

A SPLIT IN THE STUDY!

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



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WHARTON TO THE RESCUE!

(An Extraordinary Scene in the Splendid Long Complete Tale of School Life in this Issue.)

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MY READERS' PAGE

OUR COMPANION PAPERS:

"THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1d., Every Monday. "THE GEM" LIBRARY, 1d., Every Wednesday. "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d., COMPLETE LIBRARY, "THE PENNY POPULAR," 1d., Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Price 1d., Every Saturday.

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

For Next Monday:

"THE SENTENCE OF THE SCHOOL!"

By Frank Richards.

Next week's splendid story should appeal very specially to Scots readers, for Donald Ogilvy of the Remove, a plucky and staunch North Briton of the best type, plays the leading part in it. Not very much has been heard of Ogilvy in recent Greyfriars yarns; but full amends for any neglect of the one Scots junior at the school is made in this great story. Billy Bunter also figures in an important, though not a very favourable, role. Temple of the Fourth is still another character of whom more than usual is seen, and Dick Russell shows up prominently. Ogilvy fights with Temple, and is beaten; he is sent to Coventry by the practically unanimous verdict of the whole Lower School; and yet he keeps the reader's sympathy all through. For while beaten he is not disgraced, and he could have saved himself from the contempt of his school-fellows quite easily—he would only have had to break a promise. It never even occurs to the staunch son of Scotland to do this. Backed only by Russell, he faces with a stiff upper lip and a high heart the scorn of his former chums and the sneers of the cad brigade. And in the end he wins through to triumph, as he had well deserved to do, and everybody recognises that there was something wrong with

"THE SENTENCE OF THE SCHOOL!"

A LETTER FROM AN EX-ARMY READER.

A Crewe reader writes thus:

"I want to thank you for the fine stories you give us. I have been a constant reader of the 'Magnet' and 'Gem' ever since I learned to read at all, and I always look forward to Mondays and Wednesdays. I have been a soldier, and have been at the Front, and the two papers were my close companions there—they were real friends to me. My chums were no end keen to get hold of them after I had read them—I took good care that it was not till after, you bet! It was a pleasure to me to see how highly your papers were appreciated among my comrades, because I have always thought so much of them myself. When I had been wounded and was in hospital, it was just the same in my ward. They were simply first-class favourites. Now I have been discharged through wounds, and I am keeping as a memento a copy of the 'Magnet' with two corners cut fairly away by a piece of shrapnel which put me out of action. The Boches did their best to spoil my paper, but I shall treasure it as a souvenir of my fighting days. In closing, I want to offer you my congratulations on a long continued and great success."

That is the sort of letter to make a tired and overworked editor buck up. Every line of it is good reading. I can guess how the man who wrote it feels about being discharged as unfit for further service before the big push began; but he does not grouse about that or about his wounds. He carried with him to the stricken fields of France his old boyish loyalty to the papers that had enthralled him in younger days; and he has brought it back unabated. I do honestly believe that his pleasure at finding my papers so popular with his comrades was as great as my own could be, and it would be hard to say anything stronger than that!

For the many cordial messages that come along to me from my thousands of soldier chums are more welcome than I can easily say. There is a veritable army of them by this time, and though in these days of hard, grim fighting that army is thinned by the great reaper Death, yet the ranks close up, as do the ranks of a shell-swept force on the battlefield; and, as in our country now, ever new battalions are forming to take their place.

It may seem curious to some people that the favourite reading of men in the trenches should be stories of school life, but I do not find it so. The fun and high spirits of such yarns as Mr. Richards gives us each week are just what a man needs to take his thoughts off his own surroundings, especially if the

man is one who has kept the heart of a boy in him—and it is not the worst or least likeable type of man who does this. Then Mr. Richards has always a story to tell, and that appeals to the reader who wants to be taken out of himself. You don't finish one of his yarns and then sit down to wonder sadly where in all the thousands of words the story has got to, as it is quite possible to do after reading the tales of some authors.



NOTICES.

Cricket and Football.

E. Francis, 134, Kingston Road, Ilford, wants to arrange matches for the coming season within a radius of a mile or two for the I.B.S.C.

Cole Bros. C.C. (average age 14½) want home and away matches for Saturday afternoons within a four-mile radius of Sheffield.—Hon. Sec., H. Gunson, 40, Lydgate Lane, Crookes, Sheffield.

Will the Hon. Sec. of the Woodhurst Juniors C.C. send the Editor his address, which has been mislaid, and repeat the notice he forwarded?

