief, a contemptible cad, the rankest of rank outsiders, and an undesirable alien!"

"Hear, hear!" roared Skinner and Snoop and Stott.

"I guess that hits the galoot off nicely!" chuckled Fisher T. Fish, who, being a fellow of no principles himself, was quite prepared to believe in Wingate's guilt.

Harry Wharton leapt out of bed.

"Back up, you chaps!" he exclaimed. "All hands to the pumps! We'll smash these confounded cads, once and for all! Tumble out, and line up!"

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The rest of the Famous Five responded. Mark Linley and Dick Penfold and a host of other fellows joined them. Simultaneously Bolsover mobilised his army, which was quite a respectable one, under the circumstances, for a good many juniors were convinced that Wingate had stolen the five pounds. Skinner and Snoop and Stott, Trevor and Treluce and Elliott, and even such usually decent fellows as Rake and Tom Dutton, turned out of bed to enter the fray against Harry Wharton & Co.

Both sides were in grim earnest. During the day there had been several scraps of a minor nature, but this was to be the real thing. In the temporary absence of a captain, and with Courtney fallen from his high estate, there was likely to be no dramatic interruption of the combat.

It was a curious scene, and an animated one. Only Billy Bunter and Lord Mauleverer remained in bed. The former was on Bolsover's side, but funk'd a fight; the latter was on Harry Wharton's side, but was too lazy to move. The fact that they were non-combatants didn't worry the other fellows a bit. They felt that the school-boy earl and the Owl of the Remove would be more of a hindrance than a help.

Candle-ends were lighted in the gloom, and pillows, bolsters, even boots, were seized upon. Then the battle began.

"Pile in!" roared Bob Cherry's stentorian voice. "Wipe the floor with the rotters! Wingate for ever!"

The fight raged fast and furious. Bolsover's party were responsible for the first great offensive, but the Famous Five and their supporters withstood the attack right manfully. Pillows and other missiles whizzed through the air, and the scene was one which the poet Milton might have described as "confusion worse confounded."

"Here, get out of the way!" said Peter Todd gruffly, giving his cousin Alonzo a violent shove. "You're nothing more or less than a giddy ornament! Go out on the landing and keep cave."

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And Alonzo went. He was only too glad to escape that terrific bombardment.

Shoulder to shoulder, and smiting like Trojans, Harry Wharton & Co. beat back the enemy's fierce attack. They were out to win, and realised that they were fighting to defend Wingate's honour. The thought lent zest to their blows.

There were numerous casualties at the very outset. Johnny Bull, who was indeed a mighty man of valour, famous in many a pillow-fight in the past, caught Skinner a terrific swipe in the chest, and the cad of the Remove sat down suddenly, with a thud that shook the dormitory.

"Hurrah!" roared Bob Cherry. "Keep it up, you chaps!"

Biff! Bang! Thud!
"Yaroooooh!" roared Fisher T. Fish, as Harry Wharton sent him spinning with one lusty swipe of his bolster.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Rally round!" roared Bolsover, amid the uproar. "Snoop, you funk! Stott! Get going, for goodness' sake!"

But Snoop and Stott didn't feel like facing that hurricane volley of blows. They preferred to leave the lion's share of the fighting to enterprising fellows like Dick Rake.

With half a dozen juniors lurking in the background, and ready to throw up the sponge at any moment, Bolsover was at a considerable disadvantage.

The Famous Five and their compatriots carried all before them. George Wingate's load might have been less heavy had he been able to see the great fight that was being put up on his behalf.

Bolsover knew in advance that he was beaten, and the knowledge was not pleasant. Neither did he mean to accept the situation lying down. He relinquished his pillow, and rushed in with a heavy boot, swinging it by the lace in an almost murderous fashion.

"You cad!" panted Frank Nugent. "Drop that!"
"I'll see you hanged first!"

And Bolsover laid about him with frenzied energy. The result was disastrous to Harry Wharton & Co. That boot wrought considerable havoc in their ranks. It came with a crash across Hurree Singh's arm, causing him to gasp with pain and drop out of the running. Then Squiff received a clump on the side of the head which made him reel.

"Steady on, Bolsover!" exclaimed Rake. "Fair play's a jewel, you know!"

"You leave me alone!" snarled the bully of the Remove. "This ain't a fight with kid gloves. I'm going to make these rotters sit up!"

"Blessed if he isn't as bad as a Hun!" said Bob Cherry contemptuously.

As he spoke, Bob made a spring, and successfully wrenched the cruel weapon from Bolsover's hand. Then he hit out with his fist, straight from the shoulder, and the cowardly Remove went to the floor in an ungainly heap.

"Serve you right!" growled the incensed Bob. "If you want some more, say so. I'm quite ready!"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Thenceforth Harry Wharton & Co. had matters all their own way. They simply waded through the opposition, which retreated before their rush like chaff before a cyclone. Five minutes later Bolsover was only too glad to howl "Pax!" He and his followers were hopelessly beaten, and to continue the struggle would be worse than useless.

"Now we'll deal with the ringleaders!" said Harry Wharton, mopping his forehead. "I suggest that Skinner and Bolsover be tossed in a blanket a dozen times."

"Good egg!"

"Don't you dare—" began Bolsover.
Wharton cut him short.

"You've accused Wingate of theft, and you've not played the game in swinging a whacking great boot about. It's time you were taught how to behave!"

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ONE
PENNY.

"Hear, hear!"

Bolsover threatened and cajoled and entreated, but all to no purpose. He simply had to have it.

A large blanket was spread out on the floor of the dormitory, and the burly Remove was heaved on to it on his back. Then, at a given signal, a dozen Removes surrounded him—three to each corner of the blanket.

"Heave-ho!" shouted Wharton.

Bolsover, despite his weight, shot upwards like a stone from a catapult. He fairly yelled as he found himself soaring into space; but the avengers were blind to the quality of mercy. They repeated the performance, and the victim shot higher and higher each time, until, on the last occasion, he actually bumped against the ceiling. His head swam when the ordeal was over, and he was only too glad to crawl into bed, feeling more dead than alive.

"Skinner next!" said Johnny Bull. "All together, gentlemen!"

"Grooh! Lemme off!" wailed the hapless Skinner.

"Let you off?" said Wharton grimly. "You didn't dream of letting poor old Wingate off, did you? You made things as black as could be for him, when all the time he was perfectly innocent. Now you're going through the mill!"

And Skinner was forthwith dragged to the slaughter. His yells, as he was whirled into the air like a sky-rocket, would have done credit to a Red Indian on the warpath.

"I hope to goodness Lonzy's keeping a sharp look-out!" said Peter Todd. "If Quelchly came in now, there'd be the dickens to pay!"

"Blow Quelchly!" said Bob Cherry. "Get on with the washing!"

Peter Todd's anxiety was well founded, for just as Harold Skinner soared upwards for the ninth time the dormitory door was thrown open, and Gerald Loder entered, a dark frown on his face.

There was a universal murmur of alarm. Those responsible for holding the blanket forgot to raise it from the ground, with dire results for the unfortunate Skinner. He alighted on the hard floor with a crash that shook every bone in his body.

"Yarooooop!" he screamed.

Loder strode into the room, his eyes glittering.

"It seems superfluous for me to inquire into the why and wherefore of this disturbance!" he exclaimed. "I suppose that Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Bull, and Singh are the ringleaders—as usual. Each of the juniors named will come to my study first thing in the morning for a severe flogging. The rest of the Form will write me two thousand lines!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Draw it mild, Loder!" said Harry Wharton. "You know jolly well that you haven't the power to flog us!"

"Indeed! As captain of Greyfriars, I think I have full power!"

"C-c-captain of Greyfriars!" stuttered Harry, in amazement.

"Certainly!"

"Great Scott!"

Loder's startling announcement almost took the juniors' breath away. That the Head would make this drastic departure was a contingency for which none of them had looked. It was bad enough for Loder to be invested with the powers of a common or garden prefect; but his accession to the captaincy would make things simply unbearable. The kindly old Head did not know Loder as others knew him. In the guilelessness of his heart, he had imagined that his selection of a successor to Wingate was a good one. He was yet to learn his folly.

"Let it be clearly understood," Loder went on, revelling in his unaccustomed position, "that there's to be no more ragging in this unruly Form. Wingate tolerated it, no doubt, being an utter slacker; but you'll find that I'm made of sterner stuff. I shall come down very heavy on anyone who doesn't keep the peace. Got that?"

"We're not going to be bullied, if that's what you mean!" retorted Wharton. "My only aunt! Things are coming to something, with a chap like you usurping old Wingate's position! You're a bully and a tyrant, Loder, and you know it!"

ANSWERS

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
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Loder clenched his fists, and made a stride towards the speaker. But the look in Wharton's face at that moment bade him pause.

"For those words," he spluttered, "you will get a double dose in the morning. And if there's any more rioting to-night, I'll haul you before the Head!"

And with that Loder passed out, slamming the door behind him.

"Well I'm jiggered!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Loder—captain of Greyfriars! Am I dreaming, you fellows?"

"It's real enough, worse luck!" said Squiff glumly. "We're under the thumb of that brute until further orders now. I reckon—"

The Australian junior broke off suddenly. Wild yells could be heard, emanating from no great distance.

"What in thunder—" began Bob Cherry.

The dormitory door opened, and a woebegone figure slunk in. It was Alonzo Todd.

"Ow-ow-ow!" he moaned, in dire anguish. "My dear fellows—yow!—I have been subjected—yow-ow!—to the most painful treatment—yow-ow-ow!"

"My hat! It's Loder!" said Frank Nugent. "He must have nabbed poor old Lonzy on the landing!"

"That is so, my dear Nugent!" groaned the Duffer. "Unfortunately, whilst keeping watch a short time ago, I fell asleep."

"You what!" roared Peter Todd.

"I sank into slumber, my dear Peter. Doubtless it was due to an overtaxed brain, following upon a lengthy study of the works and wisdom of Professor Balmycrumptet. Apparently, Loder did not observe my presence when he entered the dormitory, but he stumbled upon me in coming out, and struck me very forcibly several times in divers places. Ow!"

"You burbling chump!" hooted Peter. "You howling maniac! If you'd kept cave, as we told you to, we shouldn't have been nailed. Now we'll jolly well bump you for sleeping at your post!"

"Oh, let him off!" said Harry Wharton. "He looks as if he'd been through a mangle already!"

And the luckless Alonzo was allowed to get into bed.

There were no more scenes of strife in the Remove dormitory that night. The fellows were too amazed by the news of Loder's promotion to think of anything else. The outlook for them—as for everybody else at Greyfriars—seemed anything but rosy; and the Removites, as they lay awake and meditated upon the situation, felt that stirring times were in store.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Whacked to the Wide!

THE Famous Five went to Loder's study in the morning, in accordance with orders. They did not deem it prudent to rebel just then, much as they would like to have done so.

The new captain did not spare the rod. He gave the juniors three stinging cuts on each hand, which made them writhe, though none of them emitted so much as a murmur.

"That's just a foretaste of what you'll get if you cross my path again!" said Loder. "You'll find I'm not a soft-hearted idiot, like Wingate proved to be!"

"Wingate's worth a hundred of you!" Bob Cherry could not help saying.

"Silence, Cherry! Another word, and I'll report you to Dr. Locke for insubordination!"

The Famous Five quitted the study with glum faces.

"Doesn't the future look rosy?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"If Loder's always going to rule the roost, life won't be worth living!"

The Removites were not the only people who thought so. That afternoon the senior match with St. Jim's was to be played, and Greyfriars would take the field minus Wingate and Courtney. Loder would be captain, and it was pretty obvious that incessant smoking had not improved his wind.

Even in normal times the Friars would find the Saints a hot handful. But without Wingate and Courtney the game would be a farce. Wingate was a tower of strength to the forward line, and he and Courtney had gained a

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great reputation for their sparkling runs and brilliant passes.

To-day, however, things would be different. Loder, wishing to pose as a jolly good fellow in the eyes of his cronies, brought in Carne and Ionides, two fellows who knew no more about scientific football than the man in the moon. Luckily for Loder, a good many of the Sixth-Formers believed Wingate to be guilty of the Games Fund robbery; otherwise they would certainly have refused to play in a team which lacked the services of the ex-captain.

The list of players was posted up in the Hall after dinner, and everybody agreed that Greyfriars didn't possess a dog's chance.

"It's rotten!" said Wingate, as he paced moodily up and down the Close with the faithful Courtney. "I never thought I should live to see this sort of thing! It makes a fellow feel like chucking up the sponge, and shaking the dust of Greyfriars from his feet!"

"You'd run away?" gasped Courtney.

"It would be a coward's trick, but I feel precious like it. They say that right always triumphs, but I'm beginning to think that's an old-fashioned theory."

"Oh, buck up!" said Courtney, clapping his chum on the shoulder. "It's a rotten position, I know, but we haven't discovered the thief yet. Sooner or later he'll be bowled out, and then you'll be reinstated."

Wingate grunted.

"I wish I could think so!" he said. "I can't help believing that Loder is mixed up in this affair, though I wouldn't go so far as to say that he actually stole the money. We've been at daggers drawn for months, and he's always shown his teeth whenever I've chipped in to save kids from being bullied. He's at the bottom of this business, I feel certain."

"Same here," said Courtney, "but we can't bring it home to the cad. That's the trouble. And now he'll take his fifth-rate side into the field and get a jolly good licking. It's unbearable!"

"P'raps they'll pull through," said Wingate. "Walker and Valence can put up a good game on occasion. Let's come down and see the match. It'll be riling, I know, but it's no good mooching about here all the afternoon."

The two seniors strolled away together. They found Loder and the members of his team already at practice, and a few minutes later the brake rolled up bearing the St. Jim's stalwarts.

Kildare, who captained the visitors, stared in surprise as Loder accosted him and shook hands.

"Skipper ill?" he queried.

"No. Wingate's fallen into disgrace. I ought not to say what he's been up to. It's scandal enough to keep him at Greyfriars, without letting the details go the rounds of the rest of the schools."

"Great Scott!"

"His absence won't make much difference to the team," Loder went on. "We've got a hot side out, and I've no fears for the result."

"Blessed is he who bloweth his own trumpet!" chuckled Darrel, of St. Jim's.

The referee blew a shrill blast on his whistle, and Loder tossed with Kildare for choice of ends. The St. Jim's fellow won, and elected to kick with the wind in his favour.

