

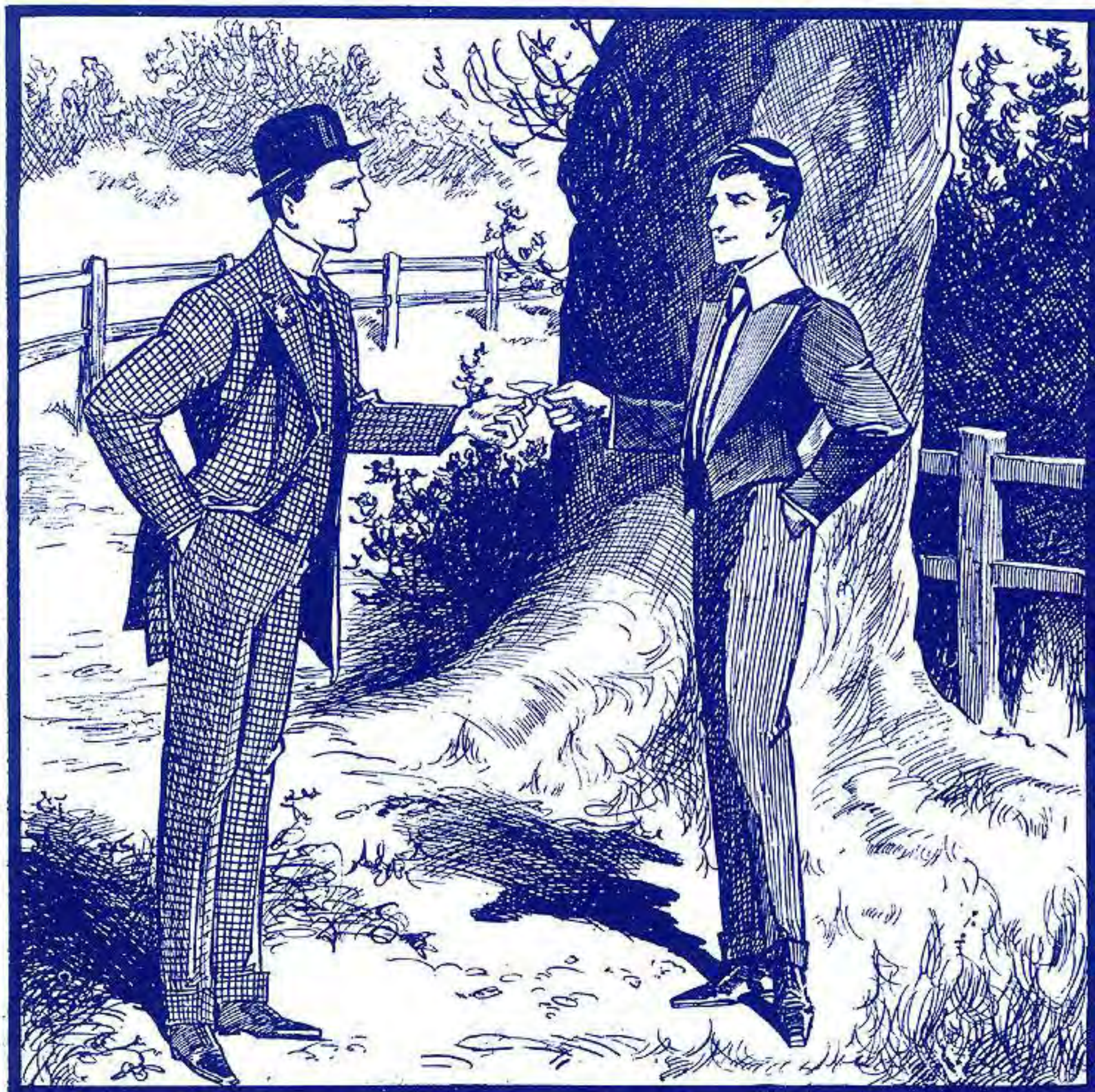
SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE

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



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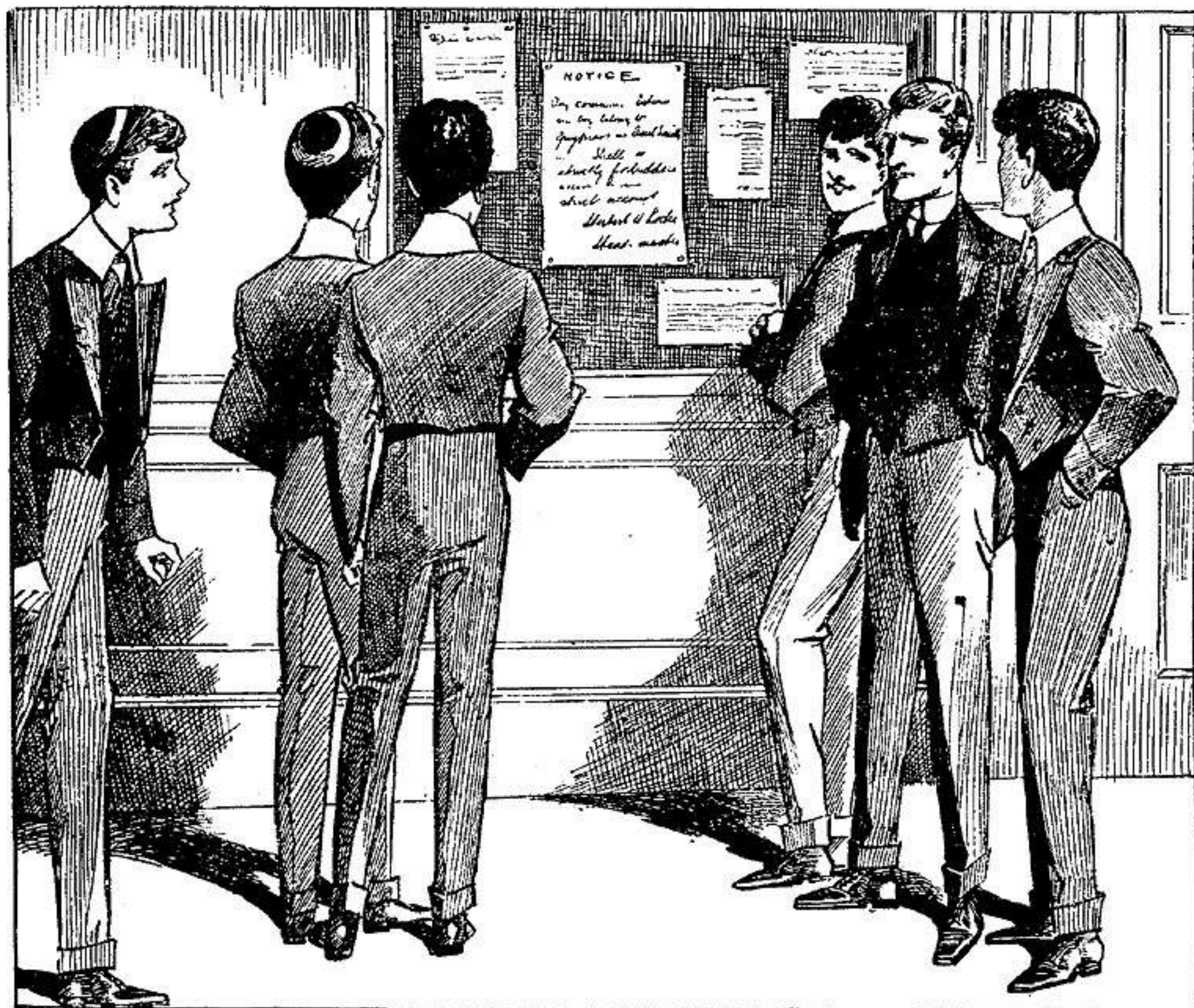


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SHIELDING A SCAPEGRACE!

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By FRANK RICHARDS.



The Bounder started, and came up to the board. He read the Headmaster's notice, with a sneering lip. "When a chap's down everybody's down on him, of course," he said. (See Chapter 7.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER Trouble Ahead!

"WHARTON!"

Harry Wharton, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, started a little, and looked round quickly.

Mr. Quelch was standing at his study door.

He had called to the junior in sharp tones, and there was a dark, grim frown upon his brow.

His tone and his look indicated that the master of the Remove was decidedly angry. And Harry Wharton—not having any special sin upon his conscience at that particular moment—wondered what was the row.

Indeed, his conscience was unusually spotless, for he had been devoting all his time of late to football and football matters, and had had no time for indulging in the merry japes with which the Greyfriars juniors sometimes improved the shining hour.

"Wharton!"

Harry Wharton hurried down the passage towards the Form-master's door.

"Yes, sir."

"Is Vernon-Smith within doors, do you know?"

Wharton felt relieved. Evidently something was very wrong; but he, at all events, was not the culprit. He wondered what Smithy had been doing.

"I think so, sir—in his study, I believe."

"He has not gone out?"

"I think not, sir."

"Very good! Kindly find him as soon as possible, and tell him to come to my study at once!"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Thank you, Wharton!"

Mr. Quelch said "Thank you, Wharton!" in the same tone in which he might have said, "Hold out your hand!" He was clearly very much irritated. He stepped back into his study, and closed the door with a snap. Through the closed door Wharton heard him utter a sound that could only be described as a snort.

"My hat!" murmured Wharton. "There's trouble ahead for Smithy! Lucky I can give him the tip!"

The captain of the Remove hurried upstairs to the Remove quarters. On the landing he was caught by Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent.

"Halt!" said Bob. "Have you forgotten the 'Greyfriars Herald,' you slacking editor? Smithy's got his sporting notes all ready, and you haven't done your thrilling, hair-raising yarn yet!"

"I'm looking for Smithy now."

"Never mind Smithy! Come and get on with your bit for the 'Herald!'" said Bob, dragging his chum by the shoulder into No. 1 Study. "On a paper like the 'Greyfriars Herald,' editors are not allowed to slack!"

"Chuck it, Bob! Quelch's sent me for Smithy, and he's in a wax!"

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Smithy in a row?" he asked.

"Looks like it! Quelch was as ratty as a Hun!"

"My hat! The duffer can't have been at the old game!" said Nugent.

"I'm sure not," said Harry hastily. "It can't be that. But he's booked for a row. I know the gleam in Quelch's eye."

Wharton hurried down the Remove passage to Vernon-Smith's door. He knocked, and opened the door.

Vernon-Smith of the Remove, who was known at Greyfriars as the "Boulder," was seated at the study-table. He had a pen in his hand, and was making notes upon a sheet of impot-paper. Vernon-Smith was "sporting editor" of the school-paper, and he performed the duties remarkably well. Smithy was no longer the "Boulder" of former times. There was no scent of cigarettes in the study, no tell-tale brown stain on his fingers. It was an honest and healthy face that he turned to Wharton with a smile as the captain of the Remove came in.

"Come for the copy?" he asked. "It's ready. My copy's always ready to time, Wharton."

"It isn't that," said Harry. "Quelch's sent me for you."

The Boulder raised his eyebrows.

"Quelch! Anything the matter?"

"It looks like it," said Harry gravely. "I want to give you the tip what to expect. I've never seen Quelch look so savage—except once—the day Snaith of the Shell was expelled. He was in a rare bat when it came out about Snaith stealing, and trying to put it on that chap Sydney. Now he's got the same gleam in his eye, so you know what to expect."

Vernon-Smith rose to his feet, his manner very quiet.

"And you don't know why?" he asked.

Wharton shook his head.

"I haven't the faintest idea. Have you——" He paused.

The Boulder's lip curled ironically.

"Have I been playing the giddy ox, you mean?" he said. "Have I been going on the giddy razzle, and been bowled out? No!"

Wharton coloured.

"I didn't really mean to ask that," he said. "I know

you're straight, Smithy. But something has happened to put Quelch into an awful wax. Don't you know what it is yourself?"

"Not in the least. I can't even guess," said Vernon-Smith.

"It's jolly odd! Quelch seemed to think that you might be gone out. Had you any idea of going anywhere special this afternoon?"

"No—except down to the footer ground for a bit of practice before tea."

"Then it's a giddy puzzle! Might be some mistake; but Quelch is ready to bite your head off, so be on your guard!"

The Boulder laughed.

"I'm not nervous," he said. "I've done nothing that I know of. And if my old beautiful reputation has risen up against me, I don't see that I've got anything to be afraid of. Quelch can't bring up the past against me!"

"He wouldn't, either. It isn't that."

The Boulder shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I'll soon see what it is. Thanks for giving me the tip!"

Vernon-Smith left the study, and Wharton followed him slowly.

The captain of the Remove felt worried.

There had been a time when the Boulder had been his bitter enemy, and at that time it could not be denied that Vernon-Smith had stooped to many a rascally trick, and had deserved a dozen times over to be expelled from the school.

Indeed, how the Boulder had escaped was a mystery to most fellows, who put it down to his phenomenal good luck.

But that time was past. True, Smithy had had his relapses, and they had brought him into danger. The leopard could change his spots, but not in a day. But Wharton had complete faith in him now. And though they were not chums, he had grown of late to feel a very real friendship for his one-time foe.

That Mr. Quelch could have been disturbed over a trifle was impossible. Something very serious had occurred, whether the Boulder was to blame or not. Harry Wharton felt a deep, inward uneasiness as he watched the Boulder tap at the Form-master's door.

The change in his habits had not changed the nature of the Boulder. He had still the same cool, reckless hardihood of old times. Many of the juniors would as soon have faced a lion in his wrath as "Quelch in a wax." But the Boulder was perfectly cool, and he entered the Form-master's study without a tremor. Whatever might be in store for him, the Boulder of Greyfriars was not likely to lack nerve to face the music.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Voice From the Depths!

"YOU sent for me, sir?"

Vernon-Smith's tone was respectful, but it was quite calm. His manner implied that the wrath of his Form-master had no terrors for him. Mr. Quelch realised that quite clearly, and an irritated gesture escaped him.

He fixed his eyes sternly upon the composed face of the Boulder.

"Yes, Vernon-Smith, I sent for you. I have a very serious matter to speak to you about."

"Yes, sir?" said the junior, in a tone of polite inquiry.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

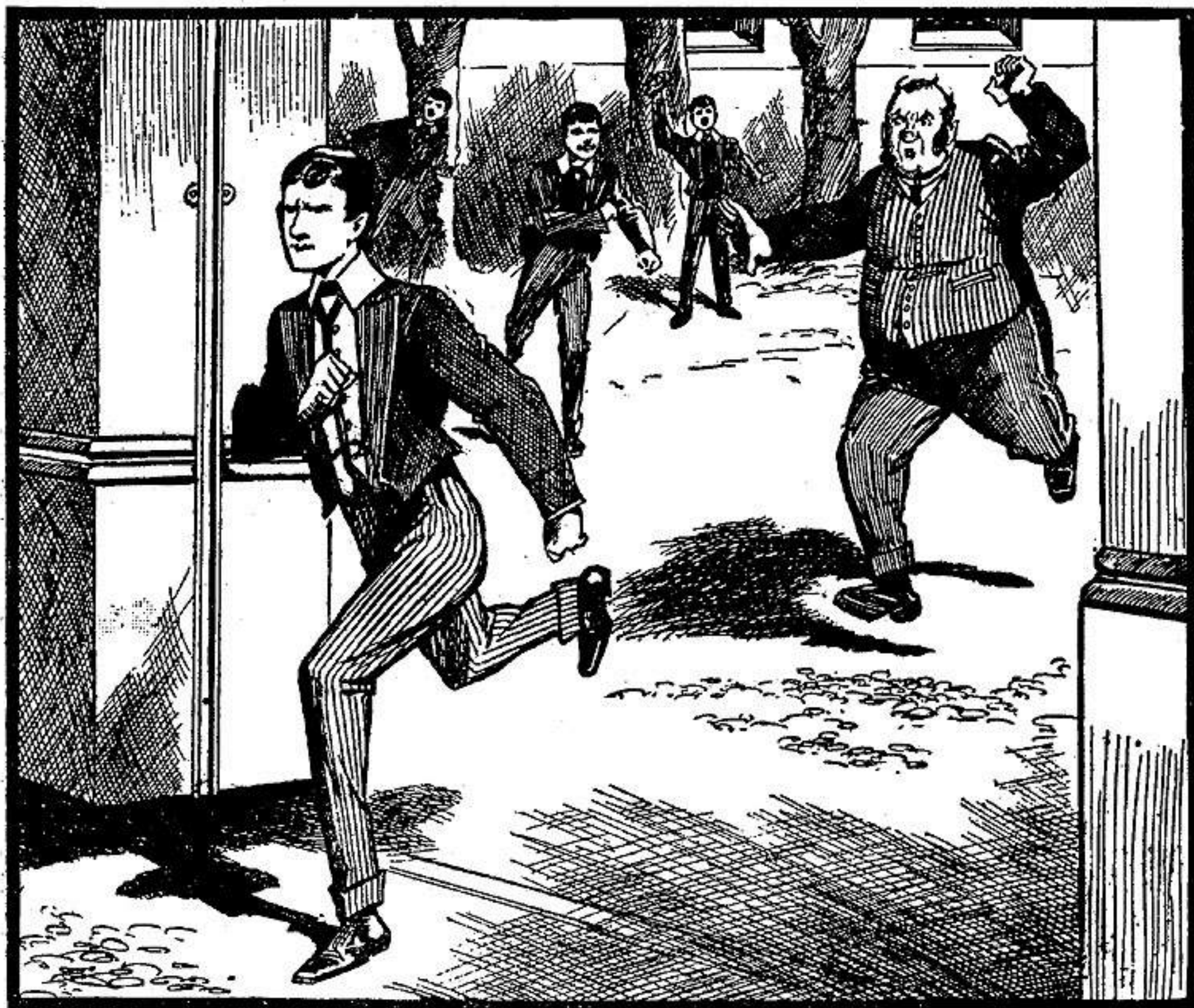
"Some time ago, Vernon-Smith, a boy in the Shell Form was expelled from this school for an act of dishonesty."

"I remember, sir—you mean Cecil Snaith," said Vernon-Smith, in astonishment.

"Yes, I mean Snaith." Mr. Quelch's eyes searched the junior's face, but all he could read there was surprise. "You are surprised to hear me mention that name, Smith?"

"Yes, sir, a little. Snaith has nothing to do with me, I suppose?"

"I trust not, Vernon-Smith—I trust not. That, how-



Vernon-Smith swung on to the gates. He was the reckless Bounder of old again now—hardy, and reckless of consequences. Gosling broke into a run, and came wheezing after him. "Stop! I'll report yer! Stop, I says!"
(See Chapter 3.)

ever, is what it is my duty to ascertain. When Snaith was here, were you very friendly with him?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure of that, Smith?"

"Of course, sir. Snaith was in the Shell, and I'm in the Lower Fourth. You must be aware that Lower Fourth boys don't, as a rule, chum with Shell fellows."

There was a tone in Vernon-Smith's voice; as he gave Mr. Quelch that information, which seemed to the Form-master to savour of impertinence. The Remove-master compressed his lips more tightly.

"I know that that is the case, Smith. But there might be exceptional circumstances. It came out, at the time Snaith was expelled, that he was a boy of bad character—that he indulged in smoking, betting, and breaking bounds to visit shady acquaintances connected with the Turf—rascalities which he had very carefully concealed until the discovery came. It was through these rascally practices that he came to commit an act of dishonesty which led to his ruin."

The Bounder's lip curled.

"And you suppose that I must have chummed with him, sir, because he was a thorough rascal?" he asked.

"I—I do not say that, Smith." Mr. Quelch was a little taken aback. "But I cannot forget that at one time you were guilty of grave derelictions of duty, and that you narrowly escaped the fate which overtook Snaith."

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"I supposed that that was all dead and gone, sir," said the Bounder quietly. "When I made my confession to Dr. Locke, I was given to understand that I was pardoned, the pardon depending on my future conduct. As I have not kicked over the traces since then, I don't see why my past should be brought up against me."

"That is not my object, Smith. I simply desire to ascertain the facts. At the time before your confession to the Head, were you very friendly with Snaith?"

"No, sir. I just knew him, that was all."

"Did you enter into any of his proceedings? I am asking you merely for information now, and have no intention of making any use of anything you tell me. Your pardon from the Head covers everything that happened before it."

"Very well, sir. I may have been out with Snaith two or three times—not more. At that time we had similar tastes. Mine changed—Snaith's didn't. But even at that time we never liked each other. He wasn't my sort. He was vicious enough—more than I was, in fact—but he never had any pluck. He would lie and cringe to get out of a scrape. I never did that."

"Your hardihood has been remarked on more than once, Vernon-Smith," said the Remove-master drily. "It is no great credit to you. However, let that pass. After your reform you ceased to have anything to do with Snaith?"

"Yes, completely. I never spoke a word to him last term that I remember."

"You do not correspond with him now?"

The Bounder started.

"Correspond with Snaith?"

"That is what I said."

"No; certainly not. I hardly knew him when he was here, and I haven't the faintest idea where he is now."

"You knew he went home, I presume?"

"I suppose so; but I never knew where he lived."

There was a short silence. The Bounder was more and more surprised. What this strange questioning was leading to he could not guess.

"I hope you are telling me the exact truth, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch at last. "If I cannot take your word as I would take Wharton's or Cherry's or Linley's, you have only your past reputation to thank."

Vernon-Smith bit his lip.

"I suppose I cannot expect to be trusted," he said bitterly. "I've done my best, but I suppose there will always be something against me."