Red Crusaders F.C. require home and away matches for the coming season within six-mile radius of district. Average age 17.—Apply, Hon. Sec., 127, Knight's Hill, West Norwood, S.E.

H. Smith, 100, Grosvenor Road, Canonbury, N., is forming a footer-club, and would be glad to hear from any reader of 14-15 within a mile or so of his address who would care to join.

M. James, 22, Llanfair Road, Canton, Cardiff, would be pleased to hear from any readers in the Cardiff district who would care to join a footer league, age 14-16. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

W. S. Robinson, George Hotel Tap, Penny Street, Portsmouth, would like to join a cricket-club in his neighbourhood.

Tenterfield A.F.C., Norden (average age 15), wants home and away matches, one-mile radius of Rochdale, for coming season.—Hon. Sec., W. Wightman, 50, Parkfield Terrace, Norden, near Rochdale.

Burlington Athletic F.C. (15-16) want matches for the coming season within six-mile radius of Hackney.—Hon. Sec., L. Cohen, 97, Downs Park Road, Clapton, N.E.

For Correspondence, Etc.

Excalibur Magazine Agencies want sub-agents—in large towns preferred—for distributing amateur magazine. Commission on sales offered.—Apply Excalibur Agencies, 14, Roberts Road, High Wycombe.

Miss Elsie Meredith, 77, Goulden Street and Miss Phyllis Redford, 13, Herd Street, off High Street—both of Seedley, Pendleton—would be pleased to correspond with other girl readers at home or abroad.

P. S. Coombs, Stanhope Villa, Fort Royal Hill, Worcester, wants to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" League, open to anyone in the United Kingdom, for the purposes of sending back numbers of the companion papers to men at the Front.

S. Cleaver, 27, Westville Road, Shepherd's Bush, W., is forming a "Gem" and "Magnet" League and Correspondence Exchange, and will be pleased to send particulars on receipt of a stamped and addressed envelope.

Archie Eugin, Water Hall, Leeds, wants to form a "Gem" and "Magnet" Correspondence League for readers anywhere, including members of His Majesty's Forces. Stamped and addressed envelope, please.

Your Editor

 *A Complete School-
 *Story Book, attrac-
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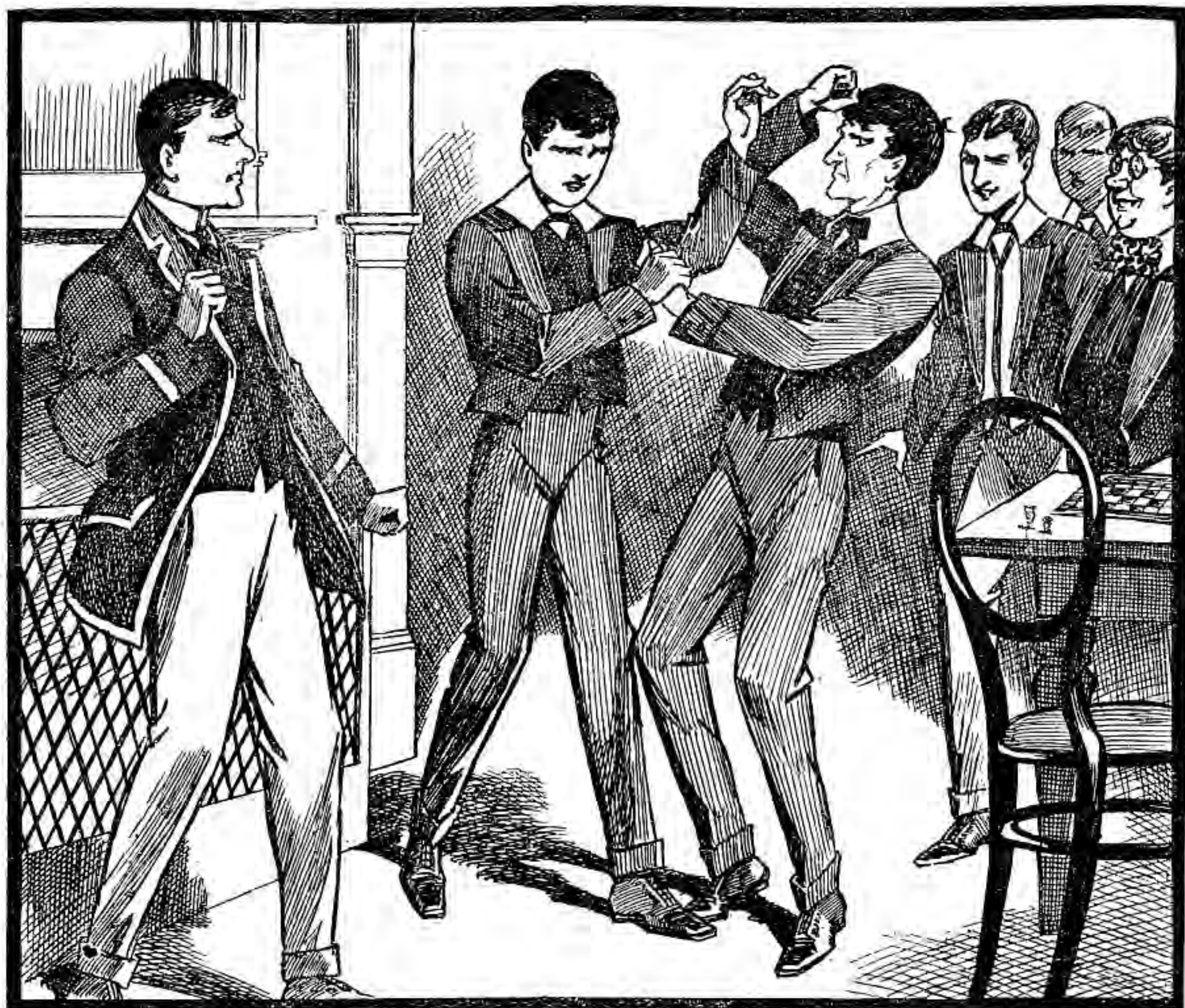