"Play up, Friars!" came the cry from the touch-line, but it was more faint-hearted than usual. The fellows knew that only by a miracle could Loder's men avert a catastrophe.

The game opened in spirited fashion. Walker went away on the right wing, and beat the opposing halves for pace. When he centred, however, there was no one up to receive the ball, Loder being hopelessly in the rear. The St. Jim's right back cleared easily.

Then the fireworks began, as Bob Cherry expressed it. Kildare broke through, and the Greyfriars backs quailed before his fierce rush. The ball went whizzing in from his foot, and crashed into the net.

"Goal!"

"One up!" said Harry Wharton moodily.

"The oneupfulness is terrific!" groaned Hurree Singh.

"The Saints are simply making hay of them!" said Johnny Bull. "Loder's puffing like a pair of old bellows

already, and this is Greyfriars' first. I'll bet the Remove could put up as good a show."

"Hear, hear!"

"Look at that!" exclaimed Nugent suddenly.

Carne had funky a sweeping movement by the opposition, and allowed Rushden to get clear away. The St. Jim's senior, amazed at the feeble opposition, shot hard and true, and the Friars custodian found himself beaten for the second time.

"They're all over them!" said Courtney in deep disgust. "I wish we hadn't come to see the match, after all, Wingate, old man. It's galling!"

"We seem to be missed, somehow!" said Wingate. "Walker's playing well on the wing, but he gets no support. St. Jim's are going to romp off with the points, or I'm a Dutchman!"

Shortly before half-time Walker scored for Greyfriars with a fine solo effort. Loder bawled to him to pass, but Walker wasn't having any. He knew that Loder would have muffed the opening, and essayed a shot on his own, which proved successful.

"There's a sporting chance of pulling the game out of the fire, after all," said Harry Wharton, as the players streamed off the field at half-time. "The Saints are top dogs all round, though, and deserve to be leading by more than two to one."

"We should be on top if only Wingate were playing!" said Bob Cherry ruefully. "There he is, on the other side of the field, with old Courtney. Looks pretty down in the mouth too! It's a downright shame that such a howling tyrant as Loder should be made captain. He'll barge his own pals into the team for all he's worth."

"You bet!" said Johnny Bull.

Loder was giving his colleagues instructions in a loud voice as they came on to the field for the resumption.

"Play up like fury!" he was saying. "If you can't play the ball, play the man!"

There was a hiss from the spectators who overheard this unsportsmanlike command.

"And that's a footer captain!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Carry me home to die, somebody!"

The second half opened at a truly terrific pace, and Greyfriars attacked. Happily, none save Carne, Valence, and Ionides the Greek lived up to Loder's injunctions. The eight remaining members of the eleven played cleanly and fairly, with due regard to the rules of the game.

Loder, however, was intent upon winning by fair means or foul. He elbowed an opposing half off the ball, and then, being challenged by the back, deliberately tripped that worthy up.

"Foul!"

The cry rang out at once from the St. Jim's players. They were amazed, as well as annoyed. Fouls were not of frequent occurrence on the Greyfriars ground.

The referee—Blundell of the Fifth—ordered a free kick, and the game proceeded.

Loder's eyes were gleaming. He was aware that his display was a poor one, and endeavoured to strike terror into the hearts of the opposing backs, in the hope that they would yield to him and present him with a few openings.

But that the St. Jim's defence never dreamed of doing. They stuck to their guns manfully, and treated Loder with the contempt he deserved.

Kildare was shortly afterwards responsible for another splendid goal. From a corner kick, well placed by Rushden, the St. Jim's skipper headed the ball swiftly into the net.

"Three to one!" said Bob Cherry. "Oh, my hat!"

"The lickfulness of the esteemed Loder," said Hurree Singh, "will be—"

"Terrific!" grinned Nugent.

After this the Friars were simply overwhelmed. Their opponents, who were in fine fettle, simply played with them. Goals came in remarkable profusion, and Kildare completed the hat-trick. Ten minutes from the end the Saints were leading by six to one.

Loder barked out his orders, but the rest of the Greyfriars players took no heed. They were fed up, and dismayed by the knowledge that they were beaten to a frazzle; but, with few exceptions, they were resolved to play the game right to the bitter end.

Then came an unpleasant chapter of accidents—a succession of incidents which served to mar the name and fame of the old school as nothing else could have

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ONE
PENNY.

done. Loder's tactics were disgusting. Sly ankle-taps and stealthy kicks were constantly administered by him to members of the opposition, and the crowd on the touch-line came desperately near to swarming on to the pitch and mobbing the unpopular captain.

"This is too foul!" said Wingate, in ringing tones of indignation. "The Saints will go away with the idea that we're a set of hooligans. Oh, I say, look at that!"

Loder had secured the ball by sheer brute force, and Baker, at back, closed in to intercept him. The Greyfriars fellow wilfully shot out his foot, and Baker went sprawling. The heavy football-boot had crashed upon his ankle, and he lay still, unable to rise.

"Good heavens!" gasped Courtney. "The dirty cad!"

"He shall suffer for this!" muttered Wingate, making a movement on to the field.

Courtney gripped his chum by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Better not, old man," he advised. "Can't use the captain of Greyfriars as a punching-ball, you know!"

"Let me go! I—"

"Leave it till after the match, then. You're not going to make a scene now, before these St. Jim's fellows. Matter of fact, I should do nothing at all, if I were you. You know what the Head said. If you're caught transgressing in any way, you'll leave Greyfriars on your neck!"

"I shall leave it with a clear conscience, anyhow," retorted Wingate, "and the knowledge that I've done my duty. My hat, the brute's properly floored poor old Baker! He can hardly limp off the field."

Kildare and Darrel assisted their injured chum to the side of the ground. Meanwhile, the crowd booed Loder for all they were worth. Captain or no captain, they could not stand idly by and witness such foul play without making some sort of a protest.

St. Jim's resumed with ten men, but the issue was perfectly safe for them. No further goals were registered, and the match ended in their favour by six to one.

Of a verity, Loder's first day as captain had been anything but a success!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

[The Fight!]

KILDARE and his followers clambered into their brake with grim faces. They had conquered Greyfriars, but there seemed to be precious little glory attached to the victory. The match had been a most distasteful one, and would not be happily remembered in their annals. But for the fact that they were sound, wholehearted sportsmen, Loder would probably have undergone an exceedingly warm time, but the Saints had held themselves in check, and they departed without a word, bearing the injured Baker with them.

Wingate waited until they were lost to sight; then he strode up to Loder, who was rebuking his fellow-players in front of the pavilion.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry, scenting trouble. "There's going to be a nice little scrimmage, I'm thinking! Come on, you chaps!"

And the Famous Five hastily made their way to the spot.

Loder broke off in his discourse as Wingate came face to face with him. They spoke for the first time since Wingate's downfall.

"What do you want?" asked Loder haughtily.

"I want to tell you, as plainly as possible, and without mincing my words," replied Wingate, "that I think you're a thorough-paced cad! The way you fouled those St. Jim's fellows was disgusting! You ought to be heartily ashamed of yourself!"

Loder turned almost purple.

"You seem to forget," he spluttered, "that your days of ruling the roost are over. You're nobody now, and it's quite within my province to punish you for your outburst of insolence!"

"I do not dispute your position!" retorted Wingate. "Unfortunately for Greyfriars, you have been appointed captain, and I don't mind telling you straight from the

shoulder that I believe you got the post by means of a blackguardly trick. It's just the sort of thing you would do!"

Loder fairly bubbled over.

"Don't dare speak to me!" he said passionately. "Keep your distance! I want no associations with a common thief!"

Smack!

Wingate's palm came with a crack like a pistol-shot across Loder's cheek, leaving a plain red mark.

"That's done it!" chortled Bob Cherry. "Now look out for squalls!"

Unmindful of his dignity, Loder clenched his fists and rushed at Wingate like a bull. The next moment a ding-dong struggle was in progress. Half the school rushed to the spot to witness such a thrilling encounter between two members of the Sixth.

Loder, weak as he was in many ways, knew how to use his fists; but he had lost control of his temper completely, and his blows were wild and ill-timed. Wingate's knuckles smashed into his jaw, and he reeled back, uttering imprecations which would have disgraced a Hun.

"Hurrah!" roared the Famous Five delightedly. "Sock it into him, Wingate, old man!"

The ex-captain was in fine form. He had been spoiling for a fight with the black sheep of the Sixth, and he went for him hammer-and-tongs, recking not of the consequences. That Loder would report him afterwards was certain; but Wingate was in too reckless a mood to trouble about that. He meant to thrash the cad who had brought disgrace and discredit upon his name, even though the action brought about his expulsion.

Loder rushed in once more, only to be met by a defence like a barndoor. Wingate shot out his left, and the bully of the Sixth gave a gasp as the blow caught him full in the chest. Before he could recover, Wingate followed up with a smashing drive under his adversary's chin, and there was a cheer from the crowd of onlookers as the new captain measured his length on the ground.

Carne and Valence rushed in, with the intention of

tackling Wingate, but the Famous Five, with Vernon-Smith and Mark Linley, forcibly held them back.

"Play the game!" said Wharton. "Three to one's a bit too thick! Let Loder fight his own battles!"

"He doesn't look capable of knocking out a two-year-old infant at the present moment!" grinned the Bounder.

With a great effort, Gerald Loder struggled to his feet. Wingate waited until he had risen, and then plunged in to the attack once more.

This time, Loder succeeded in keeping his opponent at bay. He well knew what a severe blow it would be to his prestige if he allowed himself to be licked before such a gigantic crowd of fellows. They would begin to clamour for Wingate's reinstatement, and Loder's position would be considerably jeopardised.

But Wingate's superior fitness soon began to assert itself. Loder was too partial to cigarettes to be able to keep his end up long, and Wingate waited patiently until he had tired himself out. Then the slaughter began!

Right and left, left and right, came Wingate's smashing blows. There was power behind them, too—power and muscle. Loder had the gruelling of his life as he faced that fierce onslaught, which never seemed to relax. He struck out savagely at Wingate's calm, set face, but only once did he succeed in registering a hit, and that was by a gigantic fluke.

"Loder's whacked!" said Frank Nugent. "His number's up, my sons!"

"Rather!"

"The lickfulness of the ludicrous cad is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh. "He seems to be getting it neckfully!"

Loder was. He recoiled before a tremendous right-hander in the ribs, and devoutly wished that the earth would open and swallow him up.

The new captain was in a shocking state. The claret flowed profusely from his nose, and his left eye had temporarily shut up shop. His hair was considerably rumpled, and his football jersey was rent almost in twain. In short, Loder was a wreck.

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The Sixth-Former dived beneath the table. There was a smothered roar from underneath, and then the senior's hand gripped something, and Billy Bunter was hauled forth. "Bunter!" gasped Wingate, in amazement. "You fat young toad! You've been listening!" (See Chapter 2.)

"Polish him off, Wingate!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Paste the brute's chivvy till his own grandmother won't know him! Oh, well played!"

As Bob spoke, Wingate sailed in for the twentieth time, and Loder's nose suffered yet more heavily. It was likely to become considerably swollen for a very lengthy period.

Loder's efforts to rally were feeble in the extreme, and Wingate soon put him out of his agony. A magnificent uppercut, delivered with all the force of a muscular arm, stretched Loder prone upon the ground for a second time. On this occasion he made no effort whatever to rise.

"Licked," said Harry Wharton emphatically—"licked to a jelly! Three cheers for Wingate!"

"Hurrah!"

As cheer after cheer rang out from the Famous Five and their supporters, Wingate's face lighted up involuntarily. He appreciated those cheers very deeply as he stood there, waiting, in case his antagonist showed any signs of renewing the combat.

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But Loder was whacked. All the stuffing had been knocked out of him, and he was scarcely able to move at all, much less rise.

Then, just as Carne and Valence were about to take their defeated leader away, there was a sudden interruption. Striding through the crowd of fellows came the Head!

"What is this?" he asked. "Has there been a bestial exhibition of fisticuffs on this ground?"

Then the speaker caught sight of Loder, who lay moaning on the ground, and of Wingate, who towered over him with blazing eyes.

"Boy! Wingate!" panted the Head. "Are you mad? Have you dared to publicly assault the captain of the school?"

"I gave him the thrashing he richly deserved, sir," answered Wingate steadily.

The Head fairly danced with wrath.

"I have a very shrewd idea of what has taken place," he said. "You are jealous of Loder's authority, and have

sought the first opportunity of making a personal attack upon him. I will be lenient no longer. It would have been far more satisfactory had I expelled you yesterday, when you were practically a proven thief. However, you will leave Greyfriars by the first available train in the morning, and will be confined in the meantime to the punishment-room. Go there at once!"

"I'm not a thief, sir," said Wingate stoutly, "and I've done nothing to justify this punishment. However, I will not question your orders."

"You had better not, for your own sake!" retorted the Head. "Go, sir! You shall be isolated from the rest of your schoolfellows till the morning, when Greyfriars will no longer be contaminated by your presence!"

Like a fellow in a dream, Wingate left the ground. Courtney, who had never been known to desert a chum in a crisis of this sort, accompanied him into the building.

"As for you, Loder," continued the Head, "you had better set about making yourself presentable—at once! You are in a revolting state, and it ill becomes the captain of the school to participate in a fistie brawl!"

"Wingate struck the first blow, sir!" muttered Loder, as he leaned on the arms of his cronies for support. "My authority will not receive proper recognition in the school until he has left Greyfriars, never to return."

"You need have no fears for the future," said Dr. Locke. "Wingate shall be sent home in disgrace in the morning!"

And the Head stalked away with rustling gown.

"What a shame!" said Bob Cherry, almost weeping with rage. "Wingate's got to go—good old Wingate, whom we've hero-worshipped ever since we came here! And Loder will be more of a tyrant than ever! Great Scott! It makes a chap feel like open mutiny!"

"Keep your pecker up, Bob!" said Harry Wharton, with forced gaiety. "There's still a chance of something turning up, you know, to prove Wingate's innocence."

And the Famous Five marched off to No. 1 Study for tea in a very thoughtful mood.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

For His Chum's Sake!

GERALD LODER sat in his study. He was alone, and a cheerful fire crackled and spurted in the grate.

Loder was cheerful, too, despite the casualties he had sustained as a result of his scrap with Wingate.