"Not at all, Smith, not at all. But if you hardly knew Snaith, as you say—if you have not corresponded with him, as you tell me—why is it he has written to you at Greyfriars?"

"Written to me?"

"Yes."

Vernon-Smith smiled.

"I can easily answer that question, sir. He has not written to me."

"Not to your knowledge, you mean?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir; and I suppose he couldn't write to me without my knowledge."

"You are mistaken. You must be aware that a general supervision is exercised over all correspondence at this school. As a rule, that correspondence is not interfered with. But in any case of doubt or suspicion it becomes my duty, as your Form-master, to examine letters sent to boys in my Form."

"I know that, sir," said the Bounder, with a smile. "We shouldn't expect you to let us get touting letters from moneylenders or racing sharpers."

"Precisely. Therefore, when I found a letter addressed to you in the handwriting of a boy expelled from this school for dishonesty, it became my duty to open it."

"Quite so, sir; I understand that. Do you mean that Snaith wrote to me?"

"That is what I mean. I have the letter here."

Vernon-Smith suppressed a whistle.

"You did not expect a letter from him, Vernon-Smith?"

"No, sir."

"You have held no communication with him since he left?"

"None, sir."

"Then you must explain this letter."

Mr. Quelch fumbled in a drawer and drew out a letter, which he passed to the junior across the table. Vernon-Smith took it calmly, and read it through without moving a muscle. But as he read it he realised that it was more than enough to throw his Form-master into a "rare bate." It ran:

"Dear Smithy,—Will you lend a hand, old chap, for the sake of old times? I'm in an awful scrape, and I don't know what to do. Every chap I knew at Greyfriars has turned his back on me, and I don't know where to turn. I'm getting desperate. Will you meet me at the old place on Wednesday afternoon, and have a jaw, anyway?"

CRCIL SNAITH.

"Well?" Mr. Quelch's voice was like iron. "How do you explain that, Vernon-Smith?"

The Bounder laid the letter quietly on the table.

"I don't explain it, sir," he said. "I don't see how you can blame me for a letter I never even received."

"You mean that Snaith has no claim on you?"

"None at all."

"He wrote this letter, then, without the slightest encouragement on your part?"

"I have already said so, sir."

"If you had received this letter, Vernon-Smith, what would you have done?"

The Bounder paused. It was a full minute before he replied.

"I don't know, sir. I can't help feeling sorry for the poor brute. He never had pluck enough to face the music, and he seems quite knocked out by what's happened to him. At the same time, I think it's like his check to write to me. He has no claim upon me whatever—we weren't ever friends."

"In that case, his appeal is probably based upon his belief that you were a person of a similar nature to himself."

"Perhaps," said the Bounder coolly. "He never believed I had chucked that foolery, I know that. He probably thinks I'm keeping up the same old game in secret—I shouldn't wonder. He wouldn't understand."

"Where is the 'old place' he alludes to in his letter?"

"I suppose he refers to the Cross Keys—a public-house," said the Bounder, flushing a little. "You know I've been there, sir—I confessed it to the Head."

"That is past and forgiven, Smith—if it is truly past."

"I can only give you my word, sir."

There was another long pause.

"I will take your word, Vernon-Smith," said the Remove-master at last, and his brow cleared as he spoke. "I will not deny that this letter made a very bad impression upon me. It appeared to me that you had been deceiving the Head and myself, and that this communication from Snaith, intercepted by chance, had exposed the cheat. You have explained very frankly, and I will believe you. To be quite explicit, I will give you the benefit of the doubt."

The Bounder bit his lip.

"It is all you can expect, as you must see for yourself. But you must understand this—any communication between that wretched boy Snaith and any boy at this school is strictly forbidden. Contact with him would be contamination to any self-respecting boy. He is a thief; and, worse than that, he made an iniquitous attempt to place his own guilt upon innocent shoulders. He may seek to communicate with you again by a safer channel. If you should receive any letter from him, Smith, you must not answer it. I ask you to promise me."

"I can promise that, sir."

"If he should seek to see you, you are forbidden to speak to him. This letter implies that he is in the neighbourhood of the school. I shall write to his father and complain of his conduct, and I trust that he will be speedily removed. Meanwhile, any dealings with him are strictly forbidden. That is all, Vernon-Smith. You may go."

Vernon-Smith left the study without a word. His manner was calm and quiet, but his eyes were gleaming, his brow was knitted, and there was black anger and resentment in his breast.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Bounder's Defiance I

"SMITHY!"
Harry Wharton was waiting for the Bounder at the end of the passage. He was anxious. His face clouded still more as the Bounder came by with brows knitted and gleaming eyes.

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Vernon-Smith did not see him; he was deeply immersed in his own gloomy and bitter thoughts. But he stopped as Wharton spoke.

"Is it anything very serious?" asked Harry anxiously. The Bounder's lip curled.

"I've been called over the coals, for nothing," he said. "I've been told that I'm to have the benefit of the doubt, because Quelch can't prove that I'm telling lies. Pleasant, isn't it, and encouraging to a fellow who's trying to play the game? I thought I might be trusted a little; it was quite a mistake. I'm a fellow to be watched and suspected and questioned, forbidden this and forbidden that, and only given the benefit of the doubt when a thing can't be proved up to the hilt against me. It's very encouraging!"

The Bounder's look and tone were bitter and resentful.

"But what has happened?" asked Harry. He paused, and coloured a little. "We're not exactly pals, Smithy, but if there's anything I can do——"

"You can't do anything, unless you talk to Quelch and convince him that I'm not a liar," said the Bounder. "I don't mind telling you about it. I'd tell all the Remove, for that matter. You remember Snaith, who was kicked out for getting into debt and stealing?"

"Snaith! Yes."

"He's written to me, and Quelch has intercepted the letter. I hardly knew the fellow, but he seems to have got himself into some fresh scrape, and he's written to me to ask for help. It's like his confounded cheek. He's asked me to meet him at the Cross Keys, and Quelch's got the letter. So he concluded, of course, that I've been humbugging, and that he's bowled me out. I've only half satisfied him; he doesn't know whether I've lied to him or not. I'm given the benefit of the doubt—for the present," said the Bounder bitterly. "He can't take my word. My word isn't good enough!"

Wharton opened his lips, but closed them again.

It was useless to tell the Bounder that he could expect no more than that. His old reputation was not so easily forgotten.

"You agree with him, I suppose?" said the Bounder, his brow growing blacker as he read Wharton's face.

The captain of the Remove shook his head.

"I don't, Smithy. I know you're square. But Quelch doesn't know you as we do, and that letter from Snaith is a bit of a staggerer. Why the dickens should the fellow pick you out to write to?"

"Because he thinks I'm still playing the old game, of course. He's in a bad way, and seems desperate, and he knows I've plenty of money, too. He would be hardly likely to write to any fellow he didn't think a black-guard."

"You won't answer him?"

"I've promised Quelch not to. Not that he expects me to keep the promise, very likely. I'm going to, though."

"Snaith was an utter rotter," said Wharton. "He isn't fit to speak to. It would get you into trouble if you had anything to do with him."

"I'm not afraid of that. The fact is, I feel inclined to see Snaith, and lend him a hand if I can."

"Smithy!"

"He's a weak, cringing, cowardly idiot," said Vernon-Smith. "He couldn't run straight if he tried—not that he ever tried. It's up to a chap who's got a backbone to help a miserable wretch who hasn't. But I've promised not to answer his letter, and that settles it. I don't suppose I shall see him. I can't imagine what he's hanging about here for. Quelch half-believes there's some connection between us. Let him think so, hang him! By gad, I'm half inclined——"

He checked himself abruptly, but his eyes glittered.

"I know what's in your mind," said Wharton quietly. "Don't make things worse, Smithy, by being a reckless ass. That won't do any good. Chuck the matter out of your mind, and let's go and get on with the 'Herald'!"

"The 'Herald'!" said the Bounder, with a derisive grin. "Thanks! After what I've just had from Quelch, I don't feel much inclined for doing a school paper. I'm going out for a bit."

"If you'd care for me to come——"

"I'd rather be alone for a bit, thanks!" said the Bounder. "This has given me a bit of a shock. I thought the past was dead and done with, and I find it's as lively as ever. It's a bit of a shock to me. I've got to think things out a bit."

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Wharton nodded, and the Bounder took his cap and went out into the Close. He crossed towards the gates with a quick stride.

Gosling came out of his lodge as Vernon-Smith reached the gates.

"Master Smith!"

The Bounder did not heed; he strode on.

"Master Vernon-Smith," shouted Gosling, "you mustn't go out. You 'ear wot I say? Form-master's horders."

Vernon-Smith halted.

"What's that, Gosling?" he exclaimed.

"You ain't to go out of gates to-day, Master Smith."

"Who says so?"

"Mr. Quelch."

The Bounder gritted his teeth.

"So I'm gated!" he said.

"Yes, Master Vernon-Smith."

"Did Mr. Quelch give you any reasons, Gosling?" asked the Bounder quietly.

The school-porter shook his head, looking curiously at the Removite's lowering face.

"No, sir; only he says, says he, Master Vernon-Smith is not to go out of gates this arternoon, he says. And wot I say is this 'ere, I've got to carry out them horders, Master Smith."

Vernon-Smith stood quite still.

The savage anger and bitterness in his face startled the old porter.

So he was gated!

His word could not be taken—his promise was not good enough. He was gated, lest he should keep the appointment Snaith had made. The Form-master had declared that he gave him the benefit of the doubt, but he would not trust him outside the gates of Greyfriars. The bitter resentment that swelled up in the Bounder's breast startled himself.

Gated—imprisoned within the precincts of the school, for no fault of his own, because a fellow he hardly knew had chosen to write him a letter, which he had not received! The bitter injustice of it rankled deeply.

Almost unconsciously, the Bounder turned towards the gates again. Gosling hurried after him.

"Master Smith, you 'ear wot I says?"

The Bounder burst into a bitter, scoffing laugh.

"I'm going out," he said. "I've done nothing to be gated for. I'm not going to stand it. I'm going out!"

"Master Smith——"

"Go and eat coke!"

Vernon-Smith swung on to the gates. He was the reckless Bounder of old again now—hardy, and reckless of consequences. Gosling broke into a run, and came wheezing after him.

"Stop! I'll report yer! Stop, I says!"

"Report and be hanged!"

The Bounder swung out, and strode away up the road towards Friardale. Gosling stared after him blankly.

"My heye," he murmured—"my heye! Wot I says is this 'ere, I'll report 'im!"

And the worthy Gosling wheezed away to the School House to make the report to Mr. Quelch, as in duty bound.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Meeting!

VERNON-SMITH strode on down the lane, with a black brow, and black anger in his heart.

He was going nowhere in particular, but anyone observing his hurried strides would have supposed that he was in haste to keep an appointment.

His sole idea in going out that afternoon had been to take a quiet walk by himself, to think over the situation. But the discovery that he was gated had roused all the evil in his nature. He was not trusted an inch; he was punished for nothing. That was the reward for the hard, uphill fight he had made to keep straight. His defiance had followed close upon the heels of injustice. He had deliberately disregarded the Form-master's order in going out of gates, and he knew that punishment would await him on his return. All that he had done, all that

ie had gained, would be lost. He was to be the black sheep of the Remove again—the reckless and disobedient fellow who could only be kept disciplined by punishment and the threat of punishment. Well, he reflected savagely, it was not his own fault; he had done his best. If his Form-master chose to drive him back into his old ways, the fault would not be the Bounder's.

He was in sight of the village before he even remembered where he was going. On the outskirts of Friardale, the Cross Keys was in sight—the disreputable "pub" where he had spent many a wild hour in the old days, when he used to creep silently from a sleeping school to meet Mr. Cobb and the "sporting gentlemen" of his select circle.

The Bounder paused, and looked at the place. He reflected sardonically that if Mr. Quelch could see him now, he would believe that he had come deliberately to that place, to see the fellow who had written to him.

And why shouldn't he?

He might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, according to the proverb. If he was to be suspected, and condemned on suspicion, he might as well have the game as the name.

Why not?

There were a good many reasons why not, but the Bounder was not in a mood to think of them just then.

At the Cross Keys he would find Mr. Cobb, and probably Mr. Banks the bookmaker, and others of the disreputable gang who frequented the billiard-room. He could spend the afternoon in the old style, and on his return to Greyfriars, when he was questioned, he could lie in the old way. Why shouldn't he lie, since he was believed to be a liar when he was telling the truth?

He made a step towards the building, but he paused. It was not fear that made him pause; it was something quite different. The reform in the Bounder's character had gone deeper than he realised himself, and, hardly consciously, he had grown to feel a deep disgust and aversion towards his old way of life. Boozy old Cobb, Banks with his raucous voice and familiar manner, the stuffy parlour reeking with the fumes of tobacco and spirits, the dirty cards, the dreary waste of time over a childish game—the thought of it all gave him a feeling of nausea. He turned back.

Instead of entering the Cross Keys, he passed the building and turned into the path leading down to the river. He breathed more freely when the place was left behind.

"Smithy!"

The Bounder started as his name was called.

He had reached the towing-path by the Sark, which ran behind the long inn garden. He was tramping down the towing-path, when his name was called out in a voice he knew, though it was long since he had heard it. He looked round abruptly. Cecil Snaith, the expelled Shell fellow of Greyfriars, was leaning on the gate of the inn-garden.

Snaith looked different from of old.

He was not in Etons, and he did not look like a schoolboy. He seemed to have grown years older in the time that had elapsed since he had left Greyfriars. He was dressed in tweeds of a somewhat loud pattern; he wore a bowler-hat, and his thin lips held a cigarette between them. His face was of a sickly hue, and there were dark hollows under his eyes that told of late hours and a reckless way of living.

The Bounder looked at him, and his lip curled. This was Cecil Snaith, the dandy of the Shell once upon a time—this seedy-looking "moocher" who was smoking a cigarette in the garden of the lowest haunt in the country.

"Jolly good of you to come, Smithy!" said Snaith eagerly. "You got my letter all right, then?"

Vernon-Smith started.

Snaith naturally concluded that he had come to keep the appointment. Blind chance had led the Bounder's footsteps there; but who would have believed that if he had stated it? Not Mr. Quelch!

"Come in!" said Snaith, throwing open the gate.

Vernon-Smith did not move.

"I'm not coming in," he said coolly.

"Why not?"

"I didn't come here to see you."

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"You didn't!" ejaculated Snaith.

"No."

"But you're here," said Snaith, puzzled.

"I happened to come along here, that's all."

Snaith looked disappointed.

"I thought you had come in answer to the letter," he said.

"I can't answer any letter from you, Snaith. I've promised not to."

Snaith smiled.

"A promise used not to cost you very much, Smithy," he remarked.

The Bounder's brow grew blacker.

"Well, that's enough," he said. "Good afternoon!"

Snaith ran out at the gate as the Bounder strode away. He hurried after the angry junior.

"Hold on, Smithy!"

He caught Vernon-Smith by the shoulder.

The Bounder shook off his hand roughly.

"Let me alone!"

"Smithy——"

"I want to have nothing to do with you!" said the Bounder savagely. "You've got me into enough trouble already!"

"How?" asked Snaith. "I've done nothing!"

"Quelch intercepted your letter."

"Phew!"

"And called me over the coals for knowing you, as he supposed," said the Bounder bitterly. "Gated me, too, in case I came to see you."

"But if you're gated, how——"

"I've come out all the same. Hang Quelch!"

"The same old Bounder!" grinned Snaith. "You always had plenty of nerve!"

"More than you had, anyway!" sneered the Bounder.

Snaith nodded.

"That's true enough," he said. "If I'd had your nerve I might never have come such a fearful cropper."

"You ought to have kept straight, or tried to!" said the Bounder, with a sneer. "You haven't the nerve to go the pace—if it was worth going, which it isn't. I've found that out."

"I think I've found it out, too," said Snaith. "It hasn't paid me. Kicked out of Greyfriars and disgraced, and treated like a dog at home. I've had a pretty hard time since you saw me last, Smithy."

"It doesn't seem to have done you much good."

"It hasn't. Don't buzz off, Smithy. It does a chap good to talk to a Greyfriars fellow again," said Snaith pleadingly. "Dash it all, you weren't a funk in the old days! You might risk it for a few minutes."

"I'm not a funk now. But I'm not coming into that place, if that's what you mean."

"Let's have a talk here, then. We sha'n't be seen under the trees."

"I don't care if we're seen!" growled Vernon-Smith. "But I don't see what you can have to say to me. We were never friends when you were at the school."

"You want to throw me over like all the rest?" said Snaith. "I suppose I can't expect anything else. I suppose you were surprised at my writing?"

"I thought it was like your cheek!"

"So it was," agreed Snaith. "I know it was. But—but last vac I wrote to Hobson, who was my study-mate in the Shell, and his father sent back the letter, with a note to my father—a very stiff one, too—and the pater rowed me over it. The pater was awfully cut up over the cropper I came at school."

"I should say so. It couldn't have pleased him to have his son expelled for theft!"

Snaith crimsoned.

"Don't rub that in, Smithy. I never really meant to steal, but I was driven nearly frantic by debts."

"And you took the easiest way out?" said Vernon-Smith. "It was like you. But what I want to know is—what did you write to me for? I hardly knew you."

"We had one or two good times together."

"When I was as big a fool as you were—yes. But all that was dropped."

"I wrote to you because—because I thought you might help a fellow who was down," said Snaith; "and I knew you'd be the only Greyfriars chap who'd have the pluck to speak to me if you cared to."

The Bounder laughed.

"If your letter had come to me in the usual way I might have answered it," he said. "I believe in helping a lame dog over a stile. I should get into a row if I were seen talking to you, but I'm not afraid. Quelchy believes I've kept up with you, anyway, and he's sure to think that I came out specially to meet you. Look here, Snaith, I'll be plain with you. After what you've done, you're not the kind of fellow I want to know, though I'm not a particular chap. That's candid. But if I can help you I will. What do you want?"

"I want help," said Snaith.

"Aren't you living at home now?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I've bolted."

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. A Good Turn!

"BOLTED!"

The Bounder repeated the word in astonishment. Snaith looked dogged.

"Yes, bolted."

"Well, you utter idiot!" said the Bounder, with a deep breath.

"I had to do it. Ever since I've been home it's been one long jaw; lectures and complaints from morning till night," said Snaith moodily. "The pater can't get me into another school now I've been sacked from Greyfriars; it's a black mark against me that will last all my life. I've had a tutor at home, but—but he used to complain of me."

"Slacking as usual—what?"

"Well, you know I always hated lessons. And—and if I stayed out a bit late there was always a row."

"Serve you right!"

"I wish you'd had a bit of it yourself!" said Snaith savagely. "I got fed up, and I couldn't stand it any longer. Then the other day the pater found my cigarette-case and—and a betting-card, and all the fat was in the fire! He gave me a terrific licking!"

"No wonder! I should think he had stood enough from you."

"Well, that's kind and sympathetic, I must say!" growled Snaith. "Then he made up his mind to send me away from home—to a place in the depths of the country—a little school governed by a regular martinet, where I should be thoroughly looked after, as he said. Nothing like Greyfriars—a private school run by a grim old johnny, who makes a speciality of taking in wayward or disobedient boys, and keeping them in order. Nice prospect for me!"

The Bounder grinned a little.

"Well, it wasn't a happy prospect," he said. "But I don't see what else your pater could do, under the circumstances."

"I saw what I could do," said Snaith. "I bolted—cleared off at once—without a word to anybody. I wasn't going to stand that!"

"But—you awful ass!" exclaimed the Bounder. "What are you going to do? Have you any resources?"

"Well, I thought I might find a job of some kind," said Snaith. "I'd rather be pot-boy at the Cross Keys than go home! I know a good bit about billiards, too, and might get a job as a marker."

"Great Scott!"

"A pretty come-down for a Greyfriars chap!" said Snaith. "But what's a fellow to do? I've got no plans for the future—except that I won't go to a reformatory—for that's what it amounts to. I'm staying here while I think it out. I've got no money. I thought you might help me."

"Is Cobb letting you stay here for nothing?" exclaimed the Bounder, in astonishment. "I shouldn't have thought it of him."

Cecil Snaith sneered.

"He hadn't much choice. He had a lot of money cut of me when I was at Greyfriars, and I asked him to put me up for a bit for the sake of old times."

"Cobb isn't the man to do much for the sake of old times," remarked the Bounder drily. "You must have put the screw on somehow."

"Well, I did. I know about Greyfriars chaps coming down here—Loder of the Sixth, and Carne and Skinner

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sometimes, and others. It would cost old Cobb his licence if it came out, I think. And, anyway, he would lose the money he makes out of them. So I had the whip-hand. Cobb cut up rusty at first, but he soon saw that he had better be friends with me."

Vernon-Smith laughed. Mr. Cobb, of the Cross Keys, had evidently met his match in this young rascal whom he had helped to ruin.

"So I'm staying there for a bit," went on Snaith. "I've got a stuffy room, and enough to eat, but no money. It's rotten enough, but it's a shelter. I've got to think out something for the future. I'm pretty clever at cards, and I might make something that way or on the races, if they're not stopped on account of the war."

"As they ought to be!" snapped the Bounder.

Snaith shrugged his thin shoulders. He was not very much concerned with what ought to be.

"What a ripping prospect for a Greyfriars chap!" said the Bounder scornfully. "You want to start as a card-sharp and a racing-tout!"