 *The Editor will be
 *obliged if you will
 *hand this book,
 *when finished with,
 *to a friend. . .

A SPLIT IN THE STUDY!

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By FRANK RICHARDS.



Skinner's fist lashed out at Wharton's face. Wharton's hand whipped up like lightning, and Skinner's wrist was caught before the blow could reach its mark. (See Chapter 7.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Quite Unappreciated Joke.

"HERE he comes!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Shut up, you chaps!"
 "Rot! Ha, ha!"
 Harry Wharton paused in surprise.

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove had just come in from the cricket-field. He had his bat under his arm, and his face was ruddy and good-humoured.

A number of juniors were gathered before the notice-board in the hall.

They were evidently in a state of great merriment. Skinner was chuckling, Snoop was cackling, and Bolsover major was roaring. A dozen other fellows were grinning, as if over a particularly good joke. Billy Bunter, the fattest junior in the Remove, was cackinnating with such energy that he seemed in danger of apoplexy.

Wharton looked at the juniors, and they looked at him. Some of the fellows left off laughing, but not Skinner & Co.

Some of them looked sheepish as Wharton came up, but Skinner & Co. did not look sheepish. There was nothing sheepish about Skinner & Co. They cackled more loudly than ever. Frank Nugent, who was in the crowd, turned a little red. He had been grinning like the rest.

"Hallo! What's the joke?" asked Wharton, in surprise.

It was pretty evident that the laughter was connected with himself—that he was, in point of fact, the joke.

As he realised that, the good-humoured expression faded from Wharton's face. He did not exactly enjoy being laughed at.

"Nothing," said Nugent hastily. "There's nothing to cackle at. Tea's ready in the study, Harry."

Nugent slipped his arm through his chum's as he spoke. But Wharton did not allow himself to be led to the stairs. He remained where he was, all the more determined because it was clear that Nugent did not want him to discover the "joke," whatever it was.

"No hurry," he said quietly. "If there's such a ripping joke on, I may as well share it. What is it, Skinner?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Skinner airily.

"What is it, Bolsover?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover major.

Wharton reddened.

"Can't any of you answer?" he rapped out. "It must be jolly funny to set you cackling like a lot of old hens!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Billy Bunter. "Ain't it true to life—what? He, he, he!"

"What do you mean, you fat duffer?"

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, make room and let Wharton see it. It does a chap good to see himself as others see him, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come on!" said Nugent uneasily. "Don't waste time on those grinning asses, Harry!"

"You were grinning yourself when I came in," said Wharton tartly.

"W-w-was I?"

"Yes, you were!"

"Well, why shouldn't Nugent grin?" chuckled Bolsover major. "Nugent couldn't help grinning, Mr. Magnificent Wharton."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"It's only some rot of Skinner's," said Nugent. "Nothing to take any notice of."

Wharton did not heed. He pushed his way through the crowd of juniors to the notice-board. Then he saw what had excited the merriment of the Removites.