The rascally captain congratulated himself that he had got the whip-hand of his rival at last. Fate had played into his hands, and George Wingate was lying under sentence of expulsion. Henceforth Loder would rule Greyfriars with a rod of iron. He would be monarch of all he surveyed, and the recognised leader of the whole school. The cricket and football teams would come under his immediate control, and he would have his hated foes, Harry Wharton & Co., at his mercy. The prospect was a pleasing one, and Loder became so engrossed in it that he failed to hear a sharp knock on the door of his study.

The knock was repeated—louder this time.

"Come in!" called Loder.

The visitor was Courtney of the Sixth. He slammed the door fiercely behind him, and strode up to Loder.

"I want a word with you!" he said grimly.

"Then you can get out!" drawled Loder. "I want no truck with fellows who are not even prefects. Matter of fact, you can congratulate yourself that you're not in the punishment-room now with your thieving pal!"

Courtney clenched his hands hard. Dearly would he have loved to hurl himself neck and crop upon the unspeakable cad who had spoken so unjustly of his best chum. But it wouldn't do. He would assuredly have shared Wingate's sorry fate had he raised his hand against the new captain.

"Look here!" he blurted out. "Wingate's under sentence to be sacked, but there's time to appeal against it. It's up to you to do the decent thing. You know jolly well that you asked for that licking this afternoon, by fouling as you did. It wasn't Wingate's fault. He naturally likes to see fair play."

"You want me to appeal on his behalf?" asked Loder incredulously.

"Yes."

"Then you can save your breath! I haven't the remotest intention of trying to shield a thief! Now get out! I've heard quite enough!"

Courtney paused, irresolute for a moment, during which Loder's fate hung in the balance. He little knew how near he was to being thrashed for the second time that day.

But prudence prevailed, and Courtney strode from the study. It was of no use reasoning with Loder, whose hatred of Wingate was deep and venomous. He must appeal to a higher tribunal—to the Head, who, having had time to get calm again, might perhaps become lenient.

Accordingly, Courtney made his way to the Head's study. He found Dr. Locke hard at work at his desk.

"Well, Courtney?" said the Head, not very amiably.

"It's in reference to Wingate, sir," said the Sixth-Former. "I've come to ask you—"

The Head cut him short.

"If it is your intention to plead for that wretched boy, Courtney, I may tell you at once that my determination to rid the school of his presence holds good. You may account yourself fortunate that a similar fate has not befallen you. I will not tolerate this aiding and abetting of thieves!"

Courtney turned pale.

"I didn't think I should ever live to see the day, sir," he said bitterly. "when such a fellow as Wingate would be scorned and despised on every side like this! A week ago, and anyone who dared insinuate that he was a thief would have been mobbed! But now—"

The senior broke down completely. The thought of George Wingate being ruthlessly banished from the old school he had come to love with all his heart wrung something like a sob from the Sixth-Former. He sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

"My boy," said the Head kindly, as he laid his hand

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on Courtney's shoulder, "I feel heartily sorry for you—sorry that Wingate has deceived us all! We have nursed a viper in our bosom, and it has turned and stung us! Come, come, Courtney! If Wingate did not steal the five-pound note from the Games Fund, who did? He was in sore need of money; he possessed the key of the box; he was actually seen to hand the note to his brother. What further evidence of his guilt could be required? In spite of these things, however, I was resolved to give him another chance—to allow him to remain at Greyfriars on the understanding that he was of good behaviour. And what do I find? Why, that he has attacked the boy who I appointed to be captain, and made a scene before half the school! After this, nothing can save him! He has made his own bed, and he must lie on it!"

Courtney looked up with haggard eyes.

"I've known Wingate since we were a couple of fags, sir," he said, with emotion, "and I've never found him out in anything mean or despicable!"

"Nonsense!" replied Dr. Locke. "In your mad desire to champion your chum, Courtney, you are letting your tongue run away with you! No boy at Greyfriars would be so unscrupulously mean as to be a party to so base a conspiracy! Your chum has played you false, my boy! He has posed before you as a straightforward individual, with high notions of honour; but at the eleventh hour his sins have found him out! It is a sad thing to be duped by a very intimate friend; but life is full of such minor tragedies, Courtney, as you will eventually learn!"

Courtney rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Then it's no good, sir?" he said brokenly.

"I'm afraid not, my boy."

The afraid groped his way dazedly from the study. A mist swam before his eyes as he realised that Wingate, his athletic, great-hearted chum, was doomed. The Head was impervious to all argument, deaf to all entreaty. In the morning George Wingate would shake the dust of Greyfriars from his feet for ever!

"He sha'n't go alone!" muttered the Sixth-Former fiercely. "I'm jolly well going, too! Life wouldn't be worth living at this place without old Wingate! He was the life and soul of the Sixth!"

Courtney went at once to the punishment-room—"Nobody's Study," as it was sometimes called. He found Wingate seated before a cheerless fire, reading a book.

"Courtney," exclaimed Wingate, starting to his feet, "you ought not to come here, old man! They'll nail you!"

"I don't care!" exclaimed Courtney recklessly. "I've just been to the Head to try to get you off; but it's no good! He's as obstinate as all the mules that ever were!"

"It's awfully good of you to put yourself out on my account!" said Wingate warmly.

"It was only my duty! Precious sort of chum I should be if I allowed you to bear the whole of the burden! If you're to leave in the morning, I'm coming along, too!"

Wingate smiled faintly.

"That would be sheer madness, old chum!"

"Madness or not, I mean it!" said Courtney firmly. "If only we could bowl that cad Loder out, everything in the garden would be lovely! But the time to hope seems to have flown, somehow!"

"Look here, Arthur!" said Wingate, who was deeply moved by his chum's unwavering loyalty. "Don't you go putting a halter round your own neck! Better one suffer than two!"

"Rot! How could I stay on here after such a glaring injustice has been done to you? I should feel like a beastly outsider!"

"Oh, well," said Wingate, with a sigh, "I can see you're bent on having your own way! It's jolly good of you to stand by me like this! I sha'n't forget it in a hurry! Now you'd better leave me, old chap. I feel I should like to be alone."

Courtney nodded, and withdrew from the bare, uninviting punishment-room. He had ordained his course, and he meant to stick to it, and to the chum who had been more than a brother to him. And when he reached his own study, and seated himself before the fire, he prayed silently and fervently to the Giver of all good that

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ONE
PENNY.

George Wingate might yet be cleared of the charge laid against him, and resume his former position as captain of Greyfriars School.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Makes a Discovery!

BILLY BUNTER walked slowly and cautiously along the Sixth-Form passage. Like Moses of old, he looked this way and that way, and there was no man. Then, pausing outside Loder's study, he applied his ear to the keyhole, by no means an unusual habit on the part of the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter listened intently, but no sound came from within. Apparently, the study was deserted.

Softly opening the door, the fat junior peered in. His hopes were confirmed, for the room was empty.

"Good!" muttered Bunter, rubbing his hands. "I wonder if the beast has got any grub knocking about? I think he has, because I saw Nugent minor getting supplies for him in the tuckshop."

There was nothing in the way of food lying on the table, merely a few papers. Ever inquisitive, Billy Bunter could not resist turning them over.

He gave a start as he suddenly came across a receipt, signed in an illiterate hand. The amount was five pounds, and the signature was that of Mr. Cobb, the landlord of the Cross Keys.

Five pounds!

Bunter fairly gasped. How had Loder been able to raise such a sum, when it was common knowledge that he was stony? No letters had arrived for the prefect during the last few days, so there was no reason for believing that he had received a remittance of any sort.

But Bunter, though he was usually very obtuse, sometimes had a quick knack of putting two and two together. Five pounds had recently been stolen from the Games Fund, and a similar sum had just been paid to Mr. Cobb by Loder. This opened up a possibility that had occurred to very few people before, namely, that Loder, and not Wingate, was the thief!

Bunter chuckled, and slipped the receipt into an inside pocket.

"This'll come in handy!" he muttered. "Now for the grub!"

The Owl of the Remove went to the cupboard, and opened the door. His little round eyes gleamed behind his spectacles as he sighted the stacks of good things inside.

"This is ripping!" he murmured, groping for a large cherry-cake, newly made by Mrs. Mimble. "I'll bag this cake, and a few of these tuppenny tarts. I think I'll have a few scones, too, while I'm about it. Loder'll miss 'em, I expect, but how will he know it was me?"

Bunter tucked the good things under his arm, and was about to make his way to the door, when footsteps sounded in the corridor without.

"Loder!" muttered Bunter, in alarm.

The Owl of the Remove bundled the provisions back into the cupboard, and bounded in after them. It was a tight squeeze, but the fat junior just managed it. He pulled the door to just in time.

The next moment a terrible thought seized him. What if Loder should come to the cupboard to lay out the things for tea? The perspiration stood out in beads on Bunter's forehead at the idea.

"But I've got that receipt, anyway," he murmured. "It's enough to make him sit up!"

Shortly afterwards Bunter's worst fears were confirmed. He heard Loder stride across the room, and the handle of the cupboard door turned.

"Now for some grub!" said the familiar voice of Loder. "I'm famished—Why—what—g-g-good heavens!"

"Ow!" gasped Billy Bunter, his knees knocking together.

"Bunter!" roared Loder, recovering from his astonishment. "What are you doing here, you young rascal?"

"Yow! I—I—" stammered Bunter.

The incensed Sixth-Former grasped him by the collar,

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"SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
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and yanked him forth. Then he glanced into the cupboard. Bunter had hurled the tarts inside indiscriminately in that moment of excitement, and they had disported themselves all over the place.

"You young rotter!" roared Loder. "You've been trying to bone my grub!"

"I—I haven't!"

"Don't tell lies!"

Loder flung the Owl of the Remove from him, and went to the corner for a cricket-stump. Bunter, spotting his opportunity, edged towards the door.

"Come back!" exclaimed the angry prefect. "I'm jolly well going to lam you! Understand?"

Billy Bunter blinked at Loder through his big spectacles.

"You're not going to lay so much as a finger on me!" he said loftily.

"W-w-what!"

"If you dare touch me, Loder, I'll go straight to Dr. Locke!"

"Bunter! Are you mad? What d'you mean by saying you'll go to the Head?"

Bunter smirked.

"I've a little scrap of paper here," he said. "It's only a grubby piece, but it's sufficient to get you sacked from the school—see?"

Loder turned pale. The cricket-stump fell with a crash from his nerveless fingers.

"What is this paper you refer to?" he demanded hoarsely.

"A receipt—a receipt for five guid!" chuckled Bunter. "I know who rifled the Games Fund now. He, he, he!"

Loder almost choked. His face was working convulsively as he made a dive at the fat junior who stood in the doorway.

"Stand back!" warned Bunter. "Stand back, or I'll yell out with all my might, and some of the prefects'll hear. Then I'll tell them what you are—a thief!"

Loder paused irresolute. He saw that he was in a cleft stick. If Bunter raised an alarm his position would be most precarious. The production of the fatal receipt would speedily transfer suspicion from Wingate to himself.

It was equally useless to try to take the receipt from Bunter by force. The fat junior would be certain to cry out, and some well-meaning senior would come in to see what was the matter. Loder was cornered all ways. He stood with clenched hands, regarding Bunter with the glare of a basilisk.

"Will you hand over that receipt?" he asked, as civilly as possible under the circumstances.

"Certainly not!" said Bunter, with asperity.

"You sneaked it off my table——"

"And I'm going to hang on to it. So long as you're prepared to treat me handsomely I sha'n't expose you."

"What do you want me to do, confound you?"

"Ahem! For quite a long time now I've been expecting a—a postal-order. Owing to the war, and consequent delays in the post, it hasn't come. Will you advance me a quid?"

"You—you rotten blackmailer! You'll end your days in Pentonville, as sure as fate!"

"Oh, really, you know! Look here, are you going to hand me that quid?"

"I haven't any money at all!" panted Loder. "I'm broke—broke to the wide! It's not a bit of use your asking me for any."

Bunter shrugged his fat shoulders.

"Very well, then," he said, "I'm off to see the Head."

And the Owl of the Remove stepped out into the passage.

"Come back!" yelled Loder, his face pallid. "Don't be such a young fool! You—you shall have the money!"

"That's better!" said Bunter approvingly, as he re-entered the study.

"You can't have it now, at this instant," said Loder. "I—I must raise it. You shall have it first thing in the morning, without fail!"

Bunter looked doubtful.

"I'm not so sure that that'll suit my convenience," he said.

"Surely you can wait a few hours?" said Loder, in tones THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 417.

of entreaty. "I'll pay you a sovereign spot cash after rising-bell-to-morrow morning. Honour bright!"

"All right!" said Bunter. "I'll grant the concession on this occasion. But if you fail me, look out for squalls!"

"I sha'n't fail!" said Loder. "Don't worry about that. And you'll be careful not to show that receipt to anybody?"

"Trust me!" chuckled Bunter.

And he rolled out of the study, his fat face beaming like a full moon with delight. He congratulated himself that he had discovered a horn of plenty, and promised himself all manner of good things in the near future—at Loder's unwilling expense.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Caught Red-handed!

BED-TIME, you kids!"

Walker of the Sixth put his head in at the door of the Rag and made that time-honoured announcement.

For once in a way the Removites obeyed almost immediately. There was no lingering over games of chess or exciting school stories. No one had been playing chess, and reading had been out of the question that evening.

Wingate, formerly the captain of Greyfriars, and honoured and respected by all who knew him, was now lying under sentence of expulsion in the punishment-room. That topic alone caused a terrific sensation in the Remove, and occupied the minds of the juniors to the exclusion of everything else.

"It can't be possible!" said Harry Wharton, as they trooped up to bed. "It's like a beastly nightmare to me!"

"Same here," said Nugent. "Fancy old Wingate being expelled—and for a thing he never did!"

"No good sending a petition to the Head, I suppose?" suggested Bob Cherry.

"I'm afraid not," said Wharton. "I believe Courtney went and appealed to him shortly after the sentence had been passed; but it was of no use. And if the Head wouldn't listen to a senior, he'd certainly take no notice of little us!"

"We should only get it neckfully," agreed Hurree Singh dubiously.

"Tell you what," said Nugent. "I feel so mad about it that I want to let off steam: Let's bump Bunter! He started the silly fable about Wingate pinching money from the Games Fund!"

"Good egg!"

And the Famous Five made a movement towards the Owl of the Remove.