"Better than the alternative."

"Well, if that's what you want help in doing, you won't have any help from me. If you were thinking of something decent, it would be different."

"I'd do anything I could. Advise me, then."

"I advise you to go straight home."

"I can't!"

"It's the best thing you can do. I'll give you money to pay your fare, if that's any good," said the Bounder. "Take my tip, Snaith, and don't play the giddy ox! You've started on a way that may lead to prison. Go straight back home and tell your pater you're sorry, and ask his pardon, and start fresh."

Snaith's eyes glittered.

It was evidently not good advice that he wanted from the Bounder.

"Then you won't help me?" he said.

"I can't help you in playing the silly fool. You would blame me for it afterwards if I did. I'll help you to go home again, willingly. If you had any sense, you'd see that that's the only chance you've got."

"If I could tide over a few weeks, something might turn up. I've contracted a few debts already, for things I had to have, and I can't go without paying them. You've got lots of money, Smithy, and you used not to be mean. You dropped a lot of tin helping that fool Hazeldene out of his scrapes. Why can't you help me? A ten-pound note would see me clear, very likely."

The Bounder knitted his brows. To the son of the millionaire, ten pounds was not a sum that he had to consider very seriously. It was not the money that Vernon-Smith was thinking of.

There was a pause, and Snaith watched the Bounder's face anxiously.

"You've got lots of tin, Smithy," he pleaded. "Your pater sends you all you ask for. I've known you to have as much as fifty quid at a time."

"It isn't the money!" grunted the Bounder. "If you're willing to do the right thing, I'll help you fast enough. But I won't help you to become a bigger fool and rogue than you are now, and that's flat. Look here! You say you're in debt, and you want some money for expenses. Well, give me your word to take the train home to-morrow, and the ten quid is yours."

It was curious enough. Vernon-Smith had left Greyfriars in a spirit of reckless defiance to all authority, half-inclined to plunge again into all his old evil ways. And here he was striving, as hard as he could, to turn a weak and foolish fellow from the evil path to save him from his own folly. The Bounder was a curious mixture of good and bad; but it was the good that was uppermost now.

Certainly if he had required an object-lesson in the probable results of evil courses, he had one before him in Cecil Snaith—once of Greyfriars, and now of the Cross Keys.

Snaith's thin lips closed tightly as if to keep back the bitter words he would have liked to hurl at his adviser.

The Bounder's advice was good. It was the only

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counsel he could honestly give. But that did not recommend it to Cecil Snaith.

But a cunning gleam came suddenly into Snaith's eyes. He lowered them as if in fear that the Bounder might read his thoughts.

He drew a deep breath before he spoke again.

"Well?" said Vernon-Smith.

"Done!" said Snaith at last. "I—I dare say you're right, Smithy—I've been playing the giddy ox. Help me to get clear here, and—and I'll go to-morrow."

"You won't be sorry for it," said Vernon-Smith.

He took out his fat pocket-book, opened it, and selected two five-pound notes. There were several others there, as well as a wad of currency notes. The son of Samuel Vernon-Smith, the millionaire, was well supplied with money—too well supplied with it for his own good.

Snaith's eyes glistened greedily at the sight of the money.

"There's the tin!" said the Bounder. "Two fivers! Good-bye, Snaith!"

"Thank you, Smithy!" The expelled junior's fingers trembled with eagerness as he clutched the banknotes.

"You're a good sort!"

"Oh, rats!" said the Bounder.

With a curt nod, he walked away up the towing-path.

Snaith looked after him for a moment, and sneered; then, with hurried steps, he went into the inn-garden. Mr. Cobb's select circle had a fresh pigeon to pluck that afternoon.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. A Surprise for Greyfriars!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter, of the Remove, burst into the junior common-room at Greyfriars, his fat face pink with excitement. His little round eyes bulged behind his big glasses. It was evident that Bunter had news.



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"THE GOLDEN KEY!" GREAT NEW SERIAL STARTS NEXT MONDAY.

"I say, you fellows—I say——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Has your postal-order come, Bunter?"

"I say, you fellows," roared Bunter, "what do you think?"

"Well, I think you're a fat duffer!" said Bob Cherry.

"I think you should wash the jam off your chin," remarked Frank Nugent.

"I think you want a clean collar," said Johnny Bull.

"The thinfulness is terrific," declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I also think that the esteemed Bunter should disinfectantly wash his paws."

"You silly goats!" exclaimed Bunter. "I say, I've seen him."

"Who—the Kaiser?"

"Fathead! He's back!"

"Who is?" demanded Bolsover major

"Snaith of the Shell."

"Snaith!"

"My hat!"

"Rats!"

"I've seen him, you know," chorried Bunter triumphantly—"seen him, you know. He's back in Friardale."

Billy Bunter prided himself upon knowing everything that was going on. He delighted to make a sensation by the announcement of startling news. He was fully gratified this time.

There was a buzz of astonishment in the common-room, and the juniors gathered round Bunter.

It was not long since Cecil Snaith had been expelled from Greyfriars, and he was well remembered there. Nobody at the school had expected to hear of him again.

For a fellow who had been expelled from the school to come back to the neighbouring village, and flaunt his disgrace, as it were, in the eyes of people who knew him, was astonishing enough.

"You've seen him?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Wharton was silent. He remembered what the Bounder had told him, and he was not surprised. But the rest of the fellows were in a buzz.

"Where is he?"

"Did you speak to him?"

"What's he look like?"

"Go it, chatterbox!"

"Oh, really, you fellows! I've seen him," said Bunter importantly. "You could have knocked me down with a feather, you know. There he was, in the High Street, as large as life—smoking a cigarette! Snaith of the Shell, you know! Of course I wouldn't speak to such a chap. He turned his back on me——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean, I turned my back on him. I regard him with contempt. He was dressed awfully loudly, you know—like a sporting tout—and smoking. He's got lots of money, too."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I just said a word to him. I thought I wouldn't be too hard on a chap who was down. You know how kindhearted I am——"

"Bow-wow! Get on!" said Bulstrode. "We know how kindhearted you are. Get on with the washing!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"Get on!" roared Bolsover major.

"Ain't I getting on?" demanded Billy Bunter. "I saw his money—he showed it to me, the mean beast! I just asked him if he'd lend me half-a-crown—I mentioned that my postal-order hadn't come—and he told me to go and eat coke——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So I gave it to him straight," said Bunter loftily. "I told him I supposed he was stony, as he hadn't come across anything to steal——"

"Rotter!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry, you know he's a thief——"

"Get on with the washing!" said Squiff. "Let's hear the rest of the thrilling yarn. Or is it to be continued in our next?"

"You know what a swanking beast Snaith always was," said Bunter. "He showed me a lot of money—a fistful of it—to show he wasn't stony."



Bolsover major hit out fiercely, and the billiard-marker gave a yell and pitched into Mr Cobb, sending him reeling against the wall. But the other two fastened on the junior, and whirled him off his feet. "Go it!" chirruped Snaith. (See Chapter 8.)

"Faith, did he lind ye the half-crown?" chuckled Micky Desmond.

"The beast—no! He had a dozen or more," said Bunter. "And he kicked me—I mean, I kicked him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. He said Greyfriars was a rotten hole, and he was glad he was out of it."

"Cheeky cad!"

"So I licked him, and when I got up I came back——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at, you fatheads? I came back to tell you fellows. I think he ought to be jolly well ragged for coming back near the school, considering that he was expelled for being a thief. I think it's a disgrace. As for all that money, I dare say he's stolen it."

"And you wanted some of the stolen cash?" asked Tom Brown.

"Ahem! I—I didn't think of that. Perhaps he came honestly by one of the half-crowns——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"More than you would have done if you'd got it lent you on the strength of your postal order, I guess!" remarked Fisher T. Fish.

"And there he is," said Bunter. "I believe he's staying at the Cross Keys—that awful low hole, you

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know. I think the Head ought to interfere, and have him sent away——"

"The Head isn't landlord of the Cross Keys, is he?"

"Of course he isn't, fathead; but he ought to interfere. In fact, I'm a good mind to tell him so."

"Let's see you do it, Bunter."

"Well, it's rotten for Snaith to be back here," said Bunter. "He's as mean as ever, and a bullying beast, too—licking a chap because——"

"You said you licked him," chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ahem! Yes, that's really what I mean——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The lickfulness was terrific, judging by the dustfulness of the esteemed Bunter's clobber!" remarked Hurree Singh.

"I left him lying——" began Bunter.

"Did you tell anybody about it before you got back to Greyfriars?" asked Squiff.

"Eh? No."

"Then you didn't leave him lying. You didn't start lying till you got here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, you know what I mean. I left him lying groaning after I had licked him——"

"Was that before or after you had got up?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"After—I—I mean——"

"So you've met Snaith, and talked caddishly to him, and he licked you," said Harry Wharton. "Serve you jolly well right!"

"Has he really met him, though?" said Nugent. "It's queer for an expelled chap to come back here."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"I think that's true," said Wharton. "I believe Snaith is in Friardale. He must have a nerve to come back among fellows who know him. I should think he'd rather have kept out of sight, after what he did."

"It's rotten," said Bolsover major. "A disgrace to the school, that's what I call it. He ought to be cleared out."

"Yes, rather."

"Who says let's go and clear him out?" said the bully of the Remove, looking round.

"Hear, hear!"

Harry Wharton frowned.

"It's no business of ours," he said. "We've no right to interfere with him. Let the poor brute alone."

"Rats!"

"Rot!"

"You can keep out of it, if you like," sneered Bolsover major. "My idea is that he ought to be warned off. There will be no end of a scandal if he stays about here. It was bad enough when it happened, without having it dragged up again like this. Who'll come with me to clear him off?"

"What can you do?" said Skinner.

"Make him go. Lick him if he doesn't," said Bolsover major.

"You've no right to interfere with him," said Nugent. "It isn't pleasant having him about here, but he's done us no harm."

"Who'll come and back me up?" demanded Bolsover major, unheeding.

There was a unanimous silence.

"Don't all be in a hurry to speak first," said the Remove bully sarcastically. "Are you all funking?"

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry. "Let the poor beggar alone. He may have business in Friardale, for all you know."

"Business at the Cross Keys!" snorted Bolsover major. "Yes, I know the kind of business. What will people say—an Old Boy of Greyfriars hanging around at a place like that? It's enough to get the school into the newspapers."

"Dash it all, we can't go to the Cross Keys for him, anyway!" said Wibley. "It's out of bounds."

"Who's game to chance it?"

"We're game enough," said Harry Wharton. "But I'm not going to hit a fellow when he's down, for one."

"Same here!"

"The samefulness is terrific!"

Bolsover major gave an angry snort. His idea did not seem to be catching on in the Remove.

"Go by yourself, old chap," suggested Skinner. "You're big enough to lick two or three Snaiths. You did lick him once when he was here. You go!"

"Go it, Bolsover!" chorused the juniors.

"Do you think I'm not game to go?" roared Bolsover.

"Well, go it, then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover looked round at the grinning juniors with lowering brows. Bolsover major was a bully, but he had plenty of pluck, and he was dogged and obstinate. The mere hint that he "funked" going was sufficient to make him go.

"Well, I'll soon show you," he growled. "I'm going. And if any of you want to see me handle Snaith, you can follow on—at a safe distance, like the rotten funks you are."

Bolsover major strode away, scowling. Skinner chuckled.

"I'm going to see the fun," he remarked. "Two to one that Bolsover doesn't have the nerve to go into the Cross Keys!"

"Done," said Snoop—"in bobs!"

"Come on, and let's see!"

Skinner and his friends departed on the track of Bolsover major, with the intention of watching the "fun" from a safe distance, and no intention whatever

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of risking a flogging by entering the forbidden precincts of the Cross Keys.

Meanwhile, the news spread through Greyfriars.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Lie Direct!

SNAITH had come back!

The news was soon spread through the school, and from the Second Form to the Sixth the Greyfriars fellows talked it over, in varying tones of surprise and disgust.

Even Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of the school, was interested in the surprising news.

Cecil Snaith had come back, braving the contempt of those who knew him, perhaps indifferent to it. He had been seen smoking in the street at Friardale; he had licked and kicked Bunter of the Remove for cheeking him.

There was hardly a fellow in the school who did not condemn Snaith's action in coming back where he was known.

He had disgraced the school, and disgraced himself; and the least he could have done, in the opinion of Greyfriars, was to keep away from the school he had brought shame upon.

What on earth had he come for? was a question that puzzled everybody. He could hardly have any business in a sleepy little village like Friardale.

To get into dealings with fellows he had known—fellows of the same kidney; that was a pretty general suspicion. Hobson and Hoskins of the Shell, who had shared their study with Snaith when he was their Form-fellow, were asked what they would do if they met him. They replied cheerfully that they would knock him down if he had the cheek to speak to them. From his old Form-fellows, evidently, Snaith had nothing to expect—unless it was a thick ear or a black eye.

Hobson and Hoskins felt keenly the disgrace he had brought on their study, and they had not forgotten him for it.

From the boys the news soon spread to the masters. Mr. Quelch, of course, knew it already. He did not know where Snaith was staying; but he knew that the expelled Shell fellow was in the neighbourhood.

The Remove-master was extremely irritated. So was Mr. Hacker, the master of the Shell. Mr. Hacker felt Snaith's disgrace as something of a reflection upon himself, and he keenly resented the return of the culprit, which revived the wretched story that was beginning to be forgotten. Mr. Quelch resented it chiefly because of his suspicion that Snaith's return was not unconnected with a boy in his own Form.

The two masters were shut up with the Head for some time in Dr. Locke's study. A little later, all Greyfriars read a notice on the board. It was a notice of an unusual nature, signed by the Head.

"Any communication between any boy belonging to Greyfriars and Cecil Snaith, formerly of the Shell, is strictly forbidden. Any boy disregarding this order will be called to strict account."

"HERBERT LOCKE, Headmaster."

"That settles it," remarked Bob Cherry.

"The settlefulness is terrific," observed the Nabob of Bhanipur, with a shake of his dusky head. "But what pricefulness the esteemed Bolsover?"

"Bolsover's gone to see him," remarked Dick Rake. "He might as well have let him alone. Hallo, here comes the Bounder. Seen this, Smithy?"

Vernon-Smith had just come in.

He was looking tired, and a little muddy, after a long walk, and his brow was sullen. But he stopped as Rake called to him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"This notice about Snaith," said Rake.

The Bounder started, and came up to the board. He read the headmaster's notice with a sneering lip.

"When a chap's down, everybody's down on him, of course," he said.

"Oh, come!" exclaimed Harry Wharton warmly. "You

"THE GOLDEN KEY!" GREAT NEW SERIAL STARTS NEXT MONDAY.

don't expect the Head to let the fellows pal with a thief, surely?"

"Once a thief isn't always a thief," said Vernon-Smith. "I believe at that time Snaith was half off his head, and hardly knew what he was doing."

"He knew well enough to try to fix what he did on another chap," said Squiff drily.

"And jolly nearly succeeded too!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Dash it all, I don't believe in being down on a chap who's had bad luck, but there's a limit. Snaith was the limit."

"Suppose he hadn't been bowled out, then another chap would have got it in the neck for him," said Rake. "It was too thick. Snaith ought to be in prison."

Wharton joined the Bounder as he left the group.

"Anything wrong, Smithy?" he asked.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"Only I'm just going through it," he said.

"Quelch again?"

"Yes."

"But I understood——"

"I've been out," explained the Bounder. "I found I was gated—for nothing. I went out, all the same."

"You shouldn't have done that, old chap!" said Wharton, with a troubled look. "Of course, I know how you feel. But——"

"Well, I did it," said Vernon-Smith moodily, "and I'm not sorry, as it's turned out. I did a chap a good turn."

"Snaith?" asked Harry.

"Yes. I've persuaded him to go back to his people. The silly ass had run away from home."

"By Jove!"

"Now, I've got to report myself," said the Bounder bitterly. "Gosling reported me to Quelch, of course, and I've got to go through it. I don't care much."

"If you tell Quelch what you've done about Snaith, Smithy, he's pretty certain to let you off!"

"Catch me! He wouldn't believe me, for one thing, and I'm not going to brag of my virtuous deeds, for another. The Bounder sneered. "He can't take my word. He's not going to know that I've met Snaith. It would mean pretty bad trouble for me. He would think that I'd gone out on purpose to meet him."

"And you didn't?" asked Harry hesitatingly.

"Not in the least. It was a sheer chance."

Wharton was silent.

"You only half believe me yourself," said the Bounder mockingly. "So what do you imagine Quelch would think?"

"I do believe you, Smithy, though it does look queer. But I'm afraid Mr. Quelch won't," admitted Harry.

"Let him think what he likes. He thinks me a liar, and that clears me—I can tell lies to a man who believes me a liar already."

"You can't, Smithy——"

"Well, I'm going to."

The Bounder swung away, leaving Wharton frowning grimly. The recklessness of Vernon-Smith's mood alarmed him. It seemed that it was quite the old Bounder again—the hardened and hardy fellow he had been of old, reckless of honour and reckless of consequences.

Vernon-Smith tapped at Mr. Quelch's door and entered.

"Gosling informed me that I was to report myself to you, sir," he said, as Mr. Quelch's glance turned sternly upon him.

"That is correct, Vernon-Smith. You left the precincts of the school after the porter had informed you that you were forbidden to go out of gates."

"I had done nothing to be detained for, sir."

"My order was given to Gosling before I had called you to my study in connection with Snaith's letter, Vernon-Smith. I had not had time to rescind it, when you left."

"Oh!" said the Bounder, considerably taken aback.

The injustice of which he had complained disappeared suddenly. He realised clearly that he had been hasty. The order had naturally been given to the porter as soon as Mr. Quelch opened Snaith's letter. It would have been withdrawn after the matter was settled; but the Bounder had gone out immediately after leaving the Remove-master, and there had been no time.

"You understand?" said Mr. Quelch severely. "I should have withdrawn my instructions to Gosling, but

NEXT
MONDAY,

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

before I could do so he came to report to me that you had gone out, in deliberate defiance of my order. This is a very serious matter, Vernon-Smith."

The Bounder was silent.

"I cannot allow such a defiance of authority to pass unpunished," said Mr. Quelch. "Your determination to go out, in spite of my order, Smith, compels me to suspect that you had the intention of meeting Snaith, in spite of what passed in my study."

The Bounder had faltered for a moment, but his face hardened again now.

"You thought me a liar, sir?" he asked icily.

"I feared that you had deceived me, Smith. If it was not so, why did you disobey my order in the most flagrant and wilful manner?"

"I thought it was an injustice, sir."

"You should not have thought your Form-master unjust, Vernon-Smith. Even thinking so, you should not have taken the law into your own hands, as you know very well. Under the circumstances, however, I am inclined to pass over the matter if you assure me solemnly that you did not meet Cecil Snaith."

The Bounder's lip curled.

"You do not answer me, Vernon-Smith." Mr. Quelch raised his voice a little. "Is it possible that, after all that was said, you left Greyfriars to meet that wicked and wretched boy?"

No answer.

"Answer me, Smith! Did you leave Greyfriars to meet Snaith?"

"No, sir."

"I hope you are speaking the truth," said Mr. Quelch severely. "But your hesitation in replying does not speak well for you. I am very far from satisfied with you, Vernon-Smith."

"I am sorry for that, sir," said the Bounder, with a tone of irony in his voice that made the Form-master colour with anger.

"Take care, Smith. I will speak plainly to you. If you have disobeyed my injunction to keep away from that wicked boy, I shall report your conduct to the Head, and demand a public flogging as your punishment."

The Bounder's eyes gleamed.

"I shall make some inquiry into the matter," said Mr. Quelch. "I am sorry, Vernon-Smith, that you do not see fit to answer me frankly."

"I have answered you, sir. I did not leave Greyfriars to go to Snaith."

"Tell me plainly, without equivocation, Vernon-Smith, whether you have seen Snaith and spoken to him this afternoon or not?"

The Bounder drew a deep breath.

"No, sir!"

It was the lie direct.

It was quite the old Bounder who spoke—with a firm voice, a steady tongue, an unflinching eye. Mr. Quelch scrutinised his face, but he saw nothing there to enlighten him. In lying, as in everything else, the Bounder of Greyfriars had an iron nerve.

"Very well, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch, at last. "I will believe you; I am determined to believe you. You may go."

The Bounder went without a word.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bolsover Means Business!

"GO it, Bolsover!"

Thus Skinner & Co.

The party had arrived at the Cross Keys. Bolsover major strode on ahead, with Skinner and Snoop and Billy Bunter at his heels.

The nearer they came to the Cross Keys, the less the bully of the Remove relished his self-imposed task.

To talk about it in a loud voice in the common-room at Greyfriars, to call other fellows funks for not sharing in the design, was one thing. To march into a public-house that was out of bounds, and brave the resentment of the landlord and his rowdy friends, was quite another.

Bolsover major wished that he had talked a little less. He wished still more that he had not invited Skinner & Co. to follow him and see it done. But he could not draw back now. He could not abandon the enterprise under the mocking eyes of his Form-fellows. For very shame's sake he was bound to go on.

"I say, you fellows, he's funking!" chuckled Billy Bunter.

Then Bunter dodged hurriedly behind Skinner, as the Remove bully swung back towards him.

"You fat toad!" began Bolsover, between his teeth.