There was a sheet of paper pinned on the board among the school notices. But it was not a notice. It was a caricature. Wharton's brow darkened as he looked at it. It was evidently meant to represent himself, and there was no doubt that it came from Skinner's skilled hand.

It was a pen-and-ink sketch of Wharton, and the amateur artist had hit off the likeness very cleverly.

But while retaining the likeness to Wharton's handsome features, he had imbued the countenance with an expression of lofty pride and disdain. The lip was curling, the nose was elevated, and the whole expression was that of a person who did not consider the earth quite good enough for him to walk on. The figure, very cleverly drawn, represented the junior strutting, amid a crowd of fellows who were bowing down till their foreheads touched the ground. Under the picture was scrawled:

"MR. MAGNIFICENT WHARTON."

Harry Wharton was generally popular in the Remove; but he had his enemies, and his enemies held it chiefly against him that he considered himself monarch of all he surveyed. It was true that some fellows found it difficult to get on with Wharton, but they were generally cads like Skinner and Snoop. True enough, there had been a time when his uncertain temper had tried the patience even of his best chum, Frank Nugent, but that time was long since past. But it was quite in Skinner's style to rake up old troubles and perpetuate them if he could. Skinner was up against No. 1 Study all the time.

Had Wharton been in his usual cheery mood he would probably have laughed at the caricature, though perhaps in a rather annoyed way.

But his temper was already a little on edge from the laughter that had greeted him and from the fact that Nugent himself had been grinning at the ridiculous representation.

It was evident that a good many of the fellows considered that there was a likeness between the captain of the Remove and the strutting, swanking duffer in the picture. It was not pleasant to find that anybody discerned even the faintest shadow of a likeness.

Wharton did not laugh.

His eyes gleamed as he looked at the caricature, and the

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juniors, noting the gathering signs of wrath, grinned the more. It was immensely amusing, especially to Skinner & Co., to get Wharton's rag out. Wharton was not easy to draw as a rule. But he had been drawn quite easily this time. He looked round with glinting eyes at the grinning circle.

"So that's meant for me?" he said quietly.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "Isn't it a good likeness?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as ithers see us!" quoted Ogilvy, and there was a fresh roar.

Wharton looked directly at the Scottish junior.

"So that's what you think of me, Ogilvy?"

"Well, not exactly," grinned Ogilvy. "But there's a likeness, you know. Anyway, it's funny."

"A really good likeness!" roared Bolsover major. "And it's dashed funny."

"I don't call it funny."

"You wouldn't. Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think it's rotten caddish," said Wharton, "and I think the fellow who did it and stuck it there is a rotten cad!"

"Thanks!" yawned Skinner.

"So it was you?"

"I felt called upon to pay my tribute to the Great One and Only," explained Skinner humorously, while the juniors chuckled. "I hope you don't see anything to be offended at in that likeness, Wharton. I did my very best to catch the likeness. These chaps seem to think it's a good portrait. But if you can suggest any improvements, I'm willing to make any alterations."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you don't think the nose turns up enough—" suggested Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or perhaps I should have put a halo around the noble brow?" remarked Skinner thoughtfully. "Of course, I oughtn't to have left that out. Lend me a pencil, Brownie, and I'll put in a halo."

The juniors yelled as Skinner stepped up to the board and began to pencil in a halo. Nugent grinned; he could not help it. If Wharton had taken the absurd joke in good part it would have fallen flat. But the anger in his face was the cream of the joke. Skinner & Co. congratulated themselves on having drawn blood, as it were.

"Come up to the study, Harry," said Nugent, a little alarmed by his chum's black brow.

"Oh, don't be in a hurry!" said Wharton sarcastically.

"You haven't enjoyed your laugh out yet, Nugent. It must be very agreeable to make fun of your pal behind his back. I don't want to spoil your fun!"

Nugent's face changed.

"Don't be an ass, Harry!" he said sharply. "The thing's ridiculous, but it's funny. I suppose you can take a joke as well as the rest of us?"

"A joke about the Magnificent One is practically sacrilege!" chuckled Snoop. "I shouldn't wonder if a joke about Wharton isn't an offence under the Defence of the Realm Act!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What they call lazy majesty in Germany!" cackled Billy Bunter—probably meaning *lese-majeste*.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There!" said Skinner, stepping back to survey his improvement. "The halo improves it. Thanks for the suggestion, Wharton!"

"You cheeky cad—"

"Any more suggestions to make?" asked Skinner affably.