"Here, hold on—I mean, leggo!" roared Bunter, as he found himself seized by five pairs of willing hands and hoisted off the ground. "What's the game, you fellows?"

Bump!

"Yaroooooh!"

"Give him another!" growled Johnny Bull.

And once again Billy Bunter alighted with a crash upon the hard floor of the dormitory.

"Yah! Stoppit, you beasts!"

"Once again!" sang out Wharton.

As Bunter came to earth for the third time, a piece of paper fluttered from his pocket and fell to the floor. Johnny Bull picked it up.

"Gimme that paper!" yelled Bunter. "It's mine! Hand it over at once, or I'll tell Quelchy!"

"Blessed if I want to pry into your rotten papers!" grunted Johnny. "I'm not tarred with the same brush as you, thank goodness! Here you are!"

"Half a jiffy!" exclaimed Peter Todd, stepping forward. "There seems to be something suspicious about that paper, for Bunter to want to conceal it. As head of No. 7, I'm going to take the liberty of looking at it."

"You won't do anything of the kind!" shouted Bunter.

"Won't I, by Jove?" said Peter grimly.

He took the paper from Johnny Bull's hand and glanced at it under the gaslight. Bunter jumped to his feet and attempted to rush upon his study-mate, but Wharton and Nugent forcibly held him back.

"My only hat!" murmured Peter Todd.

"What is it, Toddy?" asked Bob Cherry curiously. "A love-letter?"

"No; it's a receipt for five quid, made out by Cobb, at the Cross Keys, to Loder!"

"Great Scott!"

A murmur of amazement ran round the dormitory. The new captain of Greyfriars was not showing up in a very good light by continuing his dealings with the rascally landlord.

But no one suspected anything, or dreamed of connecting the receipt with the recent robbery until Vernon-Smith spoke. The Bounder of Greyfriars was second to none in shrewdness and foresight.

"How did you get hold of this, Bunter?" he inquired.

"Mind your own bizney!"

"It is my bizney, and the whole Form has a right to know," said Vernon-Smith grimly. "You bagged this out of Loder's study—what?"

"I—I— How do you know?" gasped Bunter in amazement.

"It was not difficult to guess. There's something awfully fishy about this, you chaps. This is my contention. Loder got into debt at the Cross Keys—that's pretty obvious—and only recently settled the account. Now, where did he get the money?"

"From his people, I suppose," said Wharton. "What are you driving at, Smithy?"

"It's my firm belief," said Vernon-Smith, his eyes gleaming, "that Loder stole the money to pay this debt."

"What?"

"He couldn't have stumped up himself, because he's been broke to the wide for some time, and Walker and Valence and Carne have refused to lend him any money. The whole thing's as clear as noonday. Loder found himself in a tight corner, and he took the fiver from the Games Fund."

There was a chorus of startled ejaculations.

"Come off, Smithy!"

"You're rotting, old man!"

"I'm not rotting!" replied Vernon-Smith. "I was never more serious in my life."

Wharton whistled.

"Loder's a beastly cad," he said, "but that's not to say he's a thief."

"But if Wingate didn't loot the Games Fund," said the Bounder, "who in thunder did?"

"Give it up!"

"It was Loder, as sure as eggs are eggs. I can form a pretty cute idea of what's happened. Bunter chanced to find this receipt, and now he's trying to blackmail Loder."

"I'm not!" howled Bunter.

"Rats! I wouldn't give a fig for your word!" said Vernon-Smith, contemptuously.

"I swear I haven't received a sou from Loder!"

"I don't suppose for a single moment you have, because he hasn't any money. But you've been trying to extort money from him, all the same."

"I—I—" gasped Bunter feebly.

"You might as well own up to it. If you tell us the truth, the plain truth, and nothing but the truth, we'll promise not to touch you, see?"

"Honour bright?"

"Honour bright!" said the Bounder solemnly.

Bunter licked his dry lips.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I did ask Loder for a small loan—not to keep, of course, but as an advance on my postal-order."

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "We seem to be making discoveries now. How much did you cadge for, you fat worm?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I—I asked for a quid, but Loder was broke, and said he'd let me have it in the morning."

"I suppose you threatened to show him up to the Head if he let you down?" said Vernon-Smith. "Come on! Better state the facts. It's the only way to save your bacon."

"Yes, I did," said Bunter desperately.

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"And how does he think he's going to raise the money?"

"How do I know? I didn't ask him."

Vernon-Smith looked grim.

"You chaps," he exclaimed, "don't think I'm talking out of my hat, because I'm not. I believe Loder will make an attempt to steal the cash between now and tomorrow morning."

"Great pip!" gasped Bob Cherry, in astonishment.

"Loder knows that if he doesn't get the quid by the morning Bunter will sneak, and as he can't borrow it from any of his friends he's left with only one alternative."

"To steal it?" said Nugent.

"Precisely!"

"In that case," said Harry Wharton excitedly, "hadn't a few of us better watch his movements?"

"That was exactly what I was going to suggest. You and I will go down to reconnoitre, Wharton. The Games Fund box is still in Wingate's study, and as some of the seniors have recently paid their subscriptions, there's still several quid in it. The key's easily accessible, too, and you can bet your boots Loder will make an attempt to do the trick to-night. We'll take up our quarters in the study. There's a big screen there, and if we hide behind it we sha'n't be spotted."

"Hadn't we better take a third party?" suggested Harry. "We may not be able to tackle the brute off our own bat. He'd be sure to fight like a demon."

"Very well, then. Bob Cherry can come along."

"Hadn't you better wait till lights-out?" said Peter Todd. "Walker might hunt for you if he finds you absent from the dorm."

"We'll chance that," said Bob Cherry. "Let's make up our beds to represent sleeping figures. It's an old dodge, but it generally works."

The three juniors hastily made the arrangements, and quitted the dormitory. With noiseless tread they descended the stairs and went to Wingate's study in the Sixth-Form passage.

Inside, all was dark and still. Wharton and Cherry could not help thinking that they had come on a wild-goose chase, but Vernon-Smith persisted in his theory. Although it was only guesswork that Loder would endeavour to rifle the Games Fund that night, it was a possibility worth making provision for, since Wingate's name might yet be cleared.

The juniors groped their way behind the screen, and waited. The January night was bitterly cold, and it was evident that their nightly vigil would be anything but comfortable.

An hour passed. The limbs of the three watchers were cramped with intense cold, and Harry Wharton suggested giving it up as a bad job. Vernon-Smith, however, was adamant.

"Don't chuck up the sponge," he said. "Let's wait till one, anyhow."

"Great Scott! We shall be frozen to death!" said Bob Cherry between his chattering teeth.

"Blow the cold! What does it matter, so long as we can clear old Wingate?"

The minutes passed with unconscionable slowness. The faint shimmer of the moon caused eerie shadows to flit about the study. It was no light task to keep that vigil in the silent watches of the night, and but for Vernon-Smith's persistence the watch would have been abandoned.

A muffled chime from the old clock-tower announced eleven. Simultaneously footsteps were heard in the passage without. The juniors lay still as mice, waiting, with palpitating hearts, for the nocturnal prowler to enter the study.

And enter it he did. They heard the door open, and an electric torch flashed out through the gloom. Happily the juniors were completely concealed, and there was little chance of the burglar spotting them.

Then a voice, unmistakably Loder's, was heard to mutter:

"Confound that spying worm! He'll raise Cain if I don't get that quid, and I shall find myself in a beastly hole. Now for it!"

Loder opened the table-drawer and took out the key of the box. Then, for the second time in the past few days, he proceeded with his dishonourable task.

That he would find plenty of money in the box he

knew. Only recently Valence and Carne had paid their subscriptions to the Fund.

The Sixth-Former turned the key in the lock. At the same instant there came a ringing cry from Harry Wharton.

"Rush him!"

Loder's blood turned cold. He had been spotted—detected in the very act of stealing money! The fat was in the fire now with a vengeance!

But he meant to fight dearly for his safety. He little guessed that Wharton was not alone.

Then three figures sprang upon him like tigers, and he was borne to the ground, despite his fierce struggles.

"It's all up, you cad!" panted Bob Cherry. "We've bowled you out, and now you're going through it. Got a cord, Smithy?"

The Bounder chuckled as he drew a length of rope from his pocket.

"I brought it along in case of emergency," he explained.

"Good man! String the brute up!"

"Look here," roared Loder, "if you think I came here to steal you've made a grave mistake. I assure you——"

"Dry up!" said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "We couldn't have plainer evidence than this. Buzz off and fetch Quelch, Bob! If he's in his room swotting, all well and good. If he's gone to bed, wake him up."

"Right-ho!" said Bob cheerfully.

And he darted out of the study.

Loder fought fiercely but unavailingly to free himself from his bonds.

"This is monstrous!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "You'll be sacked from the school for this unparalleled impertinence!"

tage of the fact that Skinner and Bolsover had seen Wingate take a fiver out, and Fate played into his hands—for a time. Bunter happened to find this receipt, and that put us on our mettle. We decided to lie in wait here to-night, knowing that Loder would have to obtain more money somehow, to keep Bunter from chattering. Wingate's perfectly innocent——"

"You can save your breath," said Loder bitterly. "I did it, right enough. But I'm not a thief!" he added wildly. "I meant to replace every penny! Honour bright, sir!"

"You confess that you stole the five pounds, and allowed Wingate to bear the blame?" said Mr. Quelch sternly.

"Yes, sir."

"For what reason did you sink so low?"

"I was in debt up to my ears with Cobb, at the Cross Keys. If I didn't pay him at once he was going to show me up. I wish to goodness he'd done it now; I should have been spared all this."

"Enough!" said Mr. Quelch. "Late though the hour is, I think Dr. Locke should become acquainted with the facts at once. Wharton, untie Loder's bonds at once! The four of you will come with me."

Dr. Locke was on the point of retiring for the night when the little party reached his study. To say that he was amazed when Mr. Quelch set the facts before him is to put it mildly.

"I little dreamt that Greyfriars harboured such a thorough-paced blackguard!" he said, referring to the wretched Loder, who, his face ashen, leaned against the bookcase for support. "Gerald Loder, you will take the place of the boy you have so cruelly wronged, and in the morning you will quit this school for ever. As for you

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"The boot's on the other foot, I'm thinking," said Vernon-Smith. "This is where you get it in the neck, you thieving rotter!"

Never before had Gerald Loder found himself in such a terrible position. And there was absolutely no means of extrication this time. He was laid by the heels fairly and squarely.

Footsteps sounded in the passage without. Mr. Quelch, who had been consuming midnight oil over his beloved History of Greyfriars, appeared on the scene with Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith had lit the gas, and the scene was an animated one. Loder lay securely bound on the floor of the study, and the Games Fund box was open.

"What is this?" ejaculated the Remove-master sharply. "Loder! Can it be possible that you have sunk to the level of a common thief?"

Loder did not reply. He felt that whatever defence he made at that moment would sound feeble in the extreme. The open cash-box, the receipt signed by Mr. Cobb, gave glaring evidence of his guilt.

"Wretched boy!" rumbled Mr. Quelch. "So you dare not reply to my question? I can only conclude that your silence is an admission of your wrongdoing. Wharton! Cherry! Vernon-Smith! How came you to be on the scene?"

Vernon-Smith explained quietly. As additional evidence against Loder, if any were needed, he produced the receipt signed by Cobb.

"It's pretty obvious, sir," said the Bounder, "that Loder looted the Games Fund box the other night, and stole five quid in order to pay this debt. He took advantage of the fact that Skinner and Bolsover had seen Wingate take a fiver out, and Fate played into his hands—for a time. Bunter happened to find this receipt, and that put us on our mettle. We decided to lie in wait here to-night, knowing that Loder would have to obtain more money somehow, to keep Bunter from chattering. Wingate's perfectly innocent——"

Remove boys, I congratulate you upon the splendid part you have played in the cause of justice. But for your prompt action, the facts might never have come to light. I thank you most cordially. You may now go to bed."

And the three juniors who had been instrumental in bringing the culprit to book wended their way to the Remove dormitory.

"Loder's sacked!" said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath. "He deserves it, up to the hilt, but—but I can't help feeling sorry for the poor brute. He must have been in the cart terribly when Cobb demanded that money."

"Never mind Loder just now!" said Harry Wharton. "Old Wingate's cleared! What a grand surprise he'll get to-night! Hip, hip, hip——"

"Hurray!" responded Vernon-Smith and Bob Cherry together.

And they dashed into the dormitory in high spirits.

"Well!" said Peter Todd. "You seem pretty cheerful. Did you work the giddy oracle?"

"Yes, rather!" said the Bounder. "Loder's the thief. He's been bowled out, fair and square, and gets the sack in the morning!"

"Gammon!" said Bolsover. "You're rotting!"

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Wingate's innocent and Loder's guilty, and everything in the garden is lovely!"

"Do you expect us to believe that cock-and-bull yarn?" sneered Skinner.

"Wait till the morning, Skinny, old son, and then you'll see for yourself," replied Bob. "And now I'm going to sleep. I never felt chirpier in my life!"

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

After Darkness, Light!

ALL Greyfriars knew next morning; and everybody—with the possible exception of Skinner & Co.—rejoiced with an exceeding joy.

Wingate, interviewed by the Head overnight, breakfasted in his own study, as of yore, and resumed the duties of captain, while Courtney, excused for his pardonable outburst of temper in Big Hall, was also restored to the position of prefect.

Most of the fellows who had doubted George Wingate flocked into his study and entreated him to kick them—hard. Those who had maintained the captain's innocence hugged themselves for very joy.

The proclamation soon went round that there was to be an assembly in Big Hall. Everybody knew what it was for. Gerald Loder, having kicked over the traces once too often, was about to pay the penalty of his offences in full.

The Hall was crowded. Every master, every boy, was present, save Loder, who had been confined since midnight to the punishment-room. Wingate and Courtney were sent to fetch him, and he tottered rather than walked into the large room.

"My boys," said Dr. Locke, a stern look in his eyes, "Gerald Loder has committed one of the blackest offences in the annals of the school. He has confessed to me that he, and he alone, was responsible for the Games Fund theft. He essayed to rob the box a second time, and this brought about his undoing."

"George Wingate is innocent. I am the first to admit that we have done him a grievous wrong. Circumstances looked black against him, and some of us were inclined to jump to conclusions. I now readily pardon Wingate for his fistic affray with Loder, since he laboured under grave provocation. As for Courtney, he has resumed his prefectship."