"Well, go ahead," said Snoop. "Here we are, Bolsover. There's the Cross Keys, and old Cobb in the doorway. And there, by gad, there's Snaith!"

He pointed to an upper window of the inn. Cecil Snaith was seated there, looking out into the street, with a cigarette between his fingers. He saw the Greyfriars juniors, and his lip curled in a sneer.

"There he is!" chuckled Skinner. "Go and turn him out, Bolsover!"

"Do you think I'm afraid?" roared Bolsover.

"Ahem! No! Nunno! Oh, no!"

"He, he, he!"

"If you want thick ears all round, you giggling idiots——"

"You came here to lick Snaith, not to lick us," said Skinner cheerfully. "We're waiting for the circus to begin."

Bolsover major scowled, and strode on towards the public-house. There was no help for it; he had to carry out the task, or return to face laughter and ridicule in the Remove. Anything was better than that.

Skinner & Co. watched him from across the road. Any Greyfriars fellow who was known to have entered the Cross Keys was booked for a flogging from the Head; and Skinner & Co. did not mean to risk that. Their own opinion was that Bolsover major wouldn't risk it, either, when it came to the point.

"By Jove! He's really going!" muttered Skinner.

"Two to one he turns back at the door!" chortled Bunter. "My hat! Won't the fellows chip him! Great Scott! He's going in!"

Bolsover major did not turn back at the door. He marched right on, much to the astonishment of Mr. Cobb.

"Arternoon!" said Mr. Cobb, with a stare, removing the black pipe from his dirty teeth.

"I want to see a chap here," said Bolsover major. "Chap named Snaith."

Mr. Cobb nodded genially. He concluded that Bolsover major was an old school chum of Snaith's, who was sticking to him in his disgrace; though he was astounded that the junior had the nerve to come to the Cross Keys in broad daylight.

The landlord pointed with his pipe to the stairs.

"Upstairs," he said. "Front room on the left."

"Thanks!" said Bolsover.

He went in, with his heart beating. Skinner & Co. exchanged looks. Anybody might have seen Bolsover major going in, and reported it to the Head of Greyfriars. Bolsover understood the risk he was running. But he tramped doggedly up the stairs, and reached Snaith's room, and kicked open the door.

Snaith started up as he came in.

"Hallo! You here!" he exclaimed.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" growled Bolsover.

"Is it a message from Smithy?"

"Smithy! No! What do you mean?"

"Nothing," said Snaith. "What do you want? Called to give me a look-in, in a friendly way?"

"I've called to give you some plain English," said Bolsover major grimly. "You're not wanted here."

Snaith laughed.

"It's rotten for you to come back to the place," said Bolsover major. "We're not standing it. You've dis-

graced Greyfriars enough, without hanging round the school in a low pub. You're to clear off."

"Have you been made Lord-Lieutenant of Kent by any chance?" asked Snaith sarcastically.

"I'm not going to jaw to you," said Bolsover. "I'm going to turn you out. You're not going to stay here, disgracing Greyfriars."

"Well, of all the cheek!" said Snaith. "Can't a fellow do as he likes? Blessed if one wouldn't think we were in Prussia, and you the Kaiser!"

"Are you going?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Are you going?" roared Bolsover.

"No, I'm not going," chuckled Snaith. "Not at your order, my boy. I remember you were the cheekiest fag in Greyfriars when I was there. You haven't changed."

"You may remember, too, that I licked you at Greyfriars," snorted Bolsover.

"I remember that you used to smoke sometimes," said Snaith calmly. "Sit down and have a cigarette and a game of nap."

"Are you going?"

"And put on a new record, for goodness' sake!"

"I'm not going to waste time here," said Bolsover major. "You're clearing off at once, or I'm going to lick you. Take your choice."

Snaith looked at him curiously. Bolsover major was the bully of the Remove, and he had sometimes extended his bullying to Shell fellows who would put up with it. But this was remarkable, even in the bull-headed Bolsover. Snaith was amused; but he read dogged determination in the Removite's face, and he had no desire whatever to face those big, heavy fists. Snaith had spent some hours that afternoon in a stuffy room, smoking, playing cards, and sipping whisky-and-water; and it had not left him in a state for a fistical encounter.

Bolsover was already advancing upon him, with his big fists up. He was quite prepared to make hay of the weedy blackguard.

Snaith backed away, his eyes gleaming.

"Hands off!" he exclaimed.

"Not unless you clear off, and I see you into the train," said Bolsover major. "I mean business."

"My dear chap, I'm going," said Snaith, his eyes glimmering. "I'll call out to Cobb to send a man up for my bag."

"Buck up, then!"

Snaith stepped out on the landing. But he did not call out to Cobb. He ran downstairs. Bolsover major, grunting angrily, followed him. He had been taken in quite easily by Snaith's trick to get out of his reach.

He tramped down the stairs, still determined. He found Snaith excitedly explaining to Mr. Cobb in the passage, and Mr. Cobb's red face had grown purple with wrath.

Considering the terms upon which Cecil Snaith had "planted" himself in the inn, Mr. Cobb would probably not have been sorry to see him licked and kicked out. But circumstances had suddenly changed. Snaith the sponger had come into funds; that afternoon Mr. Cobb and his friends had relieved him of five pounds out of the ten the Bounder had given him. Mr. Cobb charitably desired to relieve him of the other five that evening over a pleasant little game. While his money lasted, Snaith was as welcome as the flowers in May.

Consequently Mr. Cobb was highly wrathful at Bolsover's high-handed action. A guest with five pounds in his pocket, and a taste for cards in his degenerate breast, was not to be ill-used if Mr. Cobb could prevent it. The fat landlord faced Bolsover in towering wrath.

"Wot's all this?" he roared. "Comin' and kickin' up a row in my 'ouse—wot? Get out of it, you young vagabond!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Bolsover major. "And keep your fat paws away from me, Cobb, or I'll dot you in the eye!"

"My word!"

"I'm going to kick Snaith out, and see that he leaves Friardale!" said Bolsover major. "Now, then——"

"'Ands off that young gentleman!" shouted Mr. Cobb.

"Ere, 'Enry, Jerry, Tom, come 'ere!"

ANSWERS

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"THE GOLDEN KEY!" GREAT NEW SERIAL STARTS NEXT MONDAY.

The billiard-marker, the pot-boy, and a lounge in the bar came at Mr. Cobb's indignant call.

"Chuck that young vagabond out!" said Mr. Cobb.

Bolsover major gritted his teeth.

Behind the formidable array of the landlord and his three retainers Snaith stood grinning.

"You've bitten off a bit more than you can chew, Bolsover," he remarked. "You'd better clear!"

"You funky cad, I'm going to lick you!" yelled Bolsover, and he made a furious rush at Snaith.

But he did not reach him.

At a sign from Mr. Cobb, the pot-boy, the billiard-marker, and the loafer threw themselves upon him.

Bolsover hit out fiercely. The billiard-marker gave a yell, and pitched into Mr. Cobb, sending him reeling against the wall. But the other two fastened on the junior, and whirled him off his feet.

"Go it!" chirruped Snaith.

Bolsover major struggled, but Mr. Cobb and the infuriated billiard-marker piled in to the aid of their comrades, and the struggling junior was rushed bodily out of the door.

Snaith's chuckle followed him.

With arms and legs wildly flying, Bolsover major was rushed out of the Cross Keys. On the other side of the way Skinner & Co. burst into a whoop of excitement.

"Here he is!"

"He, he, he!"

"Leggo!" roared Bolsover. "One at a time, you rotters! Yaroooh! Give a chap a chance, you Prussians! Yow-ow!"

Crash! Splash!

Hurled forth by four pairs of arms, Bolsover major landed heavily in a large muddy puddle in the road. He rolled over in the puddle, drenched and bespattered with mud from head to foot.

"There!" panted Mr. Cobb. "Now you get off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Snaith. "Come and have some more, Bolsover!"

Bolsover major sat up in two inches of water, and foamed. He blinked rather uncertainly at the grinning Mr. Cobb & Co. Then he staggered up, dripping.

"You get off!" said Mr. Cobb, shaking a warning finger at him. "Don't you come kicking up your rows 'ere, young man! I'll have the perlice to yer!"

Mr. Cobb had no time for any more playful remarks. Bolsover, muddy and furious, charged at him like a bull. The landlord of the Cross Keys was bowled over by that charge like a skittle, and he came down with a bump.

"Smash 'im!" shrieked Mr. Cobb. "Smash 'im! Wallop 'im! Scrag 'im!"

The three retainers fairly jumped at Bolsover major. With three pairs of hands on him, he was borne off his feet, hitting and struggling wildly. He was ducked in the horse-trough, dragged through a heap of refuse, rolled over in the puddles, kicked, punched, and bumped and thumped. When he was left at last, lying in the muddy road, he was not in a humour for further fighting. He hadn't an ounce of breath left, and he lay in the mud, gasping and gasping as if he would never cease to gasp.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Not a Conquering Hero!

"H E, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner & Co. seemed to find it funny. They laughed till their sides ached. Bolsover's expedition had ended in disaster, but his followers had no sympathy for him. His swank had met with its reward, and they were amiably pleased to see the high-handed Bolsover taken down a peg or two.

Skinner came up at last to help him, chuckling. Mr. Cobb & Co. had gone back into the Cross Keys, also chuckling.

"Hurt?" grinned Skinner, as he stooped over the gasping, foaming Bolsover.

"Gerrroooh!"

"Rather a circus, wasn't it?"

"Groooh!"

"Are you still going to lick Snaith?"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

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"You're not going to let him stay, surely!" chortled Snoop.

"He, he, he! Go in again, and kick him out!" cackled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, this is as good as a cinema! Go it, Bolsover! He, he, he!"

Bolsover major sat up, his eyes burning. He dragged himself slowly and painfully to his feet. He was so smothered with mud that he was barely recognisable.

He did not speak to his chuckling followers; but as soon as he recovered sufficient breath he made a savage charge at them. Skinner & Co. fled promptly, yelling with laughter, and the bully of the Remove was too spent to follow them. They started for Greyfriars in great spirits.

Bolsover, gasping painfully, followed with limping steps.

Even Bolsover was fed up.

From the upper window of the Cross Keys Cecil Snaith waved a cigarette at him in farewell.

"Ain't you coming back, Bolsover?"

Bolsover, like the celebrated dying gladiator of old, heard it, but he heeded it not. Cecil Snaith might have remained at the Cross Keys till the end of the century for all Bolsover cared at that moment. With an ache in every limb, breathing mud and water, the defeated Removite tramped away drearily towards the school. He had bitten off more than he could chew with a vengeance.

Skinner & Co. arrived long before the exhausted Bolsover. The dusk was falling on the old quad as they came in, grinning.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" greeted Bob Cherry. "Where's Bolsover?"

"He, he, he!"

"He's coming," chortled Snoop. "Come this way, you fellows! Come and see Bolsover come in! He's been enjoying himself!"

"What's happened?" asked Harry Wharton.

"A regular circus! Ha, ha, ha! Bolsover got the order of the boot—hard! He's gathered up half the mud in Friardale."

"You should have seen old Cobb's blackguards handling him!" said Skinner. "But he put up a good fight. It was what Inky would call terrific. He went into the Cross Keys for Snaith, and he came out in rather a hurry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's been going on?" exclaimed Vernon-Smith, joining them, with a clouded brow. "What did Bolsover go to the Cross Keys for, Skinner?"

"Haven't you heard?" chuckled Skinner. "The great Percy decided, by right divine, that Snaith shouldn't stay in Friardale, and he went down to turn him out. He's been fighting with every blackguard at the Cross Keys, and they've made a muck of him. You'll see when he comes along. Snaith was cackling from a window when we left."

"Is Snaith still there, then?" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Yes; he's living there."

The Bounder shut his teeth hard.

"Still there?" he repeated. "But it's three hours ago that he promised—" He checked himself. "Still, there! Oh, the rotter! He was taking me in, then!" He muttered the last words inaudibly.

"Of course he's still there!" grinned Bunter. "They'll let him stay as long as he's got any money. And he's got lots. I've seen it."

"Lots!" muttered the Bounder. "My money! What a silly idiot I was to trust him half an inch!"

The Bounder strode savagely away. It was bitter to the keen, self-reliant Bounder to feel that he had been deceived and fooled by a fellow like Snaith, whom he despised from the bottom of his heart. Wharton touched him on the arm.

"He hasn't kept faith with you, Smithy?" he said, in a low voice.

The Bounder smiled—a sneering smile.

"I might have known it," he said. "He promised to go back home, and I gave him the money to go with. I might have guessed that he would break his word. Of

course he'll gamble the money away. I might have known it."

"Well, you couldn't know it," said Harry. "You did him a good turn, Smithy, and it was a generous thing to do. You can't help it that he's a rotten cad!"

"A rotten cad and a weak-minded fool!" said the Bouncer. "And so long as he stays, it may come out about my meeting him, and I've told Quelch—" He paused.

Wharton set his lips a little.

"You haven't told Quelch that you didn't see him, Smithy?"

"I have."

"Oh!"

"He told me I was to be flogged if I met him. Would he have believed that the meeting was by chance?" said the Bouncer bitterly. "He thought me a liar; he said he couldn't trust my word. If I'm a liar, he's made me one. I wanted to tell the truth, if he'd have believed it. But he wouldn't."

Wharton was silent.

The Bouncer understood his silence, and his lip curled sardonically.

"You'd have told the truth, and chanced it?" he asked.

"I hope I should have told the truth or nothing."

"You've never been in such a fix. But I see—you don't want to talk to a liar. Well, don't!"

The Bouncer swung away before Wharton could reply.

There was a shout from the gates. A crowd of fellows had gathered to see the Conquering Hero come, as Bob Cherry expressed it.

The Conquering Hero had arrived! He did not look much like a conqueror. He came limping up to the gates, his face and clothes smothered with mud, and his boots squeaking out water. He scowled savagely as he was greeted with a yell of laughter.

"Here he is! Here's Bolsover!"

"Been mud-collecting, Bolsover?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is Snaith gone?"

"Behold the Conquering Hero!"

Bolsover major tramped furiously through the yelling

crowd. He had failed utterly; as, indeed, he could only have expected to fail, if he had been a little less bull-headed. If he had carried the expedition through successfully, his boastfulness would have been justified. As it was, he could only expect ridicule, and he received it in ample measure.

His face was crimson under the mud as he tramped through the grinning crowd. He reached the School House, to find Mr. Quelch awaiting him on the steps, with a brow of thunder.

"Bolsover!"

The muddy junior halted.

"What does this mean, Bolsover? How dare you appear in such a state? Have you been fighting, and with whom?"

"I've been set on by a gang of rowdies," said Bolsover sullenly.

"Where, and why?"

"In—in Friardale," stammered Bolsover. Then it came out. "I thought it rotten for that cad Snaith to come back here, and I thought I'd make him clear out, but the other fellows were funky and wouldn't back me up, and a lot of rowdy rotters helped Snaith, and—and so—"

"You had no right to do anything of the kind, Bolsover, and the Head has forbidden any Greyfriars boy to see Snaith," said Mr. Quelch sternly.

"I—I didn't know—"

"Bolsover went out before the notice was out on the board, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Ah, that excuses you to some extent, Bolsover, but your conduct is nevertheless unruly and outrageous. It was a most astounding act of impertinence on your part to take the matter into your hands. You will be detained on Saturday afternoon, and you will write out three hundred lines of Virgil. Now go and clean yourself. You are in a most disgusting state."

Bolsover major slunk in, with feelings too deep for words, and headed for a bath-room. The chuckles of the Removites followed him. Like Cæsar of old, the great man of the Remove had fallen, and none were so poor to do him reverence.

THE "GREYFRIARS HERALD" 1^d. 2

Edited by the Chums of the Remove Form.



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Snaith lay groaning on the floor, his eyes darkening, his nose swollen and streaming crimson. Vernon-Smith unlocked the door and threw it open. A tall gentleman in a black frock-coat strode in. "Cecil—what—" "There he is, Mr. Snaith," said the Bounder coolly. "The dear boy has added blackmail to his other accomplishments, and there's the result. Good-afternoon, sir!" (See Chapter 13.)

THE TENTH CHAPTER. Snaith Calls In!

THE next day the chief topic at Greyfriars was the surprising and unexpected return of Cecil Snaith. He was still at the Cross Keys in Friardale. The fellows wondered what the Head would do, and whether he would—or, indeed, could—do anything.

The situation was unprecedented.

A fellow had to be utterly lacking in any sense of shame to return to the scene of his disgrace, to face the eyes of those who knew that he had been a thief. But if Snaith chose to do it, it was not quite plain how he could be stopped.

Vernon-Smith knew that Mr. Quelch had written to Snaith's father. But Snaith's home was at a great distance, and, even if Mr. Snaith took up the matter at

once, it was likely to be some time before the young rascal could be removed.

Meanwhile, he remained at the Cross Keys.

If any of his old acquaintances at the school had been inclined to speak to him, the Head's stern notice put an end to any thought of that kind.

Snaith was an outcast. Even among fellows who might otherwise have felt compassion for him his shameless effrontery in returning to the neighbourhood of the school excited disgust and scorn.

If he stayed long, the matter was likely to grow into a regular scandal.

All the village knew that Snaith was an old Greyfriars boy. He had been seen often enough there when he was a Shell fellow at Greyfriars. That he had been expelled was no secret, though the particulars were not known.

And he was living in the lowest public-house for miles

round, and was seen lounging about the street with disreputable and rowdy hangers-on of the place. It was already the talk of the village, and curious folk pointed out Snaith to one another, commenting on the fact that he had belonged to the big school, and passing opinions on the kind of training which had led to such results. The village grocer and the landlord of the Friardale Arms agreed that they wouldn't, under no circumstances, send their hopeful sons to no public-school—not if they knew it. They agreed that it was shocking, and all Friardale agreed with them.

The Head, of course, knew of the talk and tattle that must be going on, and he must have writhed inwardly at the mere thought of it. But he was powerless to mend matters. The Greyfriars juniors credited their Headmaster with almost supernatural powers, but in point of fact he was as helpless, so far as Snaith was concerned, as any fag in the school. Snaith had a right to do as he liked, and live where he liked, unless his parents controlled him.

There was little doubt that Snaith was enjoying the scandal he was bringing upon the school that had cast him forth. Wicked and wrong as he had been, he was far from deeming himself wholly in the wrong; somehow or other, he had worked it out to his own satisfaction that he was more sinned against than sinning.

His feelings towards Greyfriars were of bitter resentment and hatred, and he enjoyed dragging the name of the old school in the dust.

That had not been his object in returning. He had come back, when he fled from home, to the only place he knew—the only place where there was a possibility of finding friends.

But he was not long in realising the power in his hands, and he made the fullest use of it.

Curious visitors, agog with excitement over the strange affair, which was a welcome break in the monotony of their lives, came to quaff ale at the Cross Keys, and to hear Snaith talk. Mr. Cobb found Snaith quite a "draw" for a time. The young rascal, smoking a cigarette in the bar—with one eye open for the village policeman—expatiated on his wrongs and on the injustice he had suffered, amid any amount of boozy sympathy.

According to Snaith, the Head of Greyfriars was a tyrant, and the fellows were nearly all blackguards, who had turned against the only decent fellow there—Cecil Snaith himself. And his smoky and boozy sympathisers declared that it was 'ard lines.

Snaith even carried his impudence so far as to call at the school gates, and would have walked in, if Gosling had not pounced upon him and stopped him. It was after morning lessons, and the Close was crowded with fellows.

There was a yell at the sight of Snaith at the gates.

"Snaith!"

"He's come here!"

"Snaith, by gad!"

"Good-afternoon, Gosling," said Snaith, eyeing the old porter warily.

Gosling planted himself in front of Snaith, and pointed to the road.

"Hout you go!" he said

"Aren't you glad to see an old acquaintance, Gossy?" smiled Snaith.

"You get houtside."

"I'm coming in!" said Snaith calmly.

"You comin' in 'ere," gasped Gosling—"you!"

"Yes, why not? I've called to see some old friends. Hallo, Hobby, how are you getting on?"

Hobson of the Shell turned his back.

"For goodness' sake, clear off, Snaith!" exclaimed Harry Wharton in utter disgust. "What do you want here? Haven't you a rag of decency?"

"Still the same high and mighty Wharton!" said Snaith. "Not a bit changed. And there's old Coker, strutting the same as ever!"

Coker of the Fifth turned red and walked away. Snaith made a step or two forward, and Gosling stopped him.

"I don't think as you'll be allowed in, Master Snaith," he said, quite perplexed by the curious state of affairs. "You've been expelled, you know."

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"Rotten injustice," said Snaith. "Look here, let me come in, Gossy. You haven't forgotten all the tips you used to cadge from me, surely."

Gosling turned purple.

"You imperent young raskil——"

"Do you still keep the bottle of gin in your lodge, Gossy?" asked Snaith pleasantly. "Your favourite teetotal drink, you know!"

Gosling's expression became terrific. There was a chuckle from some of the fellows crowding round.

"And there's old Loder," said Snaith, as he caught sight of the prefect, who was coming down to see what the crowd was gathering for. "Hallo, Loder!"

Loder of the Sixth stared at him.

"You here!" he ejaculated.

"As large as life!" said Snaith cheerfully. "Taking a look at the old place. Have a cigarette, Loder?"

"You young scoundrel!"