Wharton did not reply, but with a flushed face he reached up to tear the offending paper from the board.

Skinner started forward.

"Let that alone! That's my property!"

Wharton did not heed. He tore the paper down, and Skinner caught his arm.

"Give it to me!"

"I'll give you something else, you cheeky cad!" exclaimed Wharton, his temper breaking out. "Take that!"

"That" was a drive with his right, and it caught Skinner on his pointed nose, and flattened the point considerably. Skinner gave a muffled yell, and went over backwards, and landed on the floor with a crash.

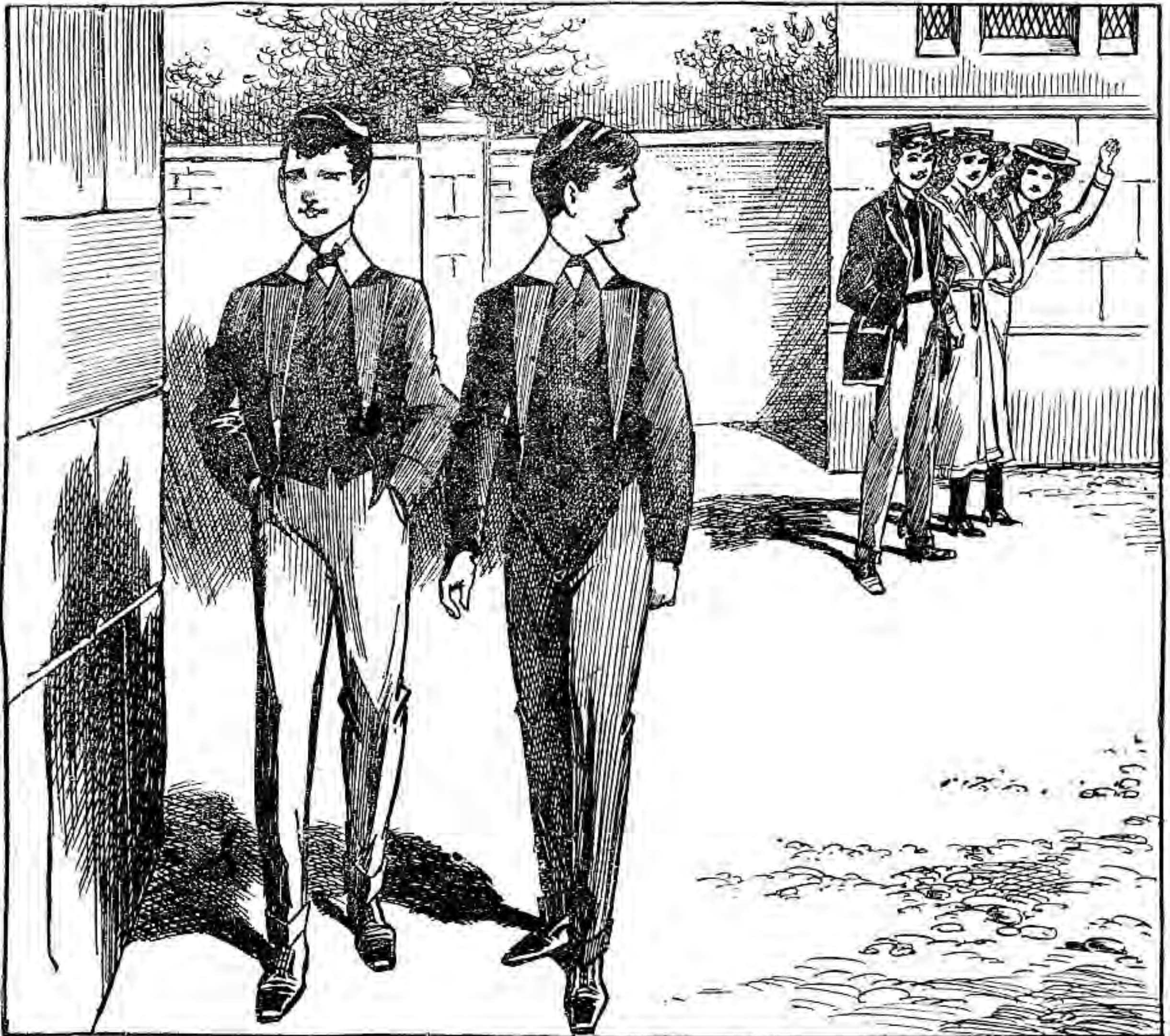
THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Quite in the Wrong!