"Hurrah!"

The cheer that broke out was deafening, and the Head made no effort to repel it.

"As for you, Loder," he continued, "your name shall be struck off instantly from the school register. You are expelled from Greyfriars! I need not enlarge upon the gravity of your conduct. Go at once and pack your belongings! I will send a wire to your father acquainting him with the sordid details."

His features haggard, his step feeble and faltering, Gerald Loder moved to the door. A hiss followed him as he went—a fierce, angry hiss, which grew in vehemence at every second. With awful suddenness it was borne upon the rascally plotter's mind that the way of the transgressor is hard.

His head swimming, the wretched Loder stumbled to his study. What the future would hold for him he dared not conjecture. His father was a very stern man, and would not be likely to take a lenient view of his son's conduct.

A moral coward, Loder hated the idea of going home at all. He felt he couldn't face it. A horse-whipping from his enraged parent and a situation in a murky city office were alike repugnant to him.

"Hang it all!" he muttered. "I sha'n't go—I can't!"

But what could he do? He had no money, and no influence. How could he possibly hope to obtain a situation?

Then a sudden idea occurred to him. The nation was at war, and it wanted men. True, Loder was not of military age, but his strength and stature would find favour with any recruiting-sergeant.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed over and over again. "I'll get into khaki and live down the wretched past. Private Gerald Loder! It doesn't sound very imposing, and the pay won't be anything to speak of, but it's better than starving in a gutter!"

Loder packed up all his belongings. He could not take them with him to the recruiting-office, so he placed his trunk in the corner of the study, knowing that Dr. Locke would have it sent on to his home when it was discovered.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE!"

Then, lighting a cigarette, the expelled senior threw himself into the armchair and reflected on his past career at Greyfriars. If only he had gone straight! What a difference it would have made! Like Saul of old, he had "played the fool, and erred exceedingly," and now, too late, he began to repent him of having passed through the long labyrinth of sin and vice.

For hour after hour he sat in the study, immersed in gloomy thought. Not a soul came near him. The fellows were at morning lessons, and Dr. Locke doubtless imagined that the expelled senior had taken his departure.

Loder rose at length, with a sigh. He was about to leave the study, when footsteps sounded in the passage, and Carne and Valence came in.

"Hallo! Not gone yet?" said Carne.

"It doesn't look like it," was the reply.

"Well, it's hard cheddar, Loder, old man! But, really, you know, it was a bit too thick to pinch money. I should have thought you'd have drawn the line at that!"

"Same here!" said Valence.

"Don't pile in on a chap when he's down," said Loder. "P'r'aps I'd better say good-bye. I don't want to run the gauntlet of a horde of fags in the quadrangle."

"Go through the Head's garden," suggested Carne. "You won't be spotted then."

Loder shook hands with the two fellows who had been his co-partners in dissipation.

"By the way," he said, pausing in the doorway, "if either of you chaps would care to make me a small loan, for the sake of old times, I shall be awfully obliged."

But Valence and Carne didn't tumble over each other to do Loder a good turn. They had done with him now, and were only too anxious to leave the premises, lest he should implicate them in any way on account of their shady doings.

"I—I'm sorry!" stammered Valence. "You've tackled me at a rotten time. The fact is, I'm stony."

"I am, too," said Carne. "There's precious little cash about these days."

Loder's lip curled contemptuously.

"It's always the way," he said. "When a chap's down, his chums give him the cold shoulder. You know jolly well that if our positions were reversed, I'd be ready to share my last penny with you. I've got faults enough, goodness knows, but I wouldn't go back on a friend!"

"No good getting your rag out!" said Carne. "We'd be only too pleased to help you if we could, but we can't!"

"Oh, well," said Loder heavily, "I suppose I must fight my own battles! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

And Gerald Loder tramped away down the passage.

"You've forgotten your trunk!" Valence called after him.

"Blow the trunk!" replied Loder.

And he went on his way, leaving his erstwhile chums staring at each other in amazement.

Most of the fellows were liberated from lessons by this time, and the thudding of the football could be heard in the Close. The sound tore Loder's heart afresh. Why had he been such a waster? If only they would give him one more chance!

But that was not to be thought of. The Head could be a very determined man on occasion, and all the appeals in the world would not induce him to grant Loder a reprieve. The wretched fellow had sown the wind, and was now reaping the whirlwind.

Wingate's name was cleared. He was restored to his high estate, and the power which once had chained him was laid low. For the captain of Greyfriars the future held high promise; but for Gerald Loder there seemed nothing to make life worth living. He would doubtless become an obscure private in his Majesty's Army, uncared for, and caring for no one in turn. He had elected during his career at Greyfriars to tread the primrose-path of dalliance, and Fate, which never tires of playing tricks on those she has long been wont to favour, had brought complete ruin in the train of the one-time Sixth-Former's reckless escapades.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Redeeming the Past!

IN order to avoid publicity as much as possible, Loder decided to go by way of the towing-path into Friardale, and thence strike out for Courtfield, to put his enlistment project into effect. Had he taken the road which led to the village, he might possibly have encountered some of the fellows it had been his practice to bully, and such a situation would have been well-nigh unbearable.

Loder's heart was very bitter as he tramped along by the side of the silvery Sark, whose shining waters he might never see again. Even Loder was not entirely devoid of sentiment, and a curious lump rose in his throat at that moment. He wished more than ever that he could be given another chance.

What was Wingate doing now? he wondered. Reveling, most likely, in the knowledge of his freedom. All animosity towards the captain of Greyfriars had vanished from Loder's breast. He was too wretched even to hate. Suddenly, as he swung round a bend, he espied a small youth in the familiar dark-blue cap of Greyfriars, endeavouring to manœuvre a punt. He wondered idly who it was, and hesitated a moment, fearing lest he should be seen.

"But what does a fag matter?" he muttered to himself. "Hang it all, he's alone! And—my hat! It's Wingate minor!"

The younger brother of the Greyfriars captain was in the punt, and he seemed ill at ease, too. Jack Wingate had had very little experience of the difficult art of punting, and he handled the pole very gingerly. Moreover, he was being whirled along with the stream, which was exceedingly swift-flowing at that part.

Loder watched the fag rather breathlessly. He had a vague premonition that something was going to happen.

And it did! Jack Wingate plunged the pole into the water, and lurched sideways in the punt. His wrists and arms followed the pole, and then, with a shrill scream, the boy lost his balance, and toppled, head foremost, into the water.

Loder looked on, spellbound. The spirit of tragedy hung over the spot where, a moment before, all had been tranquil and serene.

Could the fag swim? A glance at the cruel waters, and the pallid face which hovered on the surface for a brief instant and then disappeared, confirmed Loder's worst fears. Jack Wingate was at the mercy of the swirling current.

Loder waited no longer. He realised that a human life hung in the balance. Whipping off his coat, he took a header into the cold, clear water, and struck out for the helpless victim of the catastrophe.

When Jack Wingate's head bobbed up again, Loder saw with a start that he was a good dozen yards downstream. It was a moot point whether the would-be rescuer would reach him in time, for only a short distance further down was the rushing weir.

But Loder was undaunted. Another fellow, who set a high price on his life, might have given up the ghost, and left Jack Wingate to his fate. But for the expelled senior there was nothing to live for. Hope and ambition had died in his breast, and he was in that reckless, mood that bids defiance to danger, and even death.

With strong, swift strokes he forced his way towards the helpless, drowning lad, and took a tight grip on Jack Wingate's collar.

"Keep still!" he exclaimed. "Don't struggle, and we shall get through all right!"

Loder smiled grimly at his own optimism. He would have to fight his way against the current, almost a human impossibility, especially with the burden he was bearing.

"I'll try, anyhow!" he thought to himself. And then the life-and-death struggle began.

It was hopeless, on the face of it, to expect to succeed. Loder remembered to have read in certain story-books how the gallant hero breasted strong currents, and bore people to safety, without turning a hair; but those gallant heroes would have failed dismally against the current of the Sark.

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Moreover, the water was icy cold, and with something like a thrill Loder felt the cramp coming over his limbs. "It's all up with us!" panted Jack Wingate, who still retained full possession of his faculties.

Whilst Loder was pondering for an answer which would pacify the youngster, he became aware of a tall figure dashing along the towing-path with a stout coil of rope.

"Keep your pecker up, young 'un!" he exclaimed. "There's help coming!"

And the next moment the welcome rope, hurled by George Wingate, came swirling out to the helpless couple.

Loder ordered Jack Wingate to catch hold, and then he did so himself, though by this time he was well-nigh exhausted. The captain of Greyfriars hauled them on to the bank, his handsome face very pale. Wingate minor was very dear to him, and his heart beat fast as he realised how near the boy had been to death.

"Jack!" he gasped.

"It—it's all right, 'George!' spluttered the fag, wringing his brother's hand. "I was a mad idiot to go out in a punt at all, and but for Loder——"

He paused significantly.

The captain of Greyfriars turned to the fellow whose prompt and gallant action had saved Jack Wingate's life.

"Thank you, Loder!" he said quietly. "I sha'n't forget this in a hurry! I'm grateful to you more than I can say!"

"Grateful to me—a thief?" said Loder bitterly.

"Never mind that now! You've been punished for what you did, and I, for one, wouldn't dream of reproaching you afterwards! Look here, you're wet through! Come along to the school at once, or you'll get a chill!"

But Gerald Loder was beyond the power of replying. He had dropped to the ground in a dead faint.

Greyfriars was in a buzz when the two Wingates brought in their unconscious burden. The news spread like wildfire throughout the school, and when the Head was acquainted with the details, he at once ordered Loder to be placed in a warm bed in the sanatorium.

Dr. Short was summoned from Friardale, and his verdict was that Loder had sustained a nasty chill, and would require very careful nursing.

"Fancy Loder being a giddy hero!" said Bob Cherry, in the common-room that evening. "Who ever would have thought it?"

"There's good in everybody," said Mark Linley quietly. "Loder's a cad and an outsider, but not a coward. He saved the kid's life, and I don't see how the Head can kick him out after this!"

And a few days later, when Gerald Loder was able to sit up and take a little nourishment, as Bob Cherry expressed it, Dr. Locke visited him in the sanatorium, and granted him a free pardon.

"You may find it hard to live down this sorry business, my boy," he said; "but you shall have every opportunity. You may resume your duties as a prefect."

Loder was profuse in his expression of thanks. He made all sorts of promises at that moment to the kindly old Head—promises that it was doubtful if he would ever fulfil. For the evil in Gerald Loder was greatly outweighed by the good, and it was highly improbable that he would ever enter upon a permanent reform.

Loder did not experience such a poor reception as he had anticipated when he rejoined his schoolfellows. Some said nothing, others cheered him, but none made any reference to the affair of the Games Fund.

Not long afterwards a letter arrived for the captain of Greyfriars from Bob Wingate, announcing the joyful fact that he had recently gained the Distinguished Conduct Medal for services rendered to his country in Flanders. In celebration of this glad event, the Head granted a special half-holiday, and the Greyfriars First Eleven entertained Redclyffe. Loder and Wingate played side by side in the team, and, for a time, at any rate, harmony prevailed between the two fellows who had hitherto been the Poes of the Sixth!

THE END.

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The Rubies of Sheba.

- - By - -

EDWIN WOOTON

A GRAND INSTALMENT OF A GREAT NEW SERIAL STORY
OF MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

MR. DELAVILLE, formerly chief cashier at the GREAT SOUTHERN BANK, is under suspicion, owing to the fact that the RUBIES OF SHEBA, gems of immense value, which were placed in the bank's keeping, are missing.

TOM HEReward, a junior clerk at the bank—to whom, with his sister Dora, Delaville is acting as guardian—determines to sift the matter out to save his guardian from disgrace.

A chart is discovered showing the whereabouts of a treasure, of which the missing rubies originally formed a part.

Tom and his chum, Will Sallowby, set out on a ship in charge of Captain Boyton to find the treasure.

They reach the island where the treasure is hidden, and eventually find themselves in an underground world.

The priests of the hidden world are hostile towards Pontius, their king, on account of his friendship with Tom and his companions, and are threatening to revolt.

(Now go on with the story.)

Worse Than Anarchy.

Patho stood within the portal of the chamber, and when Tom had entered closed it gently.

"Messenger," he said—"for I know not how else to call you—there is news of moment. Speedy runners have taken the tidings of the rising to Kairon, in Memphis. He is collecting his followers, and will be here anon to demand his will."

Tom felt relieved. If Kairon was something other than a pagan, he should be a support to the government, and already he had been nominated as chief of priests. Tom said so tersely, but Patho shook his huge head.

"Kairon wears no cloth that is not made of his own wool, and on his own loom," he said figuratively. "Chief of priests! There will be no priests save himself if he has power for one brief, waking day. And there are other things, messenger. He has heard of your slaying the beast in the amphitheatre, and he loves not the deed. He avers that 'twas done by devilcraft."

Tom laughed. "I am no magician, Patho," he commented. "It was as natural a thing as making fire or shooting an arrow." "Maybe, messenger. Of such matters I have little knowledge."

"When does Kairon set out?" questioned Tom. "Even now, I surmise, he is on the way."

"Then I will go forth to meet him, and in peace." Patho's face beamed.

"Now that would be right noble, courteous, and wise," he said. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 417.

said. "Convince him, if you can, that what has been done, and what is to be done, has naught in it of devilcraft. But I have not spoken all."

"Hasten the finish, good Patho, if I am to make the journey."

"Kairon has agents everywhere, even in the household of King Pontius, and he has given orders that your magic fireballs, or what you may choose to call them, shall be brought to him. Would this render you powerless?"

"By no means. Yet it might work harm even to Kairon himself."

"He has vowed to have them publicly burnt."

"In which case, Patho, if Kairon is standing near, he will learn a good deal more than he knows now, for he will die. Well, I must be away. I give you thanks for your kindness."

With this, Tom strode back to the larger chamber. The king was seated, sullenly frowning. Four of the councillors remained; their late companion had gone to the palace front to address the populace. Boreus saluted Tom gravely as the latter entered.

Tom turned to Will. "Get our revolvers," he said, "and fully charge them. Fill our cartridge-belts. Then put all the remaining cartridges, including the cordite, in a chest, securely fasten it, and let it be guarded day and night by four soldiers. See to it now."