"Given up smoking?" asked Snaith, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Everybody here seems to have reformed since I left," said Snaith. "Loder's given up smoking! My hat! What about you, Hazeldene? Do you still keep that box of cigarettes in your locker?"

Hazeldene sidled away. Loder gave Snaith a furious look, and clenched his hand. But, apparently, the fear of what Snaith might say further daunted him, and he walked away, without a word. Snaith grinned.

"I say, Hobson, ain't you asking me to the study?" he said, with undiminished impudence.

Hobson stalked away.

"Hoskins, old man——"

"Don't talk to me!" snapped Hoskins of the Shell.

"But I want to ask you how your music's getting on," said Snaith. "Are you still making night hideous with it? Have you learned to play in tune yet?"

Hoskins walked away, with a red face, followed by a snigger. But the snigger died away as Mr. Quelch came through the crowd, with a grim brow.

He fixed his eyes upon Snaith, with an expression which made even the impudent outcast feel a little uncomfortable.

"Snaith, is it possible that you have come here? Are you so utterly lost to any sense of shame?"

Snaith recovered himself as he remembered that a Form-master of Greyfriars had no power over him now. He grinned impudently.

"Same old Quelch!" he remarked.

"What!"

"Same old rusty file!" said Snaith. "Still clicking away on the typer at that giddy 'History of Greyfriars,' Quelch."

"Boy!"

"How's old Hacker?" pursued Snaith, with great enjoyment. "How's old Prout, with his tall stories? How's the blessed old Head? Same old gargoyle—what?"

Mr. Quelch was speechless for a moment or two. The juniors were not grinning now; it was simply blood-curdling to hear a Greyfriars master being talked to in this style. It was time for the skies to fall.

The Remove-master turned to Gosling with a gasp.

"Put that young reprobate out of gates, Gosling! Kindly see that he does not enter here again."

"Yessir!"

Snaith backed away into the road, smiling.

"I'll go if I'm not welcome," he said. "I was going to stand you half-a-crown for a new bottle of gin, Gossy; now I won't! Give it up, old man, that's my advice. It's shocking to see an old fellow like you, with one foot in the grave, mopping up gin! Give my kind regards to the Head, Quelch!"

Then Snaith had to dodge as the porter rushed down on him, and he skipped into the road and strolled away, laughing. Mr. Quelch, with a frowning brow and high colour in his cheeks, glared at the juniors.

"You should not stand here!" he snapped. "How dare you come to the gates to see that—that person! Go away at once! I am ashamed of you!"

Mr. Quelch swept away. Bob Cherry grinned in a rather subdued way.

"Funny to hear him talking to Quelch!" he murmured. "But what an awful blackguard to come here,

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where nobody would touch him with a barge-pole! He's got a nerve!"

Snaith's visit to Greyfriars added to the general excitement on the subject of Snaith. How the matter was to end was a mystery. The fellows all agreed that it couldn't be allowed to go on, but how it was to be ended was a question no one undertook to answer.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Message!

"I SAY, Smithy!"

"Get out!" snapped the Bounder irritably.

Another day had passed, and the excitement among the Greyfriars juniors on the subject of Snaith was dying down.

The young rascal had not been seen near Greyfriars again, but he was still in the village, and the talk of the place.

Some of the prefects of the Sixth were keeping an eye open for Snaith now, with the intention of giving him a drastic warning to keep away from the school. Indeed, there was a rumour that old Wingate had already laid an ash-plant about him in the lane, catching him on his way to Greyfriars.

Snaith, apparently, thought it better to give the school a wide berth in any case, but fellows who went down to the village frequently saw him there. And now the order had gone forth that Friardale was, for the present, out of bounds for all Greyfriars.

There was a great deal of murmuring over that order. The fellows knew the reason, of course. It was Snaith's presence.

But the order had appeared on the notice-board, signed by the Head, and for the present Friardale was taboo to the Greyfriars fellows.

Ever since Snaith's reappearance Vernon-Smith had been gloomy and irritable.

The falsehood he had told Mr. Quelch weighed on his mind in a way that surprised himself. He argued that he had been driven to it—that he would not have lied if he had not been deemed a liar—but he could not satisfy himself. He was moody, irritable, uneasy.

And there was danger for him, too; for so long as Snaith remained at the Cross Keys there was always a possibility that it might all come out—that he had met Snaith, talked to him, and given him money. It was undoubtedly that money that enabled him to stay so long. Mr. Cobb would have found some method of getting rid of his guest, but so long as Snaith had money to spend he was welcome. It was the Bounder's money he was spending; but the Bounder comforted himself with the reflection that even ten pounds would not last the young rascal long. The sharpers of the Cross Keys would relieve him of all of it in a day or two.

But while he stayed there was danger. And Snaith, too, was treacherous and unreliable. He would have betrayed the Bounder if it had served him to do so. And if the Form-master discovered that Vernon-Smith had met Snaith, helped him, and lied about it, the consequences would be very serious.

For the Bounder, in spite of his reckless moods, was no longer the hardened Bounder of old. His new reputation had grown dear to him. Wharton treated him as civilly as before, but he knew what Wharton thought. It was useless for him to try to think that Wharton's view was that of a prig; he knew that the captain of the Remove was right. Wharton would not have lied, whatever the consequences. And, indeed, as the Bounder realised, the consequences of telling the truth and chancing it could hardly have been more troublesome than his present worry and uneasiness of mind.

Falsehoods come home to roost in the long run, as the reckless junior was discovering.

Skinner was in the study at work on his preparation, and the Bounder was sitting, idle and moody, at the table, when Bunter came in. The Bounder was in no mood for Billy Bunter's chatter. He pointed angrily to the door.

But the Owl of the Remove stood his ground.

"I've got something to tell you, Smithy," he said, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper.

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NEXT
MONDAY,

The "Magnet"
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ONE
PENNY.

"Oh, get out, you fat duffer!"

"But it's jolly important."

"Expecting another postal-order?" grinned Skinner, looking up from his work.

"As a matter of fact, Skinner, I am, and——"

"Get out!" shouted the Bounder angrily.

"Oh, really, Smithy! I didn't come here to speak about a postal-order; I've got a message for you."

"Why couldn't you say so, you fat idiot!" snapped the Bounder. "Out with it, and clear off and don't worry!"

Bunter closed one eye, and made a mysterious gesture towards Skinner. Vernon-Smith watched him in astonishment.

"Are you dotty?" he exclaimed.

"It's a private message," whispered Bunter.

"Oh, rot! Out with it!"

"Well, if you want Skinner to know——"

"Dash Skinner!"

"Thanks!" yawned that youth.

"Will you leave off making idiotic faces, you duffer, and come to the point!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith, exasperated.

"Well, if you don't mind Skinner knowing about Snaith——"

The Bounder started. Skinner looked up quickly.

"What about Snaith?" he asked. "Snaith sending a message to Smithy! What cheek!"

"I'm not going to tell you anything, Skinner. You're inquisitive! I'm not to mention Snaith's name to anybody but Smithy; he told me so particularly."

Skinner grinned.

"You'd get into a row if Quelch knew you'd been talking to Snaith," he said.

"I suppose you're not going to sneak," said Bunter, with dignity. "Besides, I didn't talk to him. He came down on me in the lane, and gave me the message, and a two-bob bit—I mean, he lent me two bob. I'm going to repay it out of my postal-order. I told Snaith that plainly. I couldn't possibly remain under any obligation to a fellow of his sort, and so I told him. The rotter only cackled."

"Do you mean to say that you've seen Snaith, and he's given you a message for me?" demanded the Bounder, with lowering brows.

"That's it," said Bunter. "If you want it out before Skinner——"

"I don't want it at all," said Vernon-Smith savagely. "If you see Snaith again, tell him I think he's a rotten cad and a liar, and I won't have anything to do with him. That will be plain enough even for Snaith."

"But he said——"

"Never mind what he said! Get out!"

"Oh, all right, if you don't want the message!" growled Bunter. "I've taken a lot of trouble to bring that message. Snaith said he wanted to see you as soon as possible."

The Bounder jumped up, seized Bunter by his fat shoulders, and spun him out of the study. There was a roar from Billy Bunter as he sat down in the passage.

The door slammed after him.

"Yow!" roared Bunter. "Beast! Yow-ow!"

Vernon-Smith threw himself into his chair again. Skinner regarded him curiously.

"Queer of Snaith to send a message to you, Smithy," he said. "Have you heard from him before, then?"

The Bounder did not seem to hear. He turned savagely to his work. He knew what Snaith wanted—more money, and another false promise if the Bounder exacted it. He was not to be caught twice with the same bait. He had done with Snaith, at all events; he was not likely to give him the means of remaining longer near Greyfriars. The sooner he went, the sooner the weight would be lifted from the Bounder's mind.

But a thought lingered in his mind, full of uneasiness—a fear that he had not done with Snaith. He threw himself into his work to drive the troublesome thought from his mind; but it would not be driven.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

An Unmitigated Rascal!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were thinking of football as they came out of the Form-room on the following morning. It was Saturday, and a half-holiday; and the Remove were playing Redclyffe. Wharton joined Vernon-Smith as the Bouncer was moving away moodily by himself.

"I hope you're feeling fit, Smithy," he said.

"What—no—yes—feeling fit? What do you mean?" said the Bouncer irritably.

"Don't bite a fellow's head off!" said Harry good-humouredly. "It's the Redclyffe match this afternoon, you know."

"I had forgotten it."

"Oh!" Wharton was a little nonplussed. "Well, I suppose you're playing, now that I've reminded you?"

"I—I suppose so. I don't care. You can leave me out of the team, if you like," said the Bouncer. "Better leave me out, I think; I've got other things to think of—not pleasant things, either!"

"I don't want to leave you out."

"You were jolly glad to leave me out once," said the Bouncer. "There was a time when you wouldn't have me in the Form eleven for love or money."

Harry Wharton coloured a little.

"What's the good of dragging that up?" he said. "That's all past and done with. I thought we were friends now."

"So you're willing to be friends with a liar!" sneered the Bouncer.

Wharton paused before he answered.

"I don't set up as a judge over you, if that's what you mean," he said. "I know you were in an awkward corner, too. I don't want to think about it."

"I—I say, I'm sorry!" muttered the Bouncer. "I'm all nerves lately. I didn't mean to say anything caddish. But—but I'm all nerves."

"You used not to be troubled by nerves, old chap."

"It's that fellow Snaith—and—and Quelch—and all the lot of it!" said the Bouncer moodily. "I wish he'd go. Why don't he go? He's gambled away the money I gave him before this. What's he hanging in Friardale for? Why don't his people fetch him away? He's been there four days now. It's a rotten shame! He ought to be taken home! I know Quelch wrote to his father—he said he was going to. It's all right, Wharton—I'm playing, as usual. Footer will drive that beast out of my mind perhaps!"

"It's the best thing," said Harry. "Kick-off at three—"

"Master Vernon-Smith"—Trotter, the page, came out of the House—"Mr. Quelch wants you in his study, sir."

The Bouncer changed colour a little, and bit his lip hard.

"It's out, I suppose," he said, in a low voice. "I wonder how Quelch found out. Now I've got to face the music."

He strode away without waiting for Wharton to reply. The captain of the Remove stood with a troubled brow. But there was nothing he could do. He could only hope for the best for Vernon-Smith.

The Bouncer made his way directly to Mr. Quelch's study. There was no hesitation about him. If he had to face the music, he had plenty of nerve for it. But his heart was beating a little faster as he entered the Form-master's study.

To his astonishment, Mr. Quelch's face was quite serene, and he gave the junior a kindly nod.

"Go to the telephone, Vernon-Smith—"

"The—the telephone!" stammered the Bouncer.

"Yes. Your father has rung me up, and asked permission to speak to you for a few minutes as he is going on a journey. You may speak to him, my boy."

Mr. Quelch crossed to the door. He did not intend to remain in the study while the boy held a private conversation with his father.

"My—my pater!" stammered Vernon-Smith, in immense relief. "Oh, then, it isn't—I—I mean, thank you, sir!"

The Remove-master quitted the study and closed the

door. Vernon-Smith picked up the receiver with a lighter heart. He had fully concluded that Mr. Quelch had discovered his intercourse with the expelled Shell fellow, and had sent for him in consequence. And it was only a telephone call from his father.

"Hallo!" said Vernon-Smith into the receiver.

"Hallo! Are you there?" came back a gruff voice.

Vernon-Smith felt puzzled for a moment; the voice did not sound to his ears like his father's.

"Yes, I am here," he replied. "Is that you, pater?"

"Is that Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes."

"Are you alone in the study?"

"Yes."

"Good!" The voice on the telephone changed in tone. "All serene, Smithy, old man! I wanted a jaw with you about my going away from here."

Vernon-Smith almost dropped the receiver in his astonishment. He knew the voice now, now that it was no longer disguised.

"Snaith," he breathed.

A chuckle was audible over the wires.

"Yes. I had to ring up Quelch, so I put on a gruff voice and gave myself as your pater—see? Did Quelch smell a rat?"

"No."

"Good again! I say, I'm sorry I couldn't get away as I promised you, Smithy. I'm going to-morrow."

"I'm glad to hear it."

Vernon-Smith was quivering with uneasiness. By a transparent trick, which, however, Mr. Quelch had not seen through, the expelled junior had got into communication with him again. He could not come to Greyfriars, letters were intercepted, and Vernon-Smith avoided him; and the cunning young rascal had thought of the telephone—Mr. Quelch's telephone.

What the Remove-master would have said if he had guessed that Vernon-Smith was talking to Snaith on his telephone could not be imagined. The Bouncer grinned a little at the thought, uneasy as he was.

"Are you still there, Smithy?"

"Yes. Good-bye, I'm going to ring off."

"Hold on a minute! I've got something to say. I—I've run out of money!"

"You've lost it at cards, you mean."

"I—I'm sorry, Smithy; I didn't mean to. But—but I can't go without money. Will you lend me another ten?"

Vernon-Smith laughed. He was amused.

"I won't lend you another tenpence!" he said. "You told me lies—you never meant to go; you were pulling my leg! You won't pull it again in a hurry, you lying worm! I've got nothing to say to you!"

"You won't help me a bit, Smithy?"

"No, I won't!"

"Don't ring off for a minute! I haven't finished! When you ring off, I'm going to ring Quelch up again."

"Quelch! What for?"

"To tell him that you met me on Wednesday, and chummed with me, and lent me ten pounds to have a high old time here at the Cross Keys!" came back Snaith's voice, in venomous tones.

Vernon-Smith almost dropped the receiver.

"You—you—what?" he stammered.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Smithy. But if you force me to cut up rusty, look out for squalls."

"You unspeakable cad!"

"Thanks!"

"You villain!" panted the Bouncer, almost beside himself with rage. "I gave you that money because you promised to go back home."

"Will Quelch believe that?"

The Bouncer set his teeth.

Would Quelch believe that? The question did not need answering. He would not believe it. Not after the deliberate lie the Bouncer had told him, and which would be exposed if it came out that Vernon-Smith had met Snaith that day.

The receiver trembled in the Bouncer's hand.

He had put himself into this young villain's power by helping him, and Snaith was determined to use his power to the utmost. Any considerations of gratitude, or

even common decency, did not seem to appeal to Cecil Snaith.

What a fool he had been, the Bounder reflected bitterly. He, the keen and cool-headed Bounder, had been fooled by this shallow rascal, whom he despised, and had placed himself under his thumb!

Yet he could hardly blame himself. Even his cynical mind could never have plumbed the depths of Cecil Snaith's baseness.

To use a good turn, generously done, as a means of blackmailing his benefactor—it was rather too "thick" for even the Bounder to have anticipated anything of the sort.

"You can't mean it," the Bounder gasped, rather than said—"you can't! You begged me to help you, and I did it at a risk to myself. You can't be such a worm!"

"I'm sorry, Smithy. But you know what the Germans say—'necessity knows no law.'"

"Yes, you ought to be a German!" said Vernon-Smith bitterly. "You would be quite at home with the Kaiser."

"Hard words break no bones, old chap," came back Snaith's cool voice. "I've heard too many in my time. Mind, I mean what I say! I was talking to Bunter yesterday, and I've had the whole story—I know all about the notice on the board, and Quelchy calling you into his study for breaking bounds when you came to see me—"

"I didn't come to see you!"

"Tell Quelchy so, and see if he'll believe you."

The Bounder suppressed a groan; that was exactly what he could not do. The lie he had told stood between him and any confession to his Form-master. Cecil Snaith did not know of that. Had he known, he would have been still more certain of his victim. But he was certain enough now.

"Tell Quelchy," went on Snaith's chuckling voice—"tell him! You know he won't believe a word of it. He showed you my letter, and you came straight out and met me. You gave me ten quid, to have a good time with. Don't think of denying it—I took the numbers of the notes."

"Then you planned this from the beginning!" the Bounder hissed into the telephone, almost choking with rage.

"It came into my mind, Smithy. A fellow in my position can't afford to be particular. You have lots of money—I've none."

"Ten pounds—"

"That's gone."

"And you expect me to give you more money to gamble with?"

"Are you so down on gambling, you blessed hypocrite? You've had many a wild night yourself—cards till two in the morning, especially on vacation. Why shouldn't I have a flutter? But I'll tell you what—I believe my luck is on the turn, and if I win, I sha'n't want any more from you. That's honest!"

"Honest!" said the Bounder, in bitter tones. "Honest, you—"

"It won't hurt you to shell out. You can get it again from your pater. I've heard you say often enough that he sends you all the tin you ask for. Ask him for some more, then. Lend me ten pounds—"

"Lend?" sneered the Bounder.

"Yes, lend; and if I have luck, I'll square. If I lose, you must stick it—after all, you can afford it. The fact is, Smithy, I'm desperate. I don't like doing this, but I'll do worse rather than go home—that's flat! I want you to come down and bring me ten pounds."

"Well, I won't!"

"I'll give you till three o'clock," said Snaith coolly. "If you're not here at three, I shall ring Quelchy up. You know what that will mean for you, not just a flogging, my buck, but the sack—the merry sack, old fellow! You'll be in the same boat with me, and I hope you'll like it!"

The Bounder felt a chill for a moment.

Was that true—could it be true? He felt in his heart that it was so. The lie he had told would be exposed, and his Form-master, already distrusting him, would not be likely to believe anything he said after that. It would be believed that he had given Snaith money to enable him to stay at the Cross Keys—that he was Snaith's confederate in bringing that shame and disgrace upon the school! It would be supposed that his

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revengeful feelings had driven him to do it. There was only one possible punishment; the same as Cecil Snaith had suffered—expulsion from Greyfriars!

If only he had not lied, then he might have chanced it—a full statement of the truth. But that falsehood stood in the way—it was like a lion in the path. It tied his tongue, it threw its own falseness over everything that he might utter. He was in the power of the unconscionable young rascal at the other end of the telephone-wire.

Snaith's voice was still buzzing, but the Bounder had dropped the receiver. He picked it up again, and Snaith's voice came clearly:

"Are you still there, Smithy?"

"Yes," said the Bounder, between his teeth.

There was a deadly glitter in his eyes.

"You understand?"

"I understand."

"Three o'clock is the latest—I'm booked for a little party at half-past. You had better come. You can stay to the party if you like. Don't force me to settle your hash at Greyfriars, Smithy; the game isn't worth the candle. If you make me cut up rusty, it's the finish for you there!"

"I know!"

"That's good! When I ring up Quelchy, and ask him to lend me my fare home, and say that I should have gone before if you hadn't lent me money to stay—urged me, in fact, to stay here and disgrace the school, for revenge on Quelch—"

"Oh!" muttered the Bounder.

"You know what that will mean for you, Smithy. Be sensible. Am I to expect you at three?"

"And after this," said Vernon-Smith, in a quiet voice—"after this, whenever you run out of money, you'll come to me? Every time you lose at the cards, I'm to make it good. You're to keep me under your thumb, and every time I give you a currency note you'll keep the number, to have more proof in your hands, to keep me still more under your thumb. I understand! Yes, you may expect me at three o'clock, Snaith."

"Good! Ta-ta!"

The Bounder hung up the receiver.

He quitted the study, his face pale, and a deadly determination burning in his eyes. The Bounder's resolution was taken.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder's Answer!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here you are!"

"The dinner-bell's gone, Smithy."

"Not ill?" asked Frank Nugent, with a curious glance at the Bounder's white face.

Vernon-Smith laughed—a laugh that struck a chill, somehow, to the hearts of the Famous Five as they heard it.

"Ill?" said the Bounder. "Never better! Ha, ha! I am going to have a ripping afternoon!"

He went in to dinner with the Removites. Harry Wharton glanced at him several times. The Bounder seemed unusually merry, and he was laughing and making jokes as he came out with the juniors after dinner. His lips laughed, but his eyes were unsmiling, and a deep, strange gleam never left them. Wharton joined him as he went up to his study. He was alarmed and anxious. That there was something terribly wrong with the Bounder was clear enough to his keen eyes.

"At three, Smithy," he said.

Vernon-Smith started.

"Three?" he repeated. "You know— Oh, you mean the match! I'm sorry, Wharton. I can't play this afternoon."

"I'm sorry, too, Smithy," said the captain of the Remove quietly. "But if you don't feel fit—"

"Fit as a fiddle!" said the Bounder, bursting into a laugh. "It isn't that. But I shall be busy this afternoon. I'm going to have a turn at the punch-ball now."

"Surely you've not got a fight on?" said Wharton, in perplexity.