"Y All! Oh! Ah! Ow!"

Skinner sprawled on the floor, gasping. A red stream ran from his nose. In the haste and anger of the moment Wharton had hit really hard without intending it, and Skinner was hurt. The athletic captain of the Remove would never have thought of

DELICIOUS TUCK-HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1D.



Bob Cherry marched the two girls away to the cricket-ground, and Wharton and Nugent went on into the School-house to repair damages. (See Chapter 13.)

using strength against the weedy, unfit slacker if he had been cool.

There was a murmur from the crowd of juniors. They were not laughing now.

"Shame!" hooted Snoop.

Wharton turned on him fiercely. He was sorry for the hasty blow as soon as it had been struck, but he was too angry to think of admitting it.

Snoop dodged back hastily behind the burly form of Bolsover major.

Wharton made a movement forward, and Bolsover stood solidly in his path. The bully of the Remove was sneering, and he had his hands up. It was a rare chance for Bolsover. Certainly he would have knocked Skinner down without a moment's hesitation for a smaller offence. All the same, it gratified him to be put in the position of defending the weak against the strong—quite a new role for the Remove bully.

"Hands off," said Bolsover major coolly. "You're not going to touch Snoop. Hit a chap your own size!"

"Dash it all, Wharton, keep your temper!" said Tom Brown tartly. "You shouldn't have let out like that. It's only a joke."

"Jokes mustn't be made about Wharton," grinned Billy Bunter. "The Great and Magnificent One mustn't be joked about. Ow! I say, you fellows, keep him off! Yow-ow-ow!"

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"I'm not touching you, you fat idiot!" exclaimed Wharton angrily.

"You're a beastly bully!" gasped Bunter, taking refuge behind Bolsover major. "Keep your paws off! Hit one your own size!"

"I wasn't going to hit you!" shouted Wharton.

"Yes, you were, and you would if Bolsover wasn't here," said Bunter, from the safe shelter of Bolsover's burly back. "Keep him off, Bolsover!"

"I'll keep him off right enough," said Bolsover.

Skinner sat up. Russell and Ogilvy helped him to his feet. Skinner dabbed his nose savagely with his handkerchief.

"You beastly rotter!" he gasped. "You took me un-awares!"

Wharton crimsoned.

"I didn't mean to——"

"Liar!" howled Skinner.

Nugent caught the captain of the Remove by the arm as he made an angry stride towards Skinner.

"For goodness' sake let it drop, Harry! There's nothing to row about!"

"Not being called a liar?" exclaimed Wharton savagely.

"Let me go!"

"But look here——"

Wharton shook off Nugent's detaining hand angrily. He strode up to Skinner.

"Now, you cad, you say I hit you unawares! Well, I'll

NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE SENTENCE OF THE SCHOOL!"

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hit you when you're looking, if you like. Put up your hands!"

Bolsover major shoved in between them.

"Stand aside!" shouted Wharton.

"Rats!"

Wharton's eyes blazed.

"Will you get aside?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then I'll jolly soon shift you!"

"Go it, Bolsover!" sang out a dozen voices, as Wharton rushed at him. Not a voice was raised for the captain of the Remove.

There was a sudden shout from the passage.

"Cave!"

"Look out!" exclaimed Nugent. "It's Quelch!"

Wharton and Bolsover were fighting, hammer and tongs, and they did not even hear. In the excitement of the moment both parties had forgotten that they were within hearing of their Form-master's study.

Mr. Quelch strode on the scene with a thunderous brow.

"Wharton! Bolsover! Cease this instantly!" he thundered.

"Harry!"

"Chuck it, you duffers!"

The two juniors, flushed and excited, separated.

They stood glaring at one another, panting for breath, while Mr. Quelch glared at both of them.

"Now, what does this mean?" exclaimed the Form-master.

"How dare you fight in the House, within a dozen paces of my study door?"

The culprits did not reply.

"It is disgraceful!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "All the more as you, Wharton, are head boy in the Form."

Wharton did not speak.

"I must know who began this," said Mr. Quelch.

Wharton set his lips. He did not regard himself as the aggressor in the conflict. Bolsover did; and so he did not speak, either.

"You have been fighting, too, Skinner?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir."

"What! Your nose is bleeding!"

"Wharton attacked me," said Skinner sullenly. "I'm not strong enough to fight him, and Bolsover took my part."

It was true enough, in a way—though it did not quite correctly represent how matters stood. But it placed the captain of the Remove in a decidedly unfavourable light. Mr. Quelch's brow grew darker.