Turning to Boyton, he added: "Captain, I make you military adviser to our good friend Boreus. I believe you understand something of military engineering, Mr. Blake, and Will had better be under your immediate direction."

"You, Boreus, will hold in readiness as many men as may be necessary to suppress a possible onslaught by the followers of Kairon. I trust it may not come to that. I am going now on an embassy of peace, for my brief hour's reign has nearly closed."

"And now, great king," he said, turning to Pontius, "I resign the use of the sceptre. It has been brought to me that Kairon approaches the city with a host. I go forth to persuade him to peace. Therefore, I pray you of your courtesy to give me guides, and all things proper to my dignity."

"Mambres will see that your commands are obeyed. The king spoke as one who had no wish to hold converse."

"Then see you to it, good secretary," said Tom to the scribe.

Tom was not posing, neither was he using theatrical language. The Latin tongue does not lend itself to the common turns and twists of English speech. Tom's words as here set down are a fair translation of expressions sounding very simple and commonplace in Latin.

Mambres had quitted the chamber. An attendant now came in, and announced that guides and a travelling-chair of state, with a guard of honour, awaited Tom.

"I take no guard," said Tom, and with this, having bowed profoundly to the king, and given his companions a nod, he went on his mission.

It was at the end of the third league of their slow journey that the guides halted. In the distance there had been a gradually rising murmur, and a sound unwritable, even phonetically, which Tom set down to marching feet. Yet it sounded more like careless scuffling than the tread of trained soldiers.

One of the guides now came to the chair side.

"They are yonder, great one," he said—"a host of some thousands, and he who rides upon the shoulders of men is Kairon."

Tom looked to where the guide pointed. Filing along a tortuous road that now lay on the further side of a field was a dense throng of men, all seemingly bearing arms, and at their head, seated in a kind of litter, whose poles were borne by four black-robed servitors, was a figure that commanded Tom's interest, if not respect.

Tom judged him to be of middle height. He was robed somewhat in the Eastern fashion, but the material he wore was of a sombre brown lue. His face, cast in the mould one associates with ascetic saints, was smoothly shaven. He was bald, save for a fringe of hair, and this, with his garb, made him resemble a monk. His forehead was high and narrow, and his eyes, deeply sunken, were overhung by bushy brows.

Tom alighted, and stood in the centre of the roadway. As the procession rounded the field, and so came immediately into view, Tom moved forward, bowed gravely, raised his right hand in salutation, and said loudly:

"Hail, Kairon!"

"And who art thou?" came from the priest's lips.

"I am Hereward, good Kairon, a follower of Christ, and have come to meet and to greet thee as a brother in the faith!"

"So! Thou hast thought to brave me! Oh, thou base blasphemer, thou hypocrite, and follower of Sathanas himself, it will not avail! Thou art doomed to death!"

"And is it thus you receive an ambassador of peace?" broke out Tom hotly. "Is it for this I—who held sway for an hour in Kamurba—made thee chief of all priests?"

"Thou sayest lie on lie!" vociferated Kairon. "The land has been foully pagan since soon after that miraculous coming hither of our forefathers, but at least there has been a glimmer of truth in the darkness. Then I—even I—had the whole truth given me, and many came to me and believed. Then thou—oh, foul magician!—came to the land, and with thy sorceries didst bewitch the king, and when he had seen thy devil-wrought signs and wonders, he issued an edict to seize all the priests. So his myriads came even to Memphis, but they were beaten, and cast out. The king would have no gods, true or false. And thou wouldst rule the king! Thou shalt be burnt, and thy magic with thee!"

"Is Boreus thy son-in-law?" asked Tom quietly.

"Even so. A worldly warrior, but honest. Hast bewitched him also?"

"Go to Kamurba, and question him. He will tell thee that I had naught to do with the edict against the priests. What I have done, I can tell thee. Even now, within the past three hours, a great throng gathered against the palace, and beat down the guards. Was the throng for thee, Kairon? I tell you nay; it had gathered to wreak vengeance, because of the king's scoffing at the pagan deities of wood and stone, and because he, even Pontius, had seized their priests. Ask Boreus, ask Mambres, ask Patho the dwarf—who seems to be more of wise man than buffoon—and they will all tell thee the same.

"Then I, whom you denounce as a wizard, sent out to the mob, and told them to appoint delegates to speak for them; and five came, and I told Pontius if he would give me authority for one brief hour I would save his kingdom. I did save it, for I issued an edict making the council of delegates permanent, and appointing thee chief of all priests—and this is my reward."

"But thou didst work sorcery," said Kairon. He seemed in doubt, and flung out the accusation almost questioningly. "Oh, man, man, when iron and flint make a spark, it is equally sorcery to the savage who has never before seen it done!"

"Thou hast enabled Pontius to speak across a full league and more. Plain sorcery that!"

"Nonsense, Kairon! Thou shalt sing psalms and hymns so as to be heard clearly a league away. That may convince thee 'tis no work of the fiend."

"I would fain believe thee," said the priest.

"Thou wilt believe in me altogether before long," returned Tom.

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"Before that hour I must sift thee as grain from husk. Bearers, set me down. Followers, tarry here while I go some paces away to converse with this stranger. Now, youth, we are alone. Tell me plainly whence thou comest, and wherefore."

Once again Tom repeated the story of the Byzantine gems. When he had concluded his companion said thoughtfully:

"Certain of thy statements I know to be true. The Upper World—it does exist. The rubies—they were, with other gems, the gift of Sheba's queen to Solomon. The passage to the vortex—by that way came our ancestors. Yes, youth, I believe in thee. Now speak to me of that Upper World. Doubtless by now all is peace and joy there?"

"Well, no; not exactly," returned Tom, thinking of some differences then in course of settlement in Flanders, France, and elsewhere.

"Well, well! Sathanas may have a small heaven left. That is to be expected. Here the foul fiend has it nearly all his own way. Things will be different some hours hence."

"I trust so," said Tom, more by way of courtesy than as an expression of belief.

"I intend they shall be so. Thou art a kind of ambassador. Go back to Pontius, and say to him that I, Kairon, at the head of my disciples, am coming to Kamurba. All the priests of the false gods are to be brought, bound, into the public square at the mid hour of the day, and their wives and their children, and all are to be slain with the edge of the sword. That is by way of a beginning. Fare thee well!"

Tom's blood ran cold. The proposition was monstrous. The pagans and semi-pagans were, when all had been said against them, only following their poor light. If Kairon began thus, what would the end be?

"Hasten!" said Tom to his bearers; and he sat impatiently until their running steps set him down within the palace.

Tom's Temptation.

"Ho, Boreus! Is Boreus, chief of the army, here? Seek him, and ask him to come at once. My companions—Sallowby, Boyton, Blake—seek them also!"

Tom uttered the words imperiously, as attendants hurried forth to receive him.

"What's the row, old chap? You speak like a popular hero at a penny gaff!" said Will, who was the first to arrive.

"Oh, dry up! We're in for a tragedy, if you like, and it's no time for joking," returned Tom. "Here, you"—as the others came in—"I've seen Kairon, and he's coming on with about ten thousand armed men. He has deputed me to command that all the priests be brought into the public square for the purpose of being executed. Not only so; but their wives and children are to be sacrificed."

"The old boulder!" said Will.

"You forget Kairon is my father-in-law!" said Boreus, with dignity.

"No; he is not a boulder. Indeed, he may be a good man in his own way," said Tom. "However, we have to prevent this tragedy. Now, Boreus, your advice, please—and quickly."

"Tell Patho to come hither. He is asleep in a near room."

The dwarf was summoned, and the facts were put before him.

"Look, you," said Patho. "Kairon will want not only to put all these men, women, and children to death, but to govern this land in such a way that any other ruler shall be a mere man of wood. If we conquer Kairon, and let the priests free, they will want to put the king to death, and Kairon also, and to make paganism the law of the land. If we conquer Kairon, and keep the priests in prison, Pontius will make himself into a god, and a most unholy tyranny it will be. If we do away with the power of all save that of the council, we shall be giving our lives and liberties into the hands of men who are ignorant, and unfitted to rule. Choose, ye."

"Kairon," said Boyton.

"The king," said Blake.

"The council," said Will.

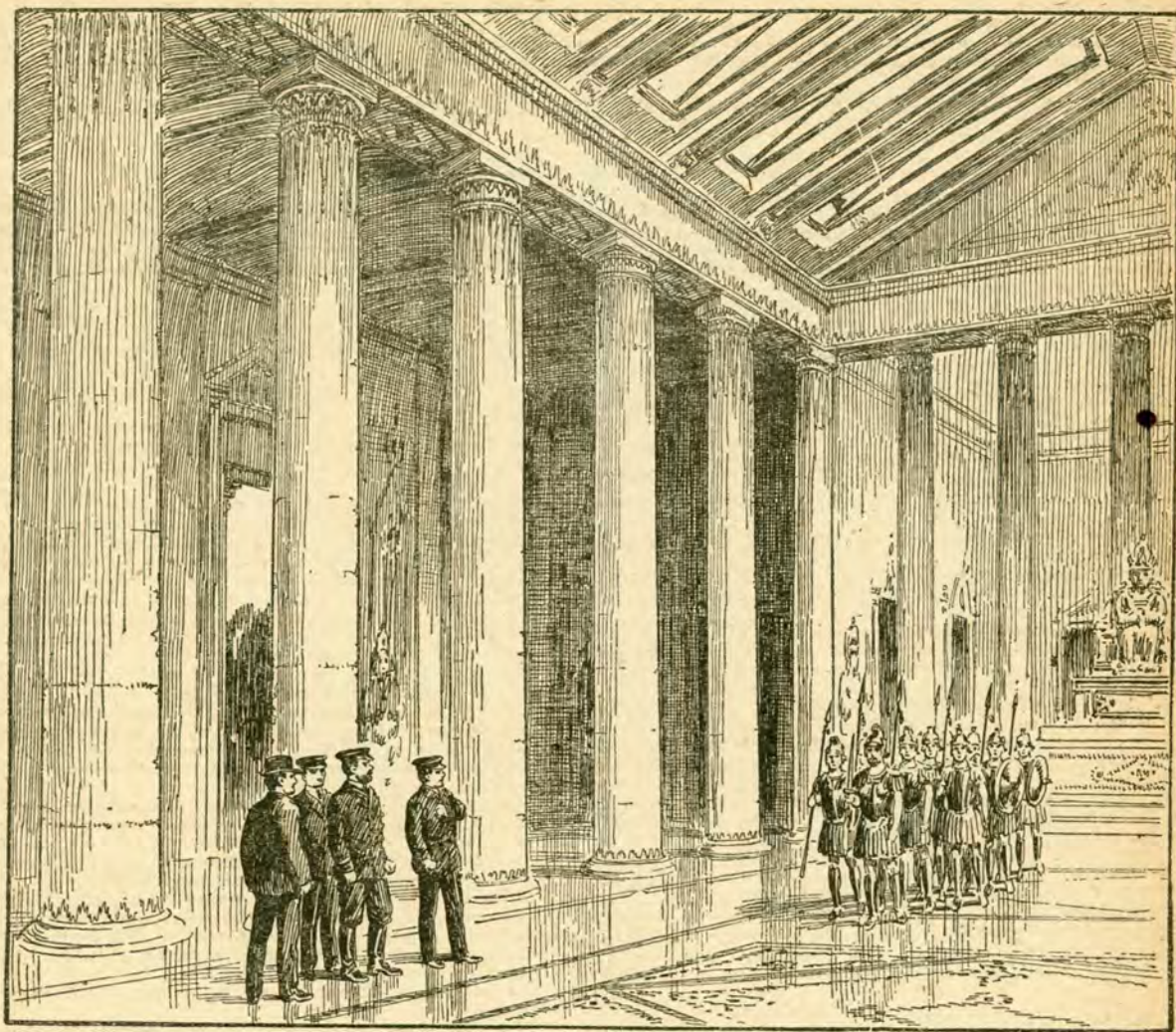
"Tom!" said Boreus, placing one hand on our hero's shoulder.

"Yes, Tom!" added the dwarf.

"Why, you must be jesting!" returned Tom Hereward.

"Not so," said Patho. "Only you four have the knowledge and the right mind that may make you wise and just rulers. And of the four you alone have, though for a brief hour, held rule. We will proclaim you king. You shall rule with mercy, yet with a firm hand."

"Men, men! Don't contemplate or discuss such folly! Here, Boreus, go, I command you, at once, and call your soldiers! Put this rabble to flight, seize Kairon, place him in prison, and then return to the palace!"



Tramp, tramp, tramp! Over the brilliant pavement of the great temple moved a body of armed men. At their head, drawn sword in hand, was Boreus. (See Chapter 27.)

"And why should I execute your commands if you do not rule?" asked Boreus superciliously.

"He does rule. He consents," said Patho.

"Anything! Yes; I consent!" broke in Tom.

Boreus flung wide the door of the chamber.

"Ho, guards! Ho, trumpeters! This is Hereward, our king! Seize the late king, and have him conveyed to the prison! Trumpeters, sound a blast before the palace! You, Mambres, bid the heralds proclaim the new king! Soldiers, see that twelve of you protect the body of our sovereign lord!"

And then, one hand resting on his sword-hilt, Boreus swung out to a terrace, and despatched fleet runners to summon his legions.

Despite the grave issues promised by the next few hours, Tom felt so wearied that he lay down on a pile of rugs and fell asleep.

He was awakened by the entry of a Court attendant.

"May I please thee, O king, the great Boreus awaits an audience!"

The soldier came in with lagging steps, and bowed with courtly reverence.

"Well?" questioned Tom.

"May I never have another father-in-law to place in ward!" said Boreus. "He cursed me by all the gods I have ever heard of. He denounced me as in league with demons. He said I was fitter for a post as gatekeeper in the infernal regions than to lead an army."

"Well, but the rest of it, man? What of the priest's followers?"

"Oh, I chased them back to Memphis, of course, and slew a few score to teach the others manners!" Boreus returned, with a yawn.

"I see. That is well, save for the slaying. However, it had to be done, I suppose."

"Or they would have slain me. And now, king, have you any further commands?"

"No; I shall visit Kairon. Then I shall visit Menathon. After that I shall call upon Pontius. Then I shall summon all to meet the Council of Five, and get them to arrange a peaceful settlement satisfactory to all."

Boreus lay back and laughed long and heartily.