"Why not? I'm a rather quarrelsome chap, you

know," grinned the Bounder. "Why shouldn't I distinguish my last day at Greyfriars with a regular roaring row?"

"Your last day at Greyfriars?" exclaimed Wharton.

"The last merry day!" smiled Vernon-Smith. "What a fool I've been, Wharton! As if a blackguard like me could ever throw it over and live it down? I've tried—you know I've tried, don't you? But it was bound to come out, you know. Didn't the fellows name me the Bounder when I first came? Once the Bounder, always the Bounder! I've tried the other thing, and it doesn't answer. I'm going to be sacked to-day, for no fault of my own—through helping a miserable worm who has turned on me. And I don't care—I'm sick of it!"

Vernon-Smith went into his study, smiling. Wharton followed him in. He was not likely to leave the Bounder in that wild mood.

"Smithy, are you out of your mind?" he exclaimed anxiously. "What's the matter? You know I'll stand by you."

"I believe you would," said the Bounder, with a nod. "But you can't do me any good. I suppose you know I've done more rotten things in my time than any other chap at Greyfriars; of course, you know. Well, I had good luck; I dodged the chopper every time somehow. I'm going to be sacked for doing a good deed—ha, ha!—a good deed like Good Little Georgie! I ought to have known that that line didn't suit me; it was bound to end in a muck-up. It has, by Jove! I've come a regular mucker at last—through helping a whining cad, and trying to get him to chuck up playing the fool, and go home to his father. Amusing, ain't it?"

"What on earth's happened?"

"Snaith's happened," said the Bounder. He threw off his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, disclosing his muscular arms, and started punching at the suspended ball. "Luckily, I'm in good form. I hope I shall have better luck than Bolsover major at the same game."

"You're not going there!" exclaimed Wharton, aghast.

"Why not? As I'm to be sacked anyway. A last fling!" grinned the Bounder. "Snaith expects me at three, and I'm going. I'm going to see him—to smash him—to thrash him till he won't have a bone left without an ache in it. Then I'm coming back to be sacked—if I get away alive from Snaith's choice friends at the Cross Keys!"

"Smithy, you can't go—"

"Oh, yes, I'm going—rather! I'm under his thumb—a fellow like me under the thumb of a cringing worm like that! Would you take me for a fellow to be bullied and cowed by a fellow like Snaith, Wharton?"

"No, hardly!" said Harry. "But—"

"Don't ask me any questions—the less you know about it the better. You don't want Quelch to call you over the coals as a confederate, do you? Only remember this—if I've come a cropper, this time it wasn't my own fault. My beloved Form-master made me into a liar by calling me one, and the rest followed. I shall tell Quelch that when I go."

Crash—crash—bounce! The Bounder was hitting at the punch-ball as if it were Cecil Snaith's face that he saw before him. Wharton watched him in anxiety and alarm. He could not understand the Bounder's wild words, and Vernon-Smith evidently did not mean to explain.

"Smithy, won't you tell me—can't I help—"

The Bounder hummed a tune.

There was silence in the study, while the Bounder punched the ball with untiring energy. He slipped on his jacket at last.

"Good-bye, Wharton! Get down to the footer. Put young Penfold in my place—he's good. Better than I should be this afternoon. If dear Quelch should want to know where I'm gone, tell him I'm gone to the Cross Keys, partly on business, and partly because it's out of bounds."

And the Bounder went laughing down the passage.

Wharton stood irresolute.

He could not stop the hardy, reckless junior, if he chose to go. He was half inclined to call in a prefect to stop him; but he naturally shrank from such a step. Before he could decide what was best to be done, the Bounder was gone. With slow steps Wharton went down

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to the footer-ground. But, though he played up well that afternoon, his thoughts were scarcely in the game. The reckless face of the Bounder, with the burning, mocking eyes, came incessantly before his mind.

A mocking smile was on the lips of the Bounder as he sauntered down the lane to Friardale. The village clock was striking three as he stopped before the Cross Keys. Cecil Snaith was looking from the window, and he grinned at the sight of the Bounder. A taxi-cab from Courtfield came buzzing along the road, and it stopped outside the inn; but the Bounder did not notice it. He went into the building, and nodded merrily to Mr. Cobb.

"Hallo, old fellow—quite like old times to see you again!" he remarked, tapping the fat landlord cheerily on the shoulder. "Merry little party this afternoon—what! I've called to see my pal Snaith!"

"Werry glad to see you agin, arter all this time, Master Smith. Thought you'd forgotten your old friends," said Mr. Cobb genially.

"Not at all!" smiled the Bounder. "I haven't forgotten Snaith, you see—my cheery old pal Snaith. He's expecting me."

The Bounder ran lightly up the stairs. Mr. Cobb glanced after him, somewhat puzzled by his unnatural excitement.

"Here you are, Smithy!" called out Snaith.

The Bounder entered his room.

"And here I am," he said pleasantly. "Glad to see me, Snaith?"

"Yes, rather! Have you brought—what—what—Hands off!" yelled Snaith furiously.

"Put up your hands, my dear boy!" grinned the Bounder. "Didn't you order me to come? Well, I've come! That's to begin. Put up your hands, you worm!"

"Help!" yelled Snaith.

The Bounder slammed the door and turned the key.

"You won't get help in time, Snaith," he said. "You're going to have the licking of your life, dear boy. You threatened me—after I put my head under your foot by helping you in a scrape. A worm like you—threatening me! Didn't you know me better than that, Snaith?"

"I'll let Quelch know everything—"

"Of course you will—I'm expecting that! Here's something else for you to let him know!"

"Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crash—crash—crash! The wretched Snaith put up his hands; he had no choice. But the iron fists of the Bounder were raining blows on him; he reeled, and tottered, and crashed on the floor, half stunned. There was a loud knocking at the locked door.

"Get up, you funk! I'm not finished yet—"

"Help!"

"Open this door! Cecil, let me in!" It was a deep, angry voice. "Cecil, it is your father! Let me in!"

"My hat!" grinned the Bounder.

Snaith lay groaning on the floor, his eyes darkening, his nose swollen and streaming crimson. Vernon-Smith unlocked the door and threw it open. A tall gentleman in a black frock-coat strode in.

"Cecil—what—"

"There he is, Mr. Snaith," said the Bounder coolly. "The dear boy has added blackmail to his other accomplishments, and there's the result. Good-afternoon, sir!"

The Bounder strolled out of the room. He heard Mr. Snaith's deep voice as he went:

"I have come to take you back, Cecil. I heard from Mr. Quelch where you were. Get your coat on and come at once—"

The Bounder sauntered out of the inn. As he walked to Greyfriars a taxicab passed him on the way to Courtfield; in it sat Mr. Snaith, with a grim, set brow, and his hopeful son. Snaith's bruised and darkened face turned towards the Bounder as they passed, with bitter hatred. He leaned out of the cab.

"I shall telephone from Courtfield!" he hissed. "Look out!"

The Bounder laughed.

The taxi-cab whizzed on and disappeared. Cecil Snaith's stay at the Cross Keys had come to a sudden stop, and he was not likely to escape the parental eye

again. His "run" had come to an end. The outcast of Greyfriars had no chance of bringing further disgrace upon the school that had cast him out.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Schoolboy and Master

"CAN I come in, sir?" Mr. Quelch looked up. "You may come in, Vernon-Smith." He laid down his pen. "What is the matter?" The Bounder smiled—a hard and mocking smile. "I've come back to be sacked, sir." The Remove-master started. "What do you mean, Smith? Where have you been?" "To the Cross Keys!" "Vernon-Smith!"

There was a hurried footstep in the passage, and Harry Wharton came in. He was in his football garb, with a coat and muffler thrown on over them.

"Hallo! Won the match?" asked the Bounder coolly.

"We've beaten Redclyffe," said Harry. "Never mind that. I came in after you, Smithy, because——"

"What does all this mean, Wharton?" asked Mr. Quelch, his voice cutting in like a knife.

Wharton turned a flushed face to his Form-master.

"I know Smithy's in trouble, sir—and I know it's not really his fault. I—I want to stand by him. He's in my Form, sir, he's in my eleven, and I know he's straight. That's what I wanted to say, sir."

"I am afraid that what you say is beside the point, Wharton. Vernon-Smith has just made a most astounding statement——"

"It's no good, Wharton—quite N.G.," said the Bounder. "You can't help me. Whatever I say will be set down as a lie, and you don't know the facts except from what I've told you—more lies, you know. I've come to confess, Mr. Quelch, before Snaith tells you over the telephone. I'm going to tell you the truth, and then you're going to take me to the Head to be sacked for telling lies. I met Snaith near the Cross Keys on Wednesday, and talked to him, and gave him money——"

Mr. Quelch gave the Bounder a strange, scrutinising glance. He made Wharton a sign to be silent, as the captain of the Remove opened his lips.

"You told me you had not met Snaith, Vernon-Smith," he said quietly. "Am I to understand that you lied to me?"

"Why not?" sneered the Bounder. "Didn't you tell me you couldn't take my word, sir? If I'm a liar, why not lie? I told you I hadn't gone to meet Snaith, and it was true; I met him by accident."

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Of course, you don't believe it," said the Bounder, laughing. "I'm telling you this to please myself, not because I expect you to believe me. I met Snaith by accident, and he told me he had run away from home, and meant never to go back. I talked to him like a kind uncle in a story, and persuaded him to go home, and gave him ten pounds to pay his expenses. He told me he was in debt, you see; a lie, very likely. He didn't go; he was fooling me. Of course, you won't believe that a fool like Snaith could deceive me easily; but he did. He stayed on, and gambled away the money, instead of going home as he promised. You promised me a flogging if I had met him. You wouldn't have believed it was by chance. You made me into a liar, so I told you a lie."

"Vernon-Smith, how dare you——"

"Wharton could hardly swallow it when I told him," smiled the Bounder. "I'm not a fellow whose word can be taken. So I lied to you, sir. But that isn't all. Snaith rang me up on your telephone this afternoon——"

"Snaith!"

"He made you believe it was my father wanted to speak to me. I found that it was Snaith."

"Bless my soul!"

"He had gambled away all the money I gave him, and wanted more. He told me that unless I brought him money, he would tell you of our meeting, and of what I had given him, and make out that I gave it to him to gamble with, and persuaded him to stay in Friardale to pay you out, sir. You'd have believed every word, of course; Snaith's so reliable. In fact, you'll hear the

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ONE
PENNY.

story soon on the telephone. You'd have heard it already, only Snaith's father has nailed him. So I had to go to the Cross Keys at three, to take money to Snaith, to make him hold his tongue."

"And you did so?" asked Mr. Quelch coolly. "In that case, why are you now making this confession to me?"

The Bounder laughed.

"I went," he said. "I gave Snaith the thrashing of his life. I haven't quite come down to knuckling under to a fellow like Snaith yet. Then I came back to be sacked. You'll hear Snaith's story soon; but you needn't waste time. I'm ready to go to the Head!"

There was a long pause.

"Calm yourself, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch, at last. "I have never been spoken to by a schoolboy in this manner before, and you deserve severe punishment. I prefer to deal patiently with you. Had you told me the truth on Wednesday, I should have believed you, as I believed your falsehood. That you cannot be absolutely trusted is your own fault, Vernon-Smith; but I was prepared to believe you. You are mistaken in supposing that I should have believed Snaith's statements against you. I certainly should not have placed the slightest faith in him."

The Bounder's face changed as the Form-master spoke in quiet tones. The hardy, reckless look faded away.

"Smithy has told the truth, sir," said Harry Wharton. "He told me at the time about getting Snaith to promise to go home."

"I fully believe it, Wharton; and, having observed Vernon-Smith's character very closely, I am not surprised to find him capable of kindness and generosity. I wish you had told me the truth at the time, Vernon-Smith. You are mistaken in thinking that I should not have taken your word."

The Bounder stammered.

"I—I—I thought—— But—but you don't believe me now? You can't, after the lie I tell you I told. I—I——"

Mr. Quelch smiled slightly.

"I am a better judge of you than you are of me, Vernon-Smith," he said. "You are a very strange and wayward boy, and there is evil in your character, along with much good; but I believe you have honestly striven to do your best, and that there is in you much more good than evil. Come, my boy, you must learn to place more faith in your Form-master, and remember that he is a friend as well as a master. I shall forget your wild words, Vernon-Smith. You may go; the matter ends here."

Harry Wharton's face lighted up. The Bounder stood rooted to the floor. His brain was in a whirl.

"You—you believe me, sir?" he stammered.

"Certainly!"

The Bounder tried to speak, but he could not. There came a sudden rush of tears to his eyes—eyes that had seldom been thus wetted.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," he stammered, at last. "I—I didn't understand. But—but after this——" His voice broke.

"That is enough, Vernon-Smith. I know what you would say."

Wharton drew the Bounder silently from the study. Mr. Quelch remained for some minutes in thought before he took up his pen again. In the passage, the Bounder stood silent some minutes, mastering the emotion that had risen within him, and of which he was half ashamed.

"I—I've been rather a fool, Wharton," he whispered, at last. "I say, isn't he a brick? I might have known him better, too. But isn't he a brick?"

"What-ho!" said Wharton heartily. "A brick of bricks, old chap! Come on; the fellows are getting tea in the study."

The Bounder laughed, and followed him down the passage. There was a merry little party in No. 1 Study to celebrate the football victory over Redclyffe; and the merriest of all was Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

THE END.

(Do not miss "COKER'S ENGAGEMENT!" next Monday's G and Story of the Chums of Greyfriars, by FRANK RICHARDS.)



The Rubies of Sheba.

- - By - -
EDWIN WOOTON

**A LONG INSTALMENT OF A SPLENDID 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 HERWARD, 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 chums get into disfavour with Pontius, the king of the hidden world, and are imprisoned.

(Now read the conclusion of the story.)

Kairon's Cunning!

It was only when the friends found themselves alone that they broke into speech. Somehow, they could not rid themselves of the notion that they had been arrested for robbing the temple, and Tom voiced his belief. Tra overheard, and then the companions had to confide in him.

"Had it been a while ago," said Tra, "Menathon or some of the others would have had you boiled to death. That is our ordinary punishment for striking a priest, or violating a temple. However, that is not Kairon's policy for the present. If he said sorcery, he means sorcery. My advice is, go through with it, and if you fail, seek a short respite here. It cannot well be refused. Then I may be able to prove my gratitude."

"Tell me what truth there is in the charge," he said presently.

"Truth!" returned Tom. "There is no truth whatever in it! Man alive, the things I have done are tricks, and simple tricks! When I supped with Kairon he seemed to take an interest in the subject, and I told him of a place in our capital called the Egyptian Hall, where I had seen far greater but equally innocent wonders!"

Tra repeated the name "Egyptian" several times.

"Look you," he said, "there is a priest in Kamurba called Ra Keem. He worships one or two not very popular gods—second-rate ones, to tell the truth—and he holds himself aloof from the other priests. I have heard him talk with some of his disciples about a mythical land called Egypt. He may be

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inclined to give you a hand. There's no knowing. It all depends what he can get out of it!"

"I have nothing to offer him," said Tom despairingly.

"Perhaps you can put him up to a trick or two. I have no faith that this Kairon will be able to have his way for long, and a seeming miracle—a seeming one, you understand—would help Ra Keem to win back his wandering believers!"

At this moment Patho came in. His face was sad. His great head shook more than ever.

"Any news?" questioned Tom, in bravado.

"Yes, and bad. The trial is fixed for twelve hours hence. You are accused by Kairon of infernal practices. He has muzzled the pagans by reporting that you have violated their temple. He has obtained from the king an assurance that he will not grant you a pardon. He has intimated to Boreus that he will denounce him under an old law for attempted parricide—because with us a father-in-law is the same as a father, and to put a father in prison is ranked with murder. Oh, he is cunning, is Kairon! There is only one chance for you!"

"And that is?" Tom asked.

"Your one chance," said Patho, "is to get Ra Keem on your side, and you should be able to do that by showing him your knowledge is of Egyptian origin."

Despite the seriousness of the situation, Tom broke into a laugh. The idea of the entertainments at the well-known place of amusement representing the learning of the men who built the Pyramids was too much. He explained matters patiently.

"It would be sheer humbug!" put in Boyton.

"Quite so!" Tom agreed.

"That may be, but the only question that interests me is, would it serve our purpose?" said Blake. "As I'm still sane, my present aim is to keep alive, and then to clear out of this hole at the earliest possible moment."

As some of the words were in English, their force was lost on Patho.

Tom gritted his teeth.

"Oh, have it your own way, but don't blame me if you find yourself overstocked with trouble!" he said.

"Yes, I guess I will have my own way, for once!" Blake returned. Turning to Patho, he added: "See here, my respected friend. We want certain things from the palace; things which belong to us, and not to Kairon or Pontius. How can we get them?"

"I go everywhere in the palace," said Patho meaningly.

"I tumble! Now, Tom, jot down a description of the articles you want—all those conjuring things, I mean. Patho will get them for us."

"And then?"

"THE GOLDEN KEY!" GREAT NEW SERIAL STARTS NEXT MONDAY.

"Can we interview Ra Keem?" he asked, addressing Patho. "I know the priest," returned the dwarf significantly.

Upon this Patho took his leave. Two hours later a servitor arrived at the prison bearing upon his head a huge bundle. Blake opened it eagerly. The dwarf had exceeded his instructions by including a box with miscellaneous contents. Tom looked at the latter carelessly, and then with interest. Certainly they might prove useful.

And then came Ra Keem.

Just as there are men now living in old England who, from the study of a few fossils, call up what may be termed the ghost of the world's dead history, and dream about it, and argue about it until it is more real to them than the present, so was it with Ra Keem and Egypt. His fossils were the collected odds and ends of tradition, and from these he had mentally constructed an Egypt where miracles were the most commonplace occurrences of daily life.

He came in now, his self-importance, and the wish to impress this importance on others, ludicrously struggling with eagerness to learn something new about his land of wonders.

Tom kept silence; the most that he would do would be to allow the others to act as they chose. Will knew too little of the matter to put himself forward. Boyton, with his hands stuck in his pockets, regarded Blake expectantly, and Blake did not disappoint him.

In a most awful mixture of ungrammatical Latin, American slang, and English, our friend let his eloquence gush forth. He and his companions were priests, he said—priests of Isis, but secretly, because just now there was a slump in Isis, and only in this hour of peril had they resolved to make known their high vocation to one who was worthy to be initiated into the mysteries.

They had brought from the temple of Isis certain sacred and magical things; and when they had proven to the venerable Ra Keem that they were indeed what they claimed to be, they would rely on his doing the square thing by them at the forthcoming trial.

At first Ra Keem seemed inclined to be sceptical, or, as Tom put it in an aside to Will—"Not such a glutton for fairy tales as we could wish."

Why had Tom supported Kairon? Why had he advised the displacement of the priests. In short, why had the strangers kept aloof from Ra Keem all this time, and evinced an interest in him only when they stood in danger of death?

"Why, that is the very point!" broke out Blake triumphantly. "Don't you tumble to the notion? Dar we explain the wondrous mysteries of the gods to one not an actual initiate? It was our purpose to prepare the nation for the great change by getting rid of Venus, and Cupid, and all that silly rot, y'know, and then old Isis would have had a real good chance to score."

"Show me of thy boasted magic," said Ra Keem. The words seemed to come as a challenge.

"Why, certainly!" returned Blake. "Only too happy! Everything guaranteed up to sample. See here, I put a penny in that box. Sure it's there? Close the lid, so, and hold it tight. Hey, presto! Open it now. Where's the penny?"

The priest looked at the empty interior of the box, and his eyes widened. In fact, he felt just a little bit afraid.

"Here's another mystery," said Blake. "Egg laid by the favourite hen of the great Pharaoh William Rufus—I mean Rameses. Solid as marble. I put it in a handkerchief, so, and I tap it, so, and say: 'Wee Willie Winkle, why do you wink?'—a most powerful incantation; and when I undo the handkerchief, a mouse runs away on wheels—I mean, quickly!"

And Blake pocketed the imitation animal before Ra Keem could discover its character.

And for the best part of an hour Blake went on with his demonstration of "magical" powers; and at each item Ra Keem's eyes took on a greedier light, but with it there came a look of cunning.

"Is the magic so put in the things that anyone can work these wonders with them, or must the worker himself be a magician?" he asked.

Blake regarded him out of one eye keenly.

"See here, Ra Keem," he said, "if I make you as great an adept as myself, will you guarantee to pull us through this trial? I shall not be telling you any more till I know how we stand."

"And I get all those?" pointing to the pieces of apparatus.

"The cargo, or, to put it like a penny book: All that thou, O priest, hast seen me use."

Ra Keem nodded. He was eager to clinch the bargain.

"I promise my gracious protection at your trial, and I am confident of the result," he said.

Ra Keem was neither shocked nor disappointed as Blake proceeded to tell him "how it was done." Of course, he reasoned, the magical powers had been given the things by the magicians who had made them. All he cared for was the fact that with them he would be able to make Jove, Mercury, Venus, and the other second-rate gods look absolutely silly, for none of them could work these wonders. Kairon should not intimidate him. He would make Isis the most fashionable god in the land.

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"There are your traps, and it's a bargain, mind!" said Blake, as he tied up the trick things in a cloth, and fixed a warning eye on Ra Keem.

Not until the priest had gone did Tom speak. He had been looking over the contents of the box mentioned. These were bottles and packages of chemicals, and pieces of laboratory apparatus.