"Is that correct, Wharton?" he exclaimed.

"In a way, I suppose it is," said Harry, biting his lip. "I knocked Skinner down, and Bolsover meddled."

It was not a very judicious reply to make to an angry Form-master.

"Bolsover did quite right to meddle, as you call it, if you were ill-using a lad weaker than yourself!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch angrily. "I am surprised at you, Wharton! I should never have expected this of you. Whatever cause of offence Skinner gave you, you had no right to strike him."

Wharton knew that well enough.

"Skinner did nothing, sir," said Snoop. "There was simply a joke on, and Wharton hit out at him. I suppose a joke can be made about Wharton as well as anybody else."

"I should imagine so," said Mr. Quelch. "You must learn to curb your temper, Wharton. I am very sorry to see this outbreak on your part."

"Skinner checked me," said Wharton sullenly.

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows.

"Do you take it upon yourself, Wharton, to knock down any of your Form-fellows who cheek you, as you call it? I cannot allow this to pass unpunished. You will take five hundred lines, Wharton. Disperse now, my boys, and kindly let there be no further disturbance."

The Form-master rustled away, frowning.

The crowd of juniors broke up, some of them grinning. Skinner went away to bathe his nose. Bolsover major gave Wharton a triumphant, jeering look which very nearly brought about a renewal of hostilities on the spot, though Mr. Quelch had hardly reached his study.

But the captain of the Remove controlled himself with an effort, and went up the stairs to the Remove passage.

A laugh from Bolsover and Snoop and Stott followed him, and it made his ears burn. He turned back on the stairs.

"Come on, Harry!" said Nugent anxiously, catching him by the sleeve.

Wharton shook off his hand angrily.

He was angry with Nugent, angry with himself, angry with everybody. He realised quite clearly that he had not acted well, and that he had placed himself in the wrong. But the

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condemnation he saw in most faces only made him the angrier.

He did not return to the lower hall. He went on to the Remove passage and into his study. Frank Nugent followed him in silence, and with a somewhat contracted brow.

He had thought that those outbreaks of temper, so common during his first acquaintance with Wharton, were over for good. It was an unpleasant shock to discover that his chum was capable of acting badly, and being unreasonably angry about it. It was easy enough for Wharton to read the thought in his face, and it added to his inward bitterness.

It was not with their usual cheerfulness that the chums of No. 1 Study prepared the usually cheery meal, and when they sat down to tea they sat in grim and uncomfortable silence.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Strained Relations!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry looked into the study, and greeted the juniors with his usual exuberance.

Bob was in blissful ignorance of anything being up, and he did not notice for the moment the glum silence that reigned in No. 1 Study.

"Finished your tea?" he asked. "Buck up, anyway! Coker of the Fifth is holding a giddy rehearsal in the Rag. The Fifth Form Stage Club is going strong. I thought we might help to make it go a little stronger—what?"

"What's Coker up to?" asked Nugent, as Wharton did not speak.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"They're going to do 'Hamlet.' We did 'Hamlet,' you know, with Wibley in the title-role. Coker is going to show Greyfriars how it ought really to be done. Coker's going to play Hamlet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nugent laughed, and Wharton could not help smiling. The idea of Horace Coker of the Fifth as the Prince of Denmark was enough to make the glumest fellow smile.

"Coker's been revising the play," went on Bob, grinning. "Coker thinks that a play ought to have a happy ending. I heard him arguing about it with Potter and Greene. He thinks Shakespeare was rather potty to make everybody die in the last act. He says it gives him the creeps. He says they might as well have died in the first act, and saved Shakespeare the trouble of writing the play!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So Coker has rewritten the last act!" chuckled Bob. "Hamlet doesn't die; he becomes King of Denmark. Ophelia turns out not to be drowned, after all; she recovers, and marries Hamlet. Coker says that's a much better ending!"

"Ha, ha! So it is!"

"Well, it's certainly a bit more cheerful," said Bob. "But there have been fearful arguments about it in the Fifth Form Stage Club. Potter says that Coker is a Hun, and Greene says he's a Vandal. He had Fitzgerald's head in chancery when I looked into the Rag. Coker's going to have his way. Hamlet will be worth seeing, the way Coker does it. And I was thinking that some pea-shooters at the window would help them along—what?"

"Good egg!" said Nugent.

"Johnny Bull's getting a squirt filled with ink, in case we come to close quarters. Come on, Wharton! You're coming?"

Wharton hesitated.

"Nothing the matter, is there?" asked Bob, looking from one to the other.