"Try it, O king!" he said. "I don't envy you your round of visits; but, if you go armed, you will probably get back with a scratch or two. What amuses me is the thought that out of a meeting of irreconcilable enemies, each anxious for his own advantage and that only, anything approaching to a peaceful and satisfactory settlement can come. But try it, do try it, and let me be present at the meeting. If my dear old father-in-law says much more in the strain he employed an hour or two ago, I'll have him thrown to the beast gods in the water. Not that they'll find much meat on his bones."

"We shall see," said Tom; and with this rose.

He dismissed Boreus with quite a kingly air. Already Tom was beginning to feel himself too big for his hat. Then he summoned Patho, and, having told him of his intention, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 417.

directed the dwarf to summon the council for a midday meeting.

"I will summon the council, O king; but if you follow the advice of Patho you will not visit these men. It would be deemed beneath your dignity as ruler. Let all be brought hither, and do you be on your throne, surrounded by your guards, and with your companions at hand. Then speak your mind."

"Patho, I believe you are right," returned Tom. "It shall be as you suggest. See that the men are brought here."

High noon came, marked by no change in position of a sun, but it agreed with the ending of the first half of the waking day. Seated on a throne no earthly monarch could have rivalled was Tom Hereward, once a junior bank clerk. By his side were his old and trusted friends. Ranged about the walls were the Royal guards, and by the portal stood Boreus, with drawn sword. Below the throne, and facing it, stood two rows of seats in the shape of a V, the open part being the one nearer the throne.

And now one by one the personages summoned arrived. Boreus was a stone image for aught of recognition he gave the arrivals. Two stalwart guardsmen conducted each to his seat. Only the delegates of the people seemed at ease. Kairon was pallid with consuming rage; Pontius wore a sneer of bitter contempt. Menathon looked the disdain he felt. It did not promise to be a pleasant party.

A herald who had been instructed by Patho mounted the steps of the throne, and, taking his stand by the new king, faced the assembly.

Then came the blare of his trumpet, and, following it, the announcement:

"To all and sundry, being the liege citizens of Kamurba, of Memphis, and of other cities and parts within this realm, greeting.

"Whereas we, Thomas Hereward, have after due thought taken to ourselves the style and title of king, and have assumed all rights pertaining to such kingship, and whereas we have, with the consent of our most trusted councillors, summoned to meet us Pontius, the late king; Menathon, priest; Kairon, priest; and certain delegates of the people.

"Now this is to make known that our Royal will and pleasure is that the persons so named and mentioned shall consult together, and, with the advice, consent, and assent of ourselves, shall enact such laws for the constitution of this realm as they shall deem to serve best the interests of the kingdom. God save the King!"

"Kairon, the priest, is called upon to speak," said Tom.

"To speak, saidst thou!" and the priest rose. "To speak! What have I to speak, save that thou, O stranger, art a false-hearted, devil-serving traitor to thy Creator and thy race!

And thou, O Menathon, art a belly-serving idolater; and that thou, O Pontius, art most justly in the grip of this fiendish false king; and that ye, poor spokesmen of ignorant slaves, are as blind men who would act as guides and as dumb men who would teach others to sing."

And then Kairon resumed his seat.

From the throat of Boreus came something like a chuckle, but his face was rigid as wood.

"Pontius, thou art permitted to speak," said Tom.

"Permitted! I thank you, usurper. That at least is kind. Perhaps thou wilt permit me to breathe next. I would that thou and Kairon and this prince of liars—Menathon—were in my power for one sweet minute. As for these poor knaves, they have my pity. Their ignorance commands it."

And Pontius sat down.

"And now the delegates," said Tom sweetly.

The men consulted together; then one rose.

"We fear no hard words," he said. "As for kings, we don't want them. As for priests, we are willing to keep on those of the old gods, provided we have cheaper living and more money. Let the priests work for half their pay, and let them tell the gods not to eat and drink so much. I have said my say."

"And now I will say mine," Tom began. "I came to this land by pure accident. I came, not knowing that there was such a land. I found it in the grip of selfish and ignorant men. The worship of Jove and Mars, Venus, Apollo, and the rest of them is rotten nonsense. Idols do not eat or drink, and that which is offered to them is consumed by greedy priests.

"I found the king sceptical of these false gods; but he would have banished all religion as equally false. I found this man, Kairon, eager to slay the pagan priests and their wives and their children. I found the populace without any voice in their own government.

"So here I make a decree. Kairon shall be high priest of the land, but shall not slay either pagan priest or his wife or his child. The false gods shall be destroyed. The people

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shall be given what their delegates declare to be a right wage. Boreus shall be in command of all the army. There shall be no vengeance or punishment fall on any man for what has been done. Pontius shall be restored to his throne on promising to observe this decree. Such is my will. Do you assent to it?"

There came a chorus of affirmative cries.

"Then," said Tom, rising, "here and now I abdicate this throne." He led Pontius to it, and with the words, "Long life to the king!" bowed his head.

Boreus sighed. His glance met that of Tom, and to the latter it seemed to say:

"You have thrown away your chance!"

Kairon's Plot.

Kairon quitted the place of the Council of State with a very different bearing from that which had marked his entry. His form was erect, his eyes expressed command, and his mouth had set into a mocking curve which proclaimed his feeling of triumph. Whatever others might do, Kairon was determined to push the advantage he had gained until his ambitions should have been accomplished.

To understand what is to follow, and therefore to mentally grip the most enthralling tragedies in this intensely dramatic history, it will be necessary to glance for a few moments at the man's past life.

Kairon had been gifted with a high grade of intelligence; but it was idealistic, not rational. He had been taught such things as the learned knew at the beginning of the Christian era. Thus he understood mathematics to a really considerable extent. He had an intimate acquaintance with such moral philosophy as the ancients taught, and he had been from earliest youth indoctrinated with the belief that the priesthood must of necessity be a learned body, and that it alone was fitted to have learning.

The king was an ornamental symbol of the nation. For the rest—well, soldiers were used to punish enemies and traitors; and all other persons existed for the benefit of these three—the king, the army, and the order of priests.

Now, not a whit had Kairon changed these views; but since that time—answering to three years ago—when he had found and deciphered the Greek sacred writings he had thrown aside all belief in paganism, had adopted what he believed to be the truth, and from much musing in solitude had arrived at the conviction that he had been specially chosen by Providence to purge the land from the grossness of its idolatry, and to be its spiritual ruler.

From his own point of view, Kairon was infallible. Now, if you add to these facts that the priest was intolerant, uncharitable, bigoted, and without any knowledge of natural science, you have the picture of a man with whom it was impossible to deal as a friend and equal. He was a priestly autocrat, who would not tolerate the faintest difference from his views.

Tom had from the first read Kairon's character. It was, therefore, with considerable surprise that, after his return to the palace, he received a verbal message, brought from the priest by one of his sombrely-garbed servitors.

"The supreme lord bishop of the land greets Thomas Hereward," said the man, "and will welcome him at his table."

"At what hour?" questioned Tom.

"It lacks one hour to the time of the feast," returned the other.

Tom nodded.

"Tell the supreme lord bishop I shall be honoured," he said.

Kairon played the host admirably. Tom was made to eat and drink heartily. He lay at his ease, and, under adroit questioning, told many things about the Upper World life. He spoke of football, cricket, the bank robbery, and, lastly, of the Great War. He did not know that Kairon, as he listened, questioned, nodded and smiled, was seething with a rage which had he spoken would have been worded in this manner:

"You self-seeking, murderous, worldly-minded reprobate!"

But it would not do to attempt the placing of Tom and his friends in the care of Tra. It would not do to attempt his or their killing openly. Boreus was not to be trusted; the populace still less. Pontius was an open enemy. There was only one way. These invaders must be made to work their own doom. But how?

And then a chance turn in the converse gave Kairon an idea.

"Oh, some of our amusements are really jolly fun!" Tom said. "My favourite is conjuring, and all that sort of thing. There was an awfully good trick on at the Egyptian Hall, in London. The fellow on the stage cut off a woman's head, and put it in a basket. Then he threw a cloth over the body,

and handed the basket to someone in the audience. The basket was opened, and found empty, and when the cloth was removed, the woman got up and bowed.

"Rank devil-craft!" muttered Kairon. "But can you do these things?"

"Goodness, no! I know one or two simple tricks, that's all. If you will wait a minute, I'll show you."

Whereupon Tom went to the storing-place, and brought his magic bottle.

"Ah, I see!" commented Kairon when the trick had been performed. "Yes, I quite see. Take care of that. It may prove highly valuable."

Tom laughed.

"And so you came here—that is, to the place above this—to find the gems of Sheba's queen. They are of little esteem here, or that gold of which you have spoken. Seven leagues from here is a hill, all of gold. It is quarried out for cooking-vessels. And as for coloured stones—the temple of the false gods is paved with them. Poor, false gods! I have taken away their guard. If you go away from this land, you would like to take some stones with you?"

That was how the wily Kairon sowed the seed. It bore its first fruit when Tom quitted his presence. The words "A hill of gold; a pavement of gems" were repeating themselves again and again.

Get away? Of course they wanted to get away! There might be a means—there must be a means. They would make one. Gems were light. They would carry with them more than the royalties of the world possessed.

Tom sought out Will, and Boyton, and Blake, then he put the matter before them eagerly.

The American shrugged his shoulders.

"Before you plan out what luggage you're going to take, it may be as well to have some idea how you're going to get away at all," he commented.

Boyton nodded.

"I think so, too," he said.

Will would not speak, lest his chum should deem himself too much sat upon.

"My plan," said Tom, "is to make a temporary bridge over the vortex. A tree would do that. Then we could cross, taking with us some planks. We could follow the path of which we have been told, and cross the gap in it by means of the planks. When we arrive at the entry we must find a way of getting over the rocky heights, and so arrive at our destination—the Nancy. After that all should be easy."

"Quite so—after that," commented the American drily.

"For goodness' sake, don't make obstacles!" exclaimed Tom.

"I should like to see this hill of gold," said Boyton sceptically. "Probably it's a mass of pyrites. In Australia they call the stuff 'New chum gold,' and other uncomplimentary things."

"Very well, we'll have a look at it to-morrow," returned Tom. "I dare say Boreus will accompany us if we ask him. We might have a pleasant day devoted to exploring. Ah, there is our friend!"

He greeted the officer cordially, and made the invitation.

Boreus received it in stony silence, and without a change of feature.

"Look you here," his voice rang out haughtily when Tom had spoken, "I have no wish to share your pleasures, or your business, or to hold further speech with you. I placed in your hands the chance of making this land fit to be lived in. To do this I made an enemy of the king and of my own father-in-law. I offended Menathon, and slew the populace. You have thrown away the chance, and called into existence a Government of irreconcilables. Not a life will be safe. It is more than likely that your own life will pay forfeit. If so, I shall not be sorry. I have spoken."

And, with this, Boreus haughtily strode away from the chamber.

"The pig!" said Will.

Tom said never a word. Brave, adventurous, a master of men though he was, in that moment he felt like breaking down and shedding tears. The greatest warriors and rulers have had such moments.

"Never mind," said Boyton foolishly.

The American turned away. It was no good his speaking, but he felt in his heart that Boreus was right. Tom had been wrong. Tom had, as it were, kept the intended abdication a secret. Well, it was too late now.

"Oh, it'll come right soon enough!" he broke out. "As to this hill, now, I'd like to see it. We'll make a jaunt of it after we've had some sleep."

And that was how, on what they called the following day, the companions found themselves gazing at what they had never imagined to be naturally possible.

Imagine an irregularly conical eminence, some three hundred feet high, and as many in diameter at the base; a hill covered with some inferior kind of soil to the depth of about a foot, and with a wedge hacked out of it, as a blunt knife might hack one from a cake; and the cut surface of

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the hill to be deeply yellow and metallic, and at the bottom, where the cake-crumbs would fall on the plate, some other crumbs, weighing several hundredweight each, and all this metal pure gold—that is what the companions saw.

The American seized a small fragment—it was larger than a coconut—and cut it with a pocket-knife.

"Great Cæsar!" he said huskily. "This hill has more gold than there is in all the banks of the world! If we could but get it to the surface!"

"The result would be that you would make gold more common than copper, and would reduce the gold owners to poverty," said Tom. "Thank you, no! We will take a little, and be content with it!"

"The boy is right," said Boyton.

"And now we'll have a look at the temple," said Will.

They halted at the building on the return journey. No priestly guard now strode to and fro before it. No solemn ministers of the false deities offered incense upon the altars; but the gods stood neglected.

As they pushed the portal wide the companions literally gasped with amazement.

The temple was as large as the largest church in their own dear land. Its walls, its pavement, its altars, the pedestals of its statues, were covered with emeralds, sapphires, rubies, and other stones of the kind we call "precious." But here they were used only because of their beauty. Possibly it will convey some real notion of the estimate accorded them if we mention that at the time of Kairon's instituting the new order of things a workman had been engaged in paving a small extension from the temple, and that he had left by the door a sack, equal to one holding a hundredweight of coal, filled to overflowing with sapphires.

"It is a case of help yourself, and fill your pockets," said Tom, with shaking voice.

Heavens! The dread tragedies that had come from a few pounds' weight of rubies, and they could be had almost, or literally, by the ton!

Without further words he filled his pocket from the sack of sapphires, then looked about him, and, with a tool left by the workman prised out ruby after ruby from its setting in the wall, growing in excitement as he went on, until fully a hundred stones lay on the pavement, each as large as a hen's egg.

"It seems impossible," commented Boyton.

"It's the most natural of things," returned Blake. "Can't you understand what this place is? Did you ever see a hole in the middle of a loaf of bread? Sometimes that is caused by steam, and sometimes by gas. This is a similar hole—in other words, it is a huge bubble—a volcanic bubble—and the gems have been crystallising out in past ages from the molten rock."

Tom looked at the speaker steadily.

"Then," he said, "the steam or the gas must have found a vent."

Tom nodded.

"Just so. I mean there must be some outlet higher up the country."

"I don't see it," Blake commented. "It seems to me that the earth was rent open where we came down. However, one of those fellows—Boreus, or Menathon, or Patho—said something once about legends as to such openings. You can never tell what truth may be at the bottom of such stories. We'll have a look into the matter, if you like. Just now I'm for getting back to the palace. My clothes are beginning to feel pretty heavy."