"Like to see some more magic?" he questioned Will.

"Anything for a change from this! Go ahead!"

Tom poured a few drops of a fuming acid into a small wooden bowl, placed this in one corner of the chamber, and then threw into it a few crystals screwed in a fragment of paper.

Nothing happened.

"Not much magic there!" said Blake.

As the last word was spoken by him there came a loud report, and Blake proved that he could jump backwards.

"Permanganate of potash and sulphuric acid," explained Tom, very quietly. "I don't remember having seen these things before. If there are quantities of them, or of these"—touching one or two bottles—"at the palace, then the less they are meddled with the safer will people be."

The Dry.

The lamps throughout the cities of the land were flooding out a threefold brilliancy. Along highways and byways moved many a throng, and for one goal, Kamurba. The streets of Kamurba itself were draped with the Royal colours, while from pennon after pennon Kairon's cypher, the letter "K," confronted the populace.

It was indeed Kairon's festival. He was about to assume the position of supreme priestly ruler. After much thought he had decided that it would be his best policy to make an alliance with Pontius, and the day's programme had been so designed as to embrace Kairon's own elevation; then his crowning of Pontius, and finally the trial of the "sorcerers."

And that the people might be duly impressed it was intended to have a state procession through the city. On every housetop and on every vacant piece of land temporary structures of wood were reared, and draped or gaudily painted. And as the throng entered the capital it almost literally piled itself up, so that as the hours passed the city in its height and its length looked as if built of human bodies.

And now came the clashing of cymbals, a fanfare of trumpets, a burst of melody. Ten score musicians, clad in white and scarlet, came into view, and at their head a standard-bearer. After the musicians came Kairon, borne aloft in a chair of state, canopied. And as he, too, passed, the light of the city glinted on the armour of warriors, and then upon the glory of Pontius, dimmed by comparison with that of his priestly subject.

And from right and left, from before and behind, there rang out the plaudits of the mob. None rightly understood what it all meant, but it was something to look at. And Kairon and Pontius must be very wonderful, or it wouldn't all be done; and so they cheered and cheered, and, when the procession had passed, waited for the next thing.

The great amphitheatre had been reached. In its centre stood a dais, approached by a flight of forty steps. Here was a throne of gold, and over part of the throne a drape of red and white and purple; and seated on the throne at a certain minute was Kairon, the priest, the while heralds proclaimed to the multitude that he had become pontiff.

And then Kairon rose, and conducted Pontius to a lesser throne on another dais, and, having placed the crown upon his head, bowed before him. And the trumpets rang out again, the cymbals closed once more, the plaudits became deafening, and the cry went up:

"The sorcerers! The sorcerers! To the trial! The sorcerers!"

Then the soldiers brought Tom and his companions into the great arena.

A trial! It was a very farce of justice; a slander upon it, for he who prosecuted was Kairon, he who witnessed against the accused was Kairon, and it was the same fanatic who finally pronounced the verdict of guilty, and who gave sentence of death. The king said naught, but sat with cynical contempt on his face. The accused said nothing, for at their first attempt at speech Kairon had bidden them as "devil-worshippers" keep silence; and Ra Keem was absent.

The wily Egyptian priest had determined to let the strangers perish, and so ensure their silence. He would keep these magical things for use in his own good time, and would announce them to the people as the especial gifts of Isis to himself. He might even invent a plausible story of the god appointing him supreme ruler of all priests.

Tom and his companions were led away to the prison. A

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few hours hence they were to suffer a public execution at the stake.

"But first"—Kairon had said—"all that you have—all your possessions—shall be publicly burnt; so shall the land be purged of wizardcraft."

"See here, old sport"—Tom returned in mixed Latin and English—"if you touch those things something will happen to you, and don't blame me!"

But something was to happen before then, for even as the news went forth that the sorcerers had been condemned, tens of thousands of bodies rose on the gimorack stand to get a clearer view of the criminals on their return to prison; tens of thousands of necks were craned for the same purpose; and one, more venturesome than his fellows, climbed the pedestal bearing a lamp upon a high roof, and sent lamp, pedestal, and his own body crashing over to where there flaunted a cloud of gaudy draperies. They were ablaze in an instant, and as the people near them shrieked and rose, the flimsy woodwork cracked and yielded, and the crowd fell upon the massed people below.

Horror came on horror, for those not crushed in the roadway sought to escape, and the way being blocked, they climbed up as best they could to where other flimsy structures stood, and some of these fell. Then the swaying, shrieking populace, stricken with terror, pushed on blindly, trampling upon all who fell.

And now upon this scene of true "frightfulness" there came further tragedy, presaged by the cry:

"The river devils! The river devils!"

It was true! Vaster than any mammoth that modern science has restored from fossil fragments, with gleaming teeth, each like an elephant's tusk in size, with hides having huge callosities, and with a tread that shook the earth, the monsters—five in number—came on.

Rarely had these tenants of the wilds made their appearance amid the dwellings of men; never before in such hideous manner as now. As they crushed they advanced, and as they advanced they tore and mangled, more from blood lust than hunger.

The guards escorting our friends had seen the first signs of confusion in the streets, and, fearing a rescue, had taken their prisoners by another route, and they were safely under Tra's care before the great horror came upon Kamurba.

The roars and the shrieks went forward. They came to the great amphitheatre; they surged up to where king and priest sat.

Many a worshipper of the old pagan deities whispered that it was their vengeance which had fallen on Kamurba. Someone raised the whisper to a shout, and almost in an instant a thousand voices roared:

"Give us back the gods! Down with Kairon!"

"It is the work of the sorcerers!" cried the priest, rising. "It is the work of those four evil beings. When they are dead you will have peace for all time. The land shall flow with plenty."

The storm of noise lulled. The ravening beasts fled, gorged with human flesh, and their rage dulled. The city quieted, but everywhere there went forth the cry:

"It is the sorcerers!"

The Approaching Doom.

Tom flung himself on a pile of rugs, and looked at Blake, a half contemptuous smile on his face.

"It didn't go well—that business with Ra Keem," he said.

The American snarled an imprecation on the treacherous priest.

Boyton stood with pale face and compressed lips. He had fought his way out of many a tight place, but here he felt like a rat in a trap. Will alone seemed unconcerned. He whistled a tune, and on Tra entering the chamber told him to hurry up with something to eat.

But the news that Tra brought made all forget their moods. It was a tale of horror, so appalling that to the companions their own impending fate seemed by comparison negligible.

"And they blame you!" said Tra. Upon which he explained his meaning.

"What they think or do is no concern of mine," said Tom. "Burnt I will not be while there are other ways of dying. Heard you anything of the other burning—that of our possessions, I mean?"

Tra nodded gloomily.

"They say that Boreus has arranged for a huge fire to be built near the vortex," he returned. "The things are to be placed there, and surrounded with resinous wood. Oil will be poured over all, and then the structure will be set ablaze."

Tom almost jumped. Then by an effort he restrained himself.

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He spoke a few words in English to his companions, and turning to the gaoler, said impressively:

"As you value your life, do not go near that fire. Get away from it, Tra, as far away as you can, and take your wife and child. There will be danger."

"Magician," said Tra, "I am not to be driven from my post of duty by any danger. But I owe you a debt. When the city sleeps I will pay you in full."

Hours passed. The meal had been eaten. The companions, wearied more in mind than in body, were sleeping. The city had passed to silence. Stealthily, as one who commits a crime, the gaoler entered the chamber of the companions, and shook Tom gently.

Tom rose.

"Rather early for the festivities, isn't it?" he queried coolly.

"Wake!" said Tra, in a whisper, passing to the next sleeper and shaking him.

Tom gazed at the gaoler curiously. Some glimmering of the truth had entered his mind.

And then it indeed flashed home, for Tra had thrown wide the door, and was beckoning.

The companions followed him as he moved silently down a lengthy passage. Near the great doors of the prison he handed Tom a large package.

"Food and drink—the best I could do," he said simply. Then, as one who wishes every word to sink into the memory of his hearers, he said: "Make for the far lands of the place. There is only danger yonder; but here there is certain death!"

"And you—will you not get into grave trouble through this?" asked Tom.

"It may be, magician; it may not be. The gods know. I owe a debt, and I have paid it."

"By the great Columbus, Tra, your soul is all white, whatever your skin may be!" said Blake huskily. "Come with us!"

Tra shook his head.

"My wife and my child come even before my friends," he returned. "It may be that we shall meet, for I am sick of the cities and their ways. But now I must return, for there are many things to be done. Fare ye well!"

And with the words the noble-hearted pagan soldier closed the great door behind them.

"The far lands!" There was no difficulty in knowing the direction of travel, for they lay yonder, where narrow paths turned from main roads, and the paths ceased in scarcely-trodden tracks, and these were lost in stretches of moorland, beyond which lay forest and hill.

With many a thought of gratitude to the man who had helped them, the friends sped on their way, each taking it in turn to carry the package of food and drink. They were not safe on road or path; they knew that even the moorland offered no secure place. It was for the forest they must make.

By the time they had reached it the cymbals and trumpets were again busy in Kamurba; the citizens were being summoned to the burning of the great tools of wizardcraft. Kairon, borne aloft, and robed as his mad fancy dictated was fitting, headed a lengthy procession, and was set down near what appeared to be a monster unlighted bonfire.

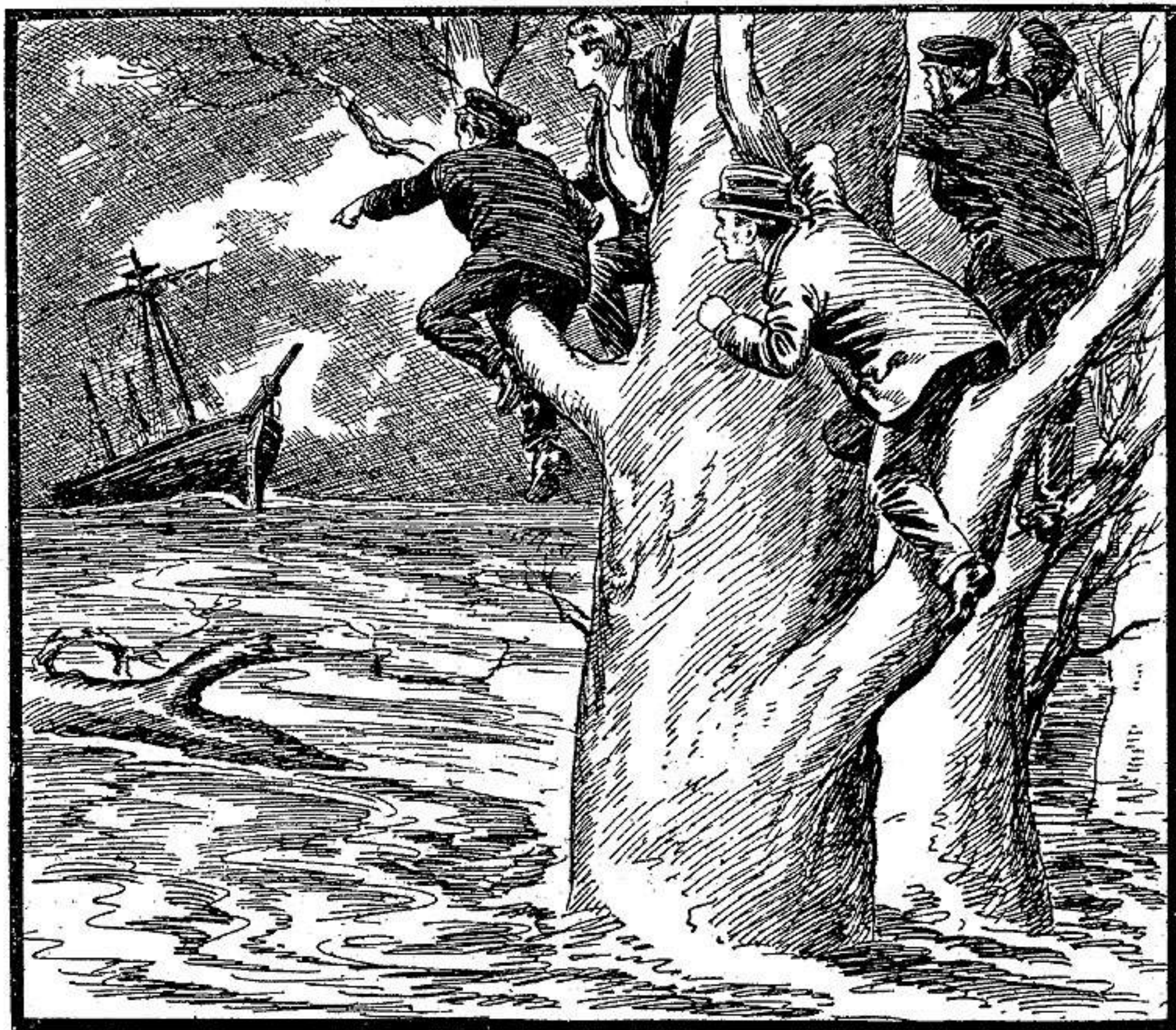
About him was a guard of soldiers; Pontius had obstinately refused to come, but had allowed his captain of the guard to represent him. It was an impressive, wild spectacle, filled with barbaric pomp.

Then came the supreme moment. Kairon himself would fire the pile. No wizardcraft could avail against his holy self; and so, torch in hand, he approached, thrust the blazing resinous thing he held among the dried grasses at the foot of the pile, drew back majestically, and stood with triumph on his face; it was the great purification!

Higher and higher crawled the flames, and now they leaped and wrappd about the thing they consumed as a reddish-golden garment, and the excitement of the populace found vent in loud plaudits, and the eyes of the priest had a blaze of their own.

Suddenly from within the pile came what none ever lived to know—a crack, a roar, a blinding something that spread outwards and upwards, and shook the mighty rocks, and scattered limbs, heads, torn trunks, as dust is scattered by the wind; and then upon this crash after crash, a hissing as of ten thousand engines, a shaking of the earth as a tree is shaken to bring down its fruit, and the downrush of one mighty volume of water, which seemed to fill all space, rolled over land and river, bore high the old hull of the brig, and went on and on as a vast wave, ever deepening.

In the very front of all was the old brig. How it raced over hidden road and field, and swirled by on the torrent as the walls of houses fell!



They saw the oncoming water and the brig coming nearer to them, and as they frantically climbed tree-trunks to escape death by drowning, the brig was brought up against a resisting mass of tree-branches.

And then, as our friends stood at the edge of the forest wondering what this thing had been which had hurled them down, they saw the oncoming water; saw the brig, too, saw it nearing them, and, as they frantically climbed tree-trunks to avoid immediate death by drowning, the brig was brought up against a resisting mass of tree-branches.

Tom said no word, but leaped on board; his companions followed him.

Oh, it was no time for speech—this moment of peril, and of a chance for life! Instinctively Boyton grasped at a floating branch—a huge piece of wood—and poled the craft from the tree to the open.

Onward still, even to where, skirting the forest, the land rose; and now there came a hill, and at its summit, far, far overhead, a dim light.

"As there's a Providence, that is daylight!" said Blake.

They knew not; perchance it was. And, staking all on this, Boyton moved his craft as best he could to where the force of the onrush slackened. Higher and higher; the hill was being mounted, though never a foot had trodden its almost glassy surface. It seemed too wonderful for truth; but it was truth. Overhead, distant from the hill summit by scarce six feet, was an opening in the rocks; jagged, brush-covered, and slanting outwards at an angle that promised the climber a way of escape.

And then, as in the intensity of their relief the companions clasped hands, they heard a shout, and, turning, saw Tom, and not alone, for on the tree-trunk which supported him were his wife and child.

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Oh, how eagerly hands were held out to help him to a place on the brig! And with what joy all stood presently on the hill-crest!

And it was the tree-trunk that alone secured the ultimate safety of all, for, promising though the fissure looked for climbing, there lay a space between it and the hill-summit that, without the aid of the tree, they could not have passed.

In safety now! Think of it—in the sweet light of day, with the sun rising yonder, and a sea-breeze playing upon them! That was the first thought of all. But the second was put into words by Blake when he asked the question:

"Where in thunder are we?"

Conclusion.

Rock; just hard, uncompromising rock, with not enough growth of vegetation on it to feed one goat. Greyish-brown, cruel-looking rock, extending for miles, slightly hollowed, and rough in the sense that it was strewn with boulders and fragments of every size.

The companions looked at one another questioningly. Then Tom found his tongue, and his answer to Blake solved the problem:

"Why, we're above the cliffs at the uninhabited part of the old island," he said.

"But we can't be," said Will. "The island is small, and we've been carried fifty miles, if one, down below."

"The land below is not of the same size as the island," re-

turned Tom, in a tone of finality. "It goes far under the sea down there, and we travelled in a semicircle."

"We'll soon find out where we are," put in Boyton.

He stepped out, the others following, to where in the distance the rock shut out a view of everything save the sky. And now the ground became rising, the sea began to reveal itself, and at length, by lying down and craning their necks, they could see below the foot of the cliff and the spume of the breakers.

"We're there, sure!" said Blake.

"And that—that almost hidden by the bluff—it's the Nancy!" shouted Tom.

Oh, it was the Nancy right enough! They saw that it was the old ship so soon as their necks had again been stretched over the cliff edge in another part.

But how to get down to it was the puzzle of puzzles.

It was Tra who solved it by finding a dried watercourse—evidently a channel worn in the rocks by the rains through countless centuries.

It was a narrow way, and perilous, almost hidden, but if it were travelled in safety it would lead them to where the Nancy could be boarded.

"I will go first," said Boyton.

And all, recognising his right as a shipmaster, and therefore their future commander if they succeeded in their undertaking, let him have his way.

Well, it was accomplished, this perilous descent. More than once it looked as if death would claim them, after all; but Fate willed it otherwise, and there came a moment when the seven friends—for, of course, the baby counted—stood on the Nancy's deck.

Tra and his wife gazed about them in wonder. This vast expanse of water; this roof of blue, with the "great lamp," as they termed the sun; these screaming sea birds, and the ship itself, half frightened them.

"Another," said Tra in Latin, and pointed.

Tom looked. A mistake? A piece of wreckage? A mass of weed? No; a genuine, ocean-going steamer on the horizon, nearing them moment by moment, heading directly for them.

Shouting would have been useless, but how the friends waved!

Sickening moments of doubt came, in which they knew not whether the ship was still heading for the island, or had changed her course. But now all doubt had vanished, for answering signals proved that they were seen.

The steamer lay to a quarter of a mile from the rocks, and lowered a boat. With each pull of the oars by the sturdy sailors Tom grew more tense; then his voice broke out in exultation—a half-sobbing note of triumph:

"Guardie! Guardie!"

There are scenes too sacred for description; moments so filled with emotion that no words can convey their meaning. For ten brief seconds Tom was clasped in his guardian's arms. Then the elder man turned to Will, and gripped his hand.

"Let us get on board the Dora!" he said huskily.

"These are my good and true friends, sir," said Tom, indicating Boyton, Blake, Tra, and the wife of the late gaoler.

"Welcome all—welcome all!" said Mr. Delaville. "Come, let us hurry! We have other friends awaiting us!"

"Not old Dolly?"

But it was "old Dolly," otherwise Dora, and the man who came from the deckhouse leaning on a stick was Peter Sallowby.

"At this rate we shall never get through with our stories," said Mr. Delaville, half laughingly, as questions and answers crossed. "Now, Tom, you begin yours, and finish it!"

And then Tom, sparing Boyton as much as possible, and never mentioning Blake as having had a hand in the kidnapping of Will and himself, told his story.

"And gems, sir!" he ended by saying. "What price these?"—with which he poured out on the saloon table the contents of his pockets.

"And what price these, sir?" added Will, following suit.

"To which I add my contribution," said Boyton, suiting his action to his speech.

"And I mine," joined in Blake, with a generous gift.

"There, sir," said Tom—"they are all yours to do as you choose with."

Mr. Delaville gazed at the heap of gems almost in awe.

"One half shall go to the Great Southern Bank people," he said. "As for the others, you, my boys, shall have them in equal shares."

"Agreed, with a slight amendment, sir," said Tom. "You will share equally with us."

"As you wish," returned Mr. Delaville.

He was too joyous at Tom's safety to think of gems.

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It was not till the steamer was well under way, and our hero and Tom were closeted alone with Mr. Delaville, that he told his own story.

"You must know," he said, "that when you failed to return from that journey to Deptford I thought you had been persuaded into joining the Army. So we—Dora and I—waited for a letter; but as the days went by I thought of our old friend Marsella."

Tom laughed.

"And it was to Marsella I became indebted, for he found out about two boys having got into a row at Deptford, and he was told something about the Nancy, and something about our good friend Mr. Blake. Well, by putting one and one together he arrived at a conclusion, Tom, which, seeing that I have found you, seems to have been about as true as it could be."

"And you think dad will be let alone, sir?" asked Will.

"I know it, my boy. I have Sir Samuel's promise for it. He had every faith in the island story, and paid all the expenses of this search trip. For good luck we renamed the ship after your sister."

"He would have lost his money if we hadn't got swept into that river," said Tom.

"Well, well, the danger is over. And, to tell the truth, I dare not think of the perils you have passed through!"

Many such talks they had, and sometimes Peter was with them, and more than once Tra, who from the store of his memory told strange legends of his race.

An uneventful voyage, some may say. Uneventful! A voyage filled with marvels of fact so romantic that it made ordinary fiction seem commonplace.

And, to tell the plain truth, all had already seen as many perils as they cared to. One may have a surfeit even of adventures, and all our good friends wanted now was rest in peaceful old England.

It was a proud Charles Delaville who, when the voyage was over, and the gems had been valued and stored in the Bank of England, handed Sir Samuel the valuation certificate.

"Nine millions sterling," it said simply.

"Six I give to the bank, and three I keep," said Mr. Delaville; and added quaintly: "That will be one million each for Tom, Will, and your lately distrusted cashier. Quite enough, Sir Samuel, to keep them from starvation!"

And it was a glorified Great Southern Bank that rose from the commercial ashes of its predecessor. It was a dignified Peter Sallowby who accepted some nominal post, in which he looked very big, and did very little; but not any of the officials were so jolly or free from swank as the two young directors, Tom Hereward and Will Sallowby, each of whom had one million invested in the great business.

And what of Tra? Poor Tra—faithful, noble-hearted Tra! It was all at first so strange to him that there were moments when he wished himself back among the crudities and superstitions and idols of the Underworld; but the strangeness passed, and he came to know men learned in the lore of the dead ages, who made him feel that they had become his brothers.

Nor was Marsella forgotten by the friends, as he would tell you if asked, at the same time pointing to a splendid ruby ring on his finger, and tapping his bank book, which also told a story.

Often the adventurers discussed with learned men the probable fate of the dwellers in the Underworld. Our friends know, for the learned have told them that the great flood which wrought their deliverance was due to that fearful explosion rending the rocks, and so letting the water of the descending river pour upon the volcano fires, the steam resulting from which ripped the world open.

"The safe is full, sir," said a clerk one day at the bank to its manager when asked to store a parcel of securities in a special receptacle.

"What is its letter?" questioned Sir William.

"K," replied the clerk.

"That was not the answer you gave me on a certain occasion, Hereward," said the manager.

"What? I don't quite understand," returned the young director.

"You said, 'The safe is empty, sir.' Another story now, my boy!"

"Thank goodness, yes! The strong-room is full to bursting!" Tom returned.

And so was Tom Hereward's heart.

THE END.

(Commences next Monday—"THE GOLDEN KEY!" by T. C. Bridges. A splendid new serial story. Order your copy of the MAGNET Library in advance.

"THE GOLDEN KEY!" GREAT NEW SERIAL STARTS NEXT MONDAY.

BRITAIN'S MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMEN PRAISE "HARLENE HAIR-DRILL."

Remarkable Endorsement of MISS ELLALINE TERRISS'S Striking Announcement

MAMMOTH NEW YEAR GIFT TO THE NATION. 1,000,000 FOUR-FOLD COMPLETE "HAIR-DRILL" OUTFITS.

FREE: 1. A Trial Bottle of "Harlene-for-the-Hair." | 3. A Supply of "Cremex" Shampoo Powder
2. A Bottle of "Uzon" Brilliantine. | 4. The secret "Hair-Drill" Manual.

THE remarkable announcement that appeared recently in the public Press by that charming and beautiful actress, Miss Ellaline Terriss, has aroused enormous interest, and the wonderful testimony given to the great value of the now-famous "Harlene Hair-Drill" method of securing and maintaining hair beauty has been immediately followed by a host of letters from all parts of the Kingdom.

The daintiest of leading actresses, whose beauty is a household word, the most handsome of actors, have written to endorse everything that Miss Ellaline



Miss Phyllis Monkman
(Photo: Bassano)
pays her tribute to Edwards' "Harlene," and most confidently advises those who desire hair beauty to follow her example.

Terriss has said.

Others who have testified to the value of "Harlene" or the other delightful preparations emanating from this famous house are the following:—

**THE MARCHIONESS OF HEADFORT
LADY DE BATHE (LILY LANGTRY)**

MARY MOORE

CONSTANCE COLLIER

EDNA MAY

ELSIE JANIS

JULIA NEILSON

MAUD JEFFRIES

ETHEL LEVEY

YVONNE ARNAUD

ELISE CRAVEN

MRS. BROWN - POTTER

Mlle. SUZANNE ADAMS

CONSTANCE STEWART

ELSIE SMETHURST

A WONDERFUL HAIR BEAUTY GIFT.

Mr. Edwards has decided to make a great National New Year Gift, and is preparing no less than the colossal number of 1,000,000 Four-Fold "Harlene Hair-Drill" Gift parcels for free distribution.

This is the gift that awaits your acceptance, and all you have to do to secure it is to post the form given below:—

1. A bottle of "Harlene" a true liquid food for the hair, which stimulates it to new growth.
2. A packet of the marvellous hair and scalp cleansing "Cremex" Shampoo which prepares the head for "Hair-Drill."

3. A bottle of "Uzon" Brilliantine, which gives a final touch of beauty to the hair.

4. The secret "Hair-Drill" manual giving complete instructions for carrying out this two-minutes-a-day scientific hair-growing exercise.

You can always obtain further supplies of "Harlene" from your chemist at 1s., 2s. 6d., or 4s. 6d. per bottle; "Uzon" Brilliantine at 1s., 2s. 6d.; "Cremex" at 1s. per box of seven shampoos (single packets, 2d. each).

If ordered direct from Edwards' Harlene Company, any of the preparations will be sent post free on remittance. Carriage extra on foreign orders



Miss Marie Lohr
(Photo: Bassano)
says: "I should like to add my tribute to your very excellent 'Harlene Hair-Drill.' It is always present on my dressing-table."



Photo: Weather & Day

Millions of people have taken delight in the charm of Miss Ellaline Terriss and her fascinating art. To-day this world-famous actress gives advice which will enable everyone to double their attractiveness and charm. The secret is "Harlene Hair-Drill" in connection with which a Four-Fold Gift awaits your acceptance. Fill in and post form given here.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

An innovation that will be much appreciated by travellers, and, incidentally, soldiers and sailors at home and abroad, is announced by Mr. Edwards' introduction of "Solidified Harlene," which can more conveniently be carried in one's portmanteau or equipment than when in liquid form in a bottle.

In addition to the popular Liquid "Edwards' Harlene," Solidified "Harlene" is now on sale at all chemists in tins at 2s. 9d., or supplies may be obtained post free on remittance

direct from Edwards' Harlene Company, 20-26, Lamb's Conduit Street, London, W.C.

"HARLENE HAIR-DRILL" GIFT COUPON.

Fill in and post to **EDWARDS' HARLENE CO.,**
20-26, Lamb's Conduit Street, London, W.C.

Dear Sirs,—Please send me your free "Harlene" Four-Fold Hair-Growing Outfit. I enclose 4d. stamps for postage to any part of the world. (Foreign stamps accepted.)

Name

Address

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," 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:

"COKER'S ENGAGEMENT!"

By Frank Richards.

Next Monday's grand, long, complete story of school life is bound to be particularly admired, since it introduces popular Phyllis Howell, the vivacious Cliff House heroine, who made such a pronounced hit in "School and Sport." As will be deduced from the title, the great Coker falls violently in love, and makes himself the laughing-stock of Greyfriars in general and the Remove Form in particular. It is Wibley, the clever schoolboy impersonator, who succeeds in bringing about a dramatic termination to

"COKER'S ENGAGEMENT!"

"MAGNET" STORY COMPETITION RESULT.

At last the herculean task of judging well-nigh a thousand stories is accomplished. Early and late a committee of skilled authors has been at work, with the result that I am now enabled to announce the result of the contest.

The award of Fifteen Pounds for the best 30,000 word story, written in the style of Frank Richards, and dealing with the immortal Harry Wharton & Co., has been awarded to

ROBERT LANGLEY,

233, Lynton Road,

Bermondsey, S.E.,

whose story was excellent from every point of view.

Magnificent consolation prizes have been awarded to the following competitors, whose stories showed considerable merit:

- David F. Crosby, 12, Hesse Mount, Hyde Park, Leeds.
Despatch-Rider J. R. Holden, St. John's Rectory, Moston, Manchester.
H. Panton, 2, Summercourt Road, Southend-on-Sea.
W. L. Catchpole, 59, Lutterworth Road, Northampton.
C. H. Myers, 20, St. Clair Street, Peterson Road, Wakefield.
Miss Enid M. Godbold, 319, Barking Road, Plaistow.
J. D. Whittaker, 21, Woodhall Terrace, Thornbury, Bradford.
John J. Offard, 9, High Street, Kilsyth, Scotland.
W. E. Dyer, 23, Devonshire Road, Redland, Bristol.
Bruce Hamilton, Leslie Villa, Woodland Road, Hassocks, Sussex.
Miss Denise Waltham, 24, Amptill Square, London, N.W.
Miss Lucille Lowther, Blantyre, Cheam Common, Worcester Park.
C. C. Middleditch, 11, Princes Street, Southend-on-Sea.
Wilfred A. Sparrow, 6, Clonmore Street, Southfield.
L. Ely, 5, Stanley Grove, Topping Street, Blackpool.
W. Entwistle, junr., 42, Brighton Terrace, Ringsend Road, Dublin.
Martin C. Walker, 28, Park Road, Upper Baker Street, London, W.
Miss D. M. Everdale Hawks, Moor Croft, Renfrew.
Miss Vera Maden, 18, Grandidge Street, Rochdale.
Frederick Fatkin, 639, 19th Avenue East, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
Robert Fatkin, 639, 19th Avenue East, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
P. Hall, 154, Ladbroke Grove, North Kensington, W.
Miss Connie Harris, 9, Holmdale Road, West Hampstead, N.W.
Miss D. Hurtley, 14, Linwood Grove, Longsight, Manchester.

The above-mentioned prize-winners are not placed in any order of merit.

In accordance with the conditions of the competition, a consolation gift, lesser in value than those won by the above-

mentioned, has been awarded to every other unsuccessful competitor. As there are so many hundreds of them, space precludes me from publishing the names and addresses of the recipients—an omission which I feel sure my chums will readily pardon.

Although the adjudication of the numerous stories was no light task, it was rendered very interesting by the unquestioned merit of many of the tales; and at least half a dozen competitors who have been awarded consolation prizes came close behind Master Langley.

On the whole, the competition proved an immense success. The winner of the premier prize is to be cordially congratulated; while those whose plucky efforts failed to hit the bullseye should bear in mind that they have accomplished a hefty task with every credit, and hold themselves in readiness for another competition on similar lines later on.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

H. B. (Sheffield).—You are right. Mr. Richards should not have made woollen goods come from Manchester. But it was only a slip of the pen. He knows more than that.

K. P. (Hull).—Thanks for getting new readers. Places named are imaginary. There are prizes for storyettes in the "Boys' Friend" also. No room for such a page in the "Magnet."

J. R. (Glasgow).—The "Dreadnought" ceased because it failed to get enough support. Bunter's weight depends a good deal upon his financial condition.

H. J. (Hull).—Cannot say whether Kildare or Wingate is the better boxer. Dr. Holmes is something over fifty. A story of Talbot's past would hardly be a St. Jim's story, would it? Place named is imaginary.

C. W. (Boston).—"Tom Merry's Weekly" will not be much longer delayed, I hope.

H. H. C. (Bridlington).—Look through the Supplement given with the Christmas Number, and you will be able to pick out all the prefects.

Jack Smith.—Cannot reply next week, because next week's number is already printed before letters come to hand. Glad you have converted your chum into a reader.

L. T. (Melbourne).—No good hoping for Loder's reformation. Hope to give Colonial readers a chance in a competition before long.

F. S. (Southend).—Thanks for friendly letter. No room to print it, however.

C. M. (Commercial Road).—You want to know my name, age, and residence at once, you say. Well, most readers of my papers know my name; as for my age and where I live, I really think that these are personal matters which scarcely concern other people. Esmond and Russell may be given prominence later; cannot say when. The best athlete in the Remove? Wharton, Cherry, Vernon-Smith, and Peter Todd are all so good that it is hard to choose among them.

Norman Crampton (Seedley).—Please accept my heartiest thanks for real good service rendered in getting twenty-five readers for the "Herald." It's great! I have not room to publish your letter, but I hereby notify the slandering cads that you hold them in utter contempt. Many thanks for good wishes also.

W. H. (Halifax).—You shall have an answer this time, though, by the way, you didn't ask any questions. Glad you are so keen on my papers. May you long continue so!

W. P. (Halifax).—Cannot say exactly; but it's several shillings a day—a much higher rate than Tommy Atkins.

R. W. (Dingle).—Let me have your address, and you shall have a parcel of back numbers for your soldier friends.

(Continued on page IV of Cover.)



FRED BURTON,
Ramegate.



A. WHITE,
Fulham.



"A. S.,"
Leith, Scotland.



TEDDY HANKS,
Carnarvon.



JOHN BULL,
Holborn.



Driver J. CRAVEN,
A.S.C. Barracks, Woolwich.



MASTER TREVOR BOOTH,
Freshfield, Lancs.



J. CRISTOL,
Dublin.



"A keen girl reader of
the MAGNET."



MISS SOPHIA JONES,
London.



An appreciative boy reader
of "Chuckles."



"F. H.," of Southwark,
engrossed in a copy of the
"Boys' Friend" 3d. Library.



G. WILLIAMS,
Carnarvon.



DAVID JONES,
Carnarvon.



MISS BETTY MARTIN,
Bottle.



CYRIL SHORE,
Leicester.



W. PERRY,
New Southgate.

REPLIES IN BRIEF—continued.

F. B. (Hastings).—Thanks for suggestion. But it is better not to have a school serial in the "Magnet." Readers like a change.

H. M. (S. Australia).—Yes, the Shell is higher than the Remove. The Remove is really the Lower Fourth, but would be equal to the Upper Fourth at St. Jim's.

"Australian" (Adelaide).—In reply to your queries (i) No; imaginary. (ii) No; fictitious.

N. D. G. (S. Australia).—Sorry Australian readers could not compete in the "Magnet" Story Competition. But they can try their luck in the "Greyfriars Herald," which is open to accept stories from readers—of course, if good enough.

C. J. S.—The only way to make a start in the acting line without the risk of giving up your present work to seek an engagement—which, being without experience, you probably would not get—is to join some amateur dramatic society. Remember that you have no good grounds for belief in your ability till it has been tested.

"A Loyal Reader" (Sunderland).—Fourpence in stamps sent to this office will bring you "The Boy Without a Name."

A. E. D. (Deptford) and "Griff" (Mumbles) are thanked for their enthusiastic letters about "S. and S."

"A Loyal Haverhill Reader."—You ask why Mr. Richards generally brings acting, pantomimes, and so on into a double number? I don't think he does. What about "Schoolboys Never Shall be Slaves," and plenty of other double number successes? A new competition is now being considered. But these things mean a lot of extra work, and we are short-handed, you know.

T. C. (Chorlton-on-Medlock).—Thanks for your support of the "G. H."

"A Loyal Reader" (Barnsley).—You say "'The Pride of the Ring' is the best tale in the 'Herald,' and so are all the others!" Are you Irish, or is it a dead-heat?

"A Patient Patriot."—Shouldn't wonder if you were right. Anyway, it's a good guess.

S. E. (Larkhall).—I welcome you as a new reader already determined to stick staunchly to the paper.

R. E. P. (Cleethorpes).—Thanks for photo, which shall be used. Glad to hear your Boys' Brigade supports the companion papers.

J. R. S. (Kirkcaldy).—Glad to hear that your father as well as yourself enjoyed "The Boy Without a Name."

C. W. N. (Sutton, Surrey).—If Bob Cherry gets laid up, you would evidently make a good locum tenens as Fighting Editor. Some of the minor characters had to be omitted from the Supplement.

"Two Boy Messengers."—Phyllis Howell will appear in future "Magnet" yarns.

D. S. (Glasgow) thinks "S. and S." the best yarn he ever read. So do lots of others!

D. P. (Bournemouth).—Glad to hear your back numbers help to cheer our wounded soldiers.

"Incognito."—Joe Frayne is still at St. Jim's.

Ida G. (Jesmond).—Your mother took the right and fair course when she agreed to read one or two of the companion papers before condemning them. I wish everybody else who objects to them would follow her example! Now she thinks them very good—as they are. Title par. quite fair, but we cannot publish a lot of these.

Miss E. A. H. (Ipswich).—So Bob Cherry is your favourite? Shall be glad to have your photo.

Jack Smith.—Pleased you were pleased with tuck-hamper.

"An Enthusiastic Schoolgirl."—Glad to hear your father reads the companion papers. I understand Miss Wilhelmina has left Cliff House.

"A Tipton Reader."—To increase your strength, improve your wind, etc., you should go in for exercises. There are plenty of cheap books published describing them. It is impossible to tell you much in a paragraph. Glad to hear the "M." and "G." have had such a good effect in inducing you to give up bad habits.

"A Wharton Admirer."—It is not easy to answer such questions as yours. Wharton, Cherry, and Vernon-Smith are all fine, all-round athletes. Wharton may be the best cricketer, but not by very much. Bob Cherry is the best fighter, and perhaps the best swimmer. There are several good sprinters, with not a great deal to choose among them. You are not the only one who wants to hear more of the *lag* contingent.

F. A. (Petersfield) thinks "The Pride of the Ring" is "the pick of the bunch."

E. W. B. C. (Aintree).—You are "some" querist! (1) Inky is so called because of his dark face. (2) Trotter is about fifteen. (3) Bob Cherry is capable of licking anybody in the Remove, though Peter Todd did once give him a set-back. (4) Kipps, Mauleverer, and Wibley are all getting a fair show, I think. (5) Study the stories. You will find in them particulars as to the studies to which your favourites belong.

"A Girl Reader" (Brighouse).—Very glad to hear that the "Magnet," the "Greyfriars Herald," and the "Gem" are all so much to your taste. You say "Tom Merry's Weekly" can't be better than the "Herald." But the Terrible Three are quite sure it's going to be, so look out for something really great! Lucky to have a hill near you suitable for tobogganing. There are not too many such in this country.

"A Regular Reader" (one of scores of thousands! Why not think out a better pseudonym?).—Have you read "School and Sport" and "The Boy Without a Name"? There is no 3d. book about "How the Famous Five Duped the Huns," and news of the event has not yet come through to us.

"Patriot" (Bristol).—As you say you have solved the Chuckles-Club code, you really ought to become a member, don't you think?

"Three Grimsby Chums."—There is little to choose between Tom Merry and Harry Wharton as footballers. In the Replies in Brief, both here and in the "Gem," you will find names of soldiers who would be glad to have back numbers. You can find out cost of sending at any post-office.

H. B. (Stratford).—Why on earth should we have stories in the "Herald" which have already appeared in a Sunday paper? They would not be suitable, and we prefer to give our readers new matter. Some fellows do want queer things!

A. W. (Liverpool).—The difficulty about introducing new "Magnet" characters is that Mr. Richards has already so many to handle. The Liverpoolian would naturally have to be a good sort, or Liverpool wouldn't take to him. But most of the Greyfriars fellows are good sorts, and he would not provide the needed variety.

"Faithful Magnetite" (Banbury).—It is only once in a way we have space to print a letter. I note that you think the grumblers' screeds should be consigned to the w.p.b. Some of them are, without mention; but some fairly ask for a dusting-down, and they get it.

E. C.—Oh, really! We shall have to put the extinguisher on the "Herald" if many people adopt your views. You don't see why anybody should pay a penny for the "Magnet" when the "G. H." at a halfpenny is just as good. Look at it another way. Is there any reason why we shouldn't charge a penny for the "G. H."? It's worth it, and we are practically giving every buyer a halfpenny a week bonus—2s. 2d. a year, and a fortune if you can only live long enough!

G. C. B. (Carlisle).—What do I think of you as a poet? Well, I don't think! 'Nuff said!

"An Irish Colleen."—H. W. and F. N. send their compliments.

V. T. (Sweetsbury, Quebec).—Thanks for a very friendly and loyal letter.

E. B. (Ware).—No chance of badges till war is over.

E. Jenkins.—Glad you like "The Pride of the Ring." You are not the only one!

L. M. (Kirkdale).—Thanks for photo of your chum. Shall be pleased to have yours also.

"Semper, Madem" (Leicester).—So you like the new "Magnet" cover better than that familiar friend the old one? The change has not hurt us a bit, but I think the old one caught one's eye more quickly on a newsagent's counter. "School and Sport" is, as you say, first-class.

S. H. T. (Newton St. Faith's).—Nugent was in love only a few weeks ago. Perhaps it may be Wharton's turn next; but not just yet, I think.

"Winifred" (Cambridge).—How much does W. G. B. weigh? Well, that depends. Do you mean after or before taking all the tuck he can get hold of?

A. H. and W. V. (Portsmouth).—I think your good town is free from the grumbling grouchers. No, we don't supply bound volumes of the "Magnet." It is quite easy to get the numbers bound. Vernon-Smith is a better forward than Bob Cherry, but Bob is better in his favourite place at half-back.

"A Loyal Fifth-Former" (Alton).—Good luck to your conversion league! Glad you found "S. and S." more than worth waiting for.

J. R. (Southport) says "S. and S."—I really can't write it out every time, and you will all understand—was A 1. Hear, hear!

A. McC. (Evesham).—The appearance of "Tom Merry's Weekly" will help your finances, you think, by enabling you to do without the "Gem." It does not seem altogether a sufficient reason for bringing it out. But there are others. We shall see. Hope your pocket-money will soon get a rise.

Your Editor