Tramp—tramp—tramp! Over the brilliant pavement of the great temple there moved a body of armed men. At their head, drawn sword in hand, was Boreus. They numbered twelve, and as they approached the group they spread out, enclosing them in a nearly completed circle.

"By authority of the high priest, Kairon!" rang out the voice of Boreus. "In the name of Pontius, the king, I seize your bodies, to convey them to the prison of the State, there to await trial for holding unlawful intercourse with the powers of darkness!"

He stepped back; the soldiers formed up. The companions were separated from one another, and Boreus led the way from the temple, paying no greater heed to their protests than had they been the cries and chatterings of frightened captured birds.

"So," said Tra, when they were again in the prison—"so you have come back! Well, there are less safe places than the home of Tra, and perhaps less grateful men than Tra!"

The conclusion of this splendid serial story will appear in next Monday's "Magnet." Order your copy in advance.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

MY READERS' PAGE

OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1d., Every Monday. "THE GEM" LIBRARY, 1d., Every Wednesday. "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d., COMPLETE LIBRARY. "THE PENNY POPULAR," 1d., Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Price 1d., Every Saturday.

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

For Next Monday:

"SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE!"

By Frank Richards.

Quite up to the usual high standard is next Monday's magnificent story of famous Greyfriars School. Snath, the ex-Shell fellow, who was expelled in disgrace some months before, makes a dramatic reappearance in the neighbourhood, and appeals to Vernon-Smith in his hour of need. Many exciting incidents follow, and the Bounder brings black suspicion upon himself by

"SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE!"

though he eventually comes out with flying colours. A very powerful story is next Monday's, and it will rank among Frank Richards' best.

A PERSONAL APPEAL TO ALL MY CHUMS.

The "Greyfriars Herald," our halfpenny companion paper, is as good as ever. Twenty pages packed with the finest features, heaps of tuck-hampers given away regularly, and yet our circulation is slipping away!

This is not the statement of a pessimist or panic-monger. It is a confirmed fact. Many of my readers have been bemoaning the delay in bringing out "Tom Merry's Weekly" as a kindred paper. Let me tell them at once, straight from the shoulder and without mincing my words, that the "Herald" must undergo a considerable revival in circulation before the St. Jim's journal can be placed on the market.

A TIMELY WARNING.

I hate raking up old and distasteful memories, but sometimes it is necessary. You all know what happened to the "Dreadnought." It died through lack of support. It was the only big failure I have experienced in the handling of dozens of papers. See to it, my chums, that the "Greyfriars Herald" does not share the same sorry fate. A further depreciation in its sale, and I shall have no alternative but to close it down, which would be an everlasting pity, since no such value for a halfpenny has ever been offered to British boys and girls before.

HOW YOU CAN HELP.

This week I am making a deep and earnest appeal to my reader-friends to rally round and save Harry Wharton's paper from the ruin with which it is threatened. The best form of helping is by recommendation. Tell all your chums of the many fine features in the "Greyfriars Herald"; and, what is more, insist upon their purchasing a copy for themselves. You have given freely of your loyal support in the past, and I feel sure you will not fail me now, in this vital hour, when the fate of the "Greyfriars Herald" sways in the balance. Rally round, readers all, and lift our little companion paper to the highest pinnacle of success!

TUCK-HAMPER TRIBUTES!

The following letters have reached me recently in acknowledgment of "Greyfriars Herald" tuck-hampers. As there have been constant suggestions on the part of anti-Magnetites that letters in My Readers' Page are "faked," the originals of the letters I am about to print may be seen at this office by any doubting Thomases.

"367, Thorold Road,

"Ilford, Essex.

"Dear Mr. Editor,—Many thanks for your letter informing me that I had won a prize in the 'Greyfriars Herald.'

I can assure you that it was a welcome surprise, and the arrival of the tuck-hamper was eagerly looked forward to. When it came at length there was great rejoicing. I have two sisters, so there were plenty of willing hands to help unpack it. We were all greatly pleased at the splendid stock of good things that it contained, and we all thank you most heartily for supplying us with such a variety of wholesome tuck. We have sampled several of the good things, and have found them excellent.

"I shall not enter the competition again, as I do not consider it would be fair to the other readers; but I shall have great pleasure in advertising your papers, especially the 'Greyfriars Herald,' to all my friends. I am a regular reader of the 'Magnet,' 'Gem,' etc.; and so are my sisters, who always make a dive for my pocket on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. We all unite in wishing your papers every success.—Yours sincerely,

R. GANSDEN."

(It is very sportsmanlike of you to suggest not competing in future. Nevertheless, no prizewinner is debarred from re-entering our picture-puzzle contests, and the fact that he has already proved successful will not be taken into consideration.—Ed.)

"50, Rochester Avenue, Rochester.

"Dear Sir,—Please accept my very best thanks for the splendid tuck-hamper received. It arrived in good condition, and I am delighted with the contents.

"With best wishes for the success of the 'Greyfriars Herald,' I am, yours obediently,

"H. T. STEPHENSON."

"23, Shaw Street, Westgate,

"Burnley, Lancs.

"My dear Mr. Editor,—I thank you very much for the tuck-hamper, which I duly received on New Year's Day. My parents and friends are delighted with the grand prize, and I shall do my best to recommend the 'Greyfriars Herald' to all my chums.

"Wishing you every success, yours truly,

"FRED GODDARD."

"67, Mansel Street, Swansea.

"Dear Editor,—Many thanks for the hamper, which I received safely. I am greatly delighted with the contents. Please accept my sincere thanks, and best wishes for the paper.—Yours,

J. P. BLAIN."

"34, Darby Street, Blackheath,

"Near Birmingham.

"Dear Editor,—I duly received the tuck-hamper, and am delighted with same. I have shown the good things to my chums, who express a desire to win one of the hampers for themselves.

"I am a regular reader of the companion papers, the stories in which are the best ever published.

"Wishing your papers every success, I remain, yours sincerely,

JACK MILLS."

"25, Grove Road,

"North Finchley, N.

"Dear Sir,—Just a line to thank you for the hamper of tuck which I received per Messrs. Selfridge & Co. I really must say that it is a most excellent prize to receive indeed.

(Continued on page 14 of Cover.)



G. CARMICHAEL,
Leith.



ALFRED R. HAYES,
Maryland Point, London.



WILFRED TULLY,
Maryport.



JOHN HAYDON,
Tottenham, London.



JAMES PICKARD,
Fallsforth, Lancs.



MISS FLORRIE E. PRICE,
Swansea.



CECIL RICHEY,
Killymount, Ireland.



CLIFFORD DIXON,
Pendleton, Manchester.



"K. B.,"
Hove, Sussex.



"F. B.,"
Hove, Sussex.



"GIRL CHUM."



MISS DOROTHY DEAN JAY,
Colchester.



MISS WINIFRED DRURY,
Birmingham.



PAUL COURTNEY,
A Boy Actor.



MICHELE GERBOLA,
An Italian Acrobat.



ARTHUR BUCKLEY,
Coventry.



A. WILLAN-SMALL,
Clapham, London.



"LENZIE,"
Glasgow.

TUCK-HAMPER TRIBUTES—continued.

"I can honestly say that the 'Greyfriars Herald' is the best halfpennyworth I have ever seen. One could not wish for better, when it contains stories of the most jovial sort, and a competition which is always attractive, and which enables everyone to have a fair chance of winning one of the splendid hampers. My friends were greatly astonished when they heard what beautiful delicacies it contained.

"You can take it from me, sir, that I will do all I can to push the paper on to success.

"With best wishes for 1916, I remain, yours faithfully,
"F. C. HAZELL."

"96, Lord Street,
"Redcar, Yorks.

"Dear Editor,—I received your hamper this morning, and words cannot say what I think of it. Some of the contents will be sent to my brother at the Front, as he will be more pleased to get them even than me. You need not worry about my recommending the 'Herald' to all my chums, as I think it is one of the best things I could do in return for my splendid prize.

"I will now close, thanking you once again for the magnificent hamper.—Yours truly,
E. BRADWELL."

"Stoneyford Road,
"Sutton-in-Ashfield.

"Dear Editor,—Received your excellent tuck-hamper to-day in first-class condition. Kindly accept my most sincere thanks for same."

"Wishing the 'Greyfriars Herald' and companion papers every success, yours faithfully,
A. E. TYLER."

The great moral to be derived from these letters is obvious, and is contained in two words—"Compete To-day!"

COMPETITION RESULT COMING.

The full result of our popular "Magnet" Story Competition will appear in these pages next Monday. Order your copy in advance.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

B. C. (Bridgetown, West Australia).—It was impossible to keep the competition open long enough for Australian readers. Will see what can be done for our Colonial supporters in the future.

"Wally."—You are evidently an observant sort of chap. It is quite true that many people can only wink one eye. Afraid a story with Skinner as the hero would not be very popular; but your idea is quite a good one, nevertheless.

D. O. (St. Kilda, Melbourne).—W. G. B. is no longer in No. 1 Study, but he has Peter Todd to look after him, and no one could be more conscientious than Peter. Afraid Bunter never will be quite a nice boy, you know.

R. McC. (Port Glasgow).—I think most of my readers would prefer one long story in a threepenny book to a number of short ones. Thanks for the suggestion, all the same.

"Two Australian Girl Chums."—Very pleased to hear from you. Coker minor is 14. Johnny Bull has no brother at Greyfriars.

A. B. C. D. (Melbourne).—The "Greyfriars Herald" is now on sale as a separate paper, and doubtless you have seen it before now.

"Johnny R."—Greyfriars v. Highcliffe is sure to come along again some time in the future.

F. A. F. (Chorlton-cum-Hardy).—No, I do not edit the papers you mention. Sorry you were disappointed about the tuck-hamper.

J. M. (Manchester).—The Bounder is a trifle over 15.

F. F. (Kidderminster).—Tom Meery and Bob Cherry are as nearly equal in the boxing line as any two fellows well could be. Mark Linley works very hard, and is just a little ahead of Harry Wharton as a scholar.

"Advance, Australia!"—There is not much to choose between Cherry and Wharton as all-round athletes, and Peter Todd is also very good. The "Greyfriars Herald" is out now, and we hope it won't die through lack of support.

G. P. (Carnegie, Victoria).—Sorry; Correspondence Exchange closed. Thanks for your good wishes. The "Antis" don't worry us a bit.

"An Australian."—Will consider your suggestion for an Australian serial.

W. McC. (Glasgow).—Very glad to hear of your chum's loyal wish for the companion papers. Perhaps Wharton's successful effort to conquer a hasty temper may account for the trait you note.

"An Office-boy Magnetite."—The characters are imaginary. Very glad to hear you like the "Greyfriars Herald" so much.

L. B. (Sheffield).—"School and Sport" seems to have pleased everybody. I am not surprised that you are enthusiastic about it.

"A Loyal Reader (Southend).—You, too! Mr. Richards will have difficulty in getting his hat on if this sort of thing goes on.

H. H. (Chester) writes to say that he is in a very indignant state of mind. I am sorry to hear it. But I really think H. H. has let his indignation run away with his judgment. Does he really think that I ought to let "one of our best dailies" slander my papers and refrain from hitting back? Politics are really quite outside the question. As Editor of the companion papers I have no politics whatever. I should have objected to the slanders every bit as much had they appeared in a paper of my own side in politics. I do not say, and do not intend to say, which that side is. I therefore decline to take the tip of H. H. and keep my politics to myself, simply because the tip is quite unnecessary. I have always kept my politics to myself. "Yours in contempt," H. H. ends up, quoting Grundy. Well, I have always considered the great George Alfred one of Mr. Richards' funniest characters, but really I don't think he is quite as funny as H. H.

H. D.—No, I really don't think it would be better to let Vernon-Smith go back to his old ways. I am sure most readers prefer him as the decent fellow he now is. Skinner, Snoop, Fish, Bunter, and the rest of the black sheep are quite enough to be going on with for the present.

A. G. (Lurgan).—The character you mention is quite imaginary, so that it would be useless for you to write to him.

D. J. (Walthamstow).—The Christmas Number of the "Magnet" is what you want for information about Greyfriars.

"A Hillside Rover."—Yes, you are sure to hear more of Phyllis Howell in the near future. Very glad to hear you enjoyed "School and Sport" so much.

"A Tiger."—"Through Thick and Thin" is quite out of print, and I really do not know where you could get a copy of it.

"True Blue."—You carried the thing just a trifle too far, I think. I am always glad to hear of keen supporters of my papers; but it is a mistake to let yourself get so enthralled that you lose all interest in other things. A good deal depends upon the way you call a fellow an ass. Yours does not seem to have been quite the right way.

"Three Girl Chums" (St. Helens).—You want another story of Hurree Singh and his enemies? Wait and see.

W. P. (Bedford).—Why should you suppose that because your letter was your first to me it would go into the W.P.B.? Photo will be used. Thanks for it! Readers may send in contributions to the "G.H." There is no Correspondence Exchange at present. Bob Cherry is as good a wrestler as any among the juniors of Greyfriars.

H. L. (Levenshulme).—No need to buy all the fresh papers that are coming out. In fact, no need to buy the "Herald" if the price is too high. We cannot very well make it lower, can we? Farthings are scarce. Sorry your parcel of back numbers failed to reach Private Alker; but the "Magnet" goes to press some weeks in advance, and he seems to have been lucky in getting well quickly.

D. B. (Newburgh).—The places you name are imaginary, so that to give their precise distance from town is scarcely feasible.

M. S. (Commercial Road).—Of course I don't think it rude of you to write! Very pleased to hear from you.

L. N. (Tottenham) had "The Remove Eleven on Tour" lent him, and it made of him an ardent Magnetite. Not at all surprised.

"A Boy Chum" (Tooting) expresses the highest approval of "Hazeldene's Honour," and the utmost contempt for the cads who sneer at the companion papers.

Phil Brown.—A very good letter for a nine-year-old! Ponsonby is sure to get the worst of it when he encounters Wharton. Pluck and fitness always tells.

W. L. K. (Halifax).—Yes, you can always reckon safely on fair play for all in our competitions.

A McK. (Glasgow).—The "Herald" will never need the Old Age Pension, because that's for needier cases—see?

P. A. (Upper Norwood).—"The Pride of the Ring" is a story which no British boy should miss. Take care none of your chums miss it, P. A. Drawing quite funny.

E. J. P.—Thanks for good wishes. Shall be pleased to see you here when you can come.

Your Editor