It dawned upon the cheery Bob at last that something was wrong.

"Nothing," said Nugent quickly.

"Oh, nothing!" said Wharton.

"Was it one of you chaps gave Skinner his nose?" asked Bob. "I've just seen his nose; it's a corker!"

"I did," said Harry curtly.

"Good! I dare say he asked for it," said Bob.

"Nugent doesn't think so," said Wharton, with a curl of the lip.

"Never mind about that," said Nugent. "It's not worth jawing about, anyway! Let's go and rag Coker!"

"Yes, come on!" said Bob, seeing that trouble was in the air, and anxious to ward it off. "Coker would make a cat laugh, and we get a ripping view from the window!"

"I do mind about it," said Wharton obstinately. "Skinner was a cheeky cad!"

"Of course; he always is," agreed Bob pacifically.

"He drew a rotten picture of me!"

Bob chuckled.

"That picture on the board?" he asked.

"Oh, you've seen it?"
"Yes, I saw it. It was cheeky, of course, and all rot, but it was funny, wasn't it?"

"It didn't strike me as funny."

"Oh, come, it was funny enough, and Skinner knows how to draw, too," said Bob. "Some of his caricatures are jolly nearly as good as the pictures in 'Chuckles.' He drew me once with feet like a giant; but I didn't mind. I know I've got good-sized feet—better than Skinner's stumpy hoofs. Surely you didn't give him that nose for drawing a comic picture?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, it's no bizney of mine," said Bob, though his expression changed a little. "Let's go and rag Coker!"

"So you agree with Nugent?"

"Eh? What's the good of jawing? Coker will be getting through that rehearsal if we don't buck up!"

"Hang Coker and his silly rehearsal!" exclaimed Wharton irritably.

"Well, we can't hang him, but we can rag him," said Bob amicably. "The window's open, you know, on the quad, and we can get in a volley before they know we're there. Then Coker's Hamlet will have a sad ending, after all!"

"Skinner was a cheeky cad!" said Harry. "He caught hold of my arm when I was taking down his foolery from the board, and I hit out!"

"Well, he deserves it for a lot of other things," said Bob.

"He deserves it for that!"

"What a chap you are to argue, Wharton!"

"Oh, it's my rotten temper, of course!" said Wharton. "I can see that that's in your mind. But I think a chap in my own study might stand by me, and not join those cackling cads against his own pal!"

"What's the good of jawing?" said Nugent. "You were hasty, and that's all about it!"

"I wasn't hasty!"

"Well, you weren't, then," said Frank impatiently. "Is that satisfactory?"

Wharton threw himself into his chair again, his brow very dark.

"Come on!" said Bob anxiously.

"For goodness' sake, don't play the giddy ox!" exclaimed Nugent. "I suppose I'm not bound to approve of everything you do? You know jolly well that you oughtn't to have knocked Skinner down, as he's a weedy rotter, and can't stand up to you! It isn't the game to hit a chap who can't tackle you!"

"So I don't play the game?"

"I don't say that, and you know it. If you want it quite plain, I think you ought to tell Skinner you're sorry!"

"I'm not sorry!"

"Well, you ought to be!" said Nugent tartly. "You stand any amount of cheek from Bunter, because he's a fat idiot. Why couldn't you keep your temper with Skinner over a harmless joke?"

"It wasn't a harmless joke! It doesn't amuse me so much as it amuses you and Bob, you see!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!" said Bob uncomfortably.

"What's the harm in grinning at a joke? I saw you grinning over Skinner's picture of me with feet like a Hun!"

"That was different."

"Well, I don't see it. And since you've asked me whether I agree with Nugent, I do. It was altogether too thick to knock Skinner down. You might have pulled his ear. But you really hurt him!"

"I didn't mean to hurt him," said Wharton, flushing. "I suppose you'll be calling me a bully next!"

"Well, you did hurt him, and he'll be wearing that nose for a week. But for goodness' sake don't let's begin ragging over a worm like Skinner! Let's go and help Coker with his rehearsal!"

"Hang Coker!"

"You're not coming?"

"No!"

"Well, don't, then!" said Bob tartly; and he left the study.

Nugent made a movement to follow him, but hesitated.

"Better come along, Wharton!"

"I'm not coming," said Wharton grimly. "You've as good as called me a bully, and you say I don't play the game. I expect you to take that back!"

Nugent paused.

"You put the words into my mouth," he said. "All I said was that you acted hastily, and that you ought to tell Skinner you're sorry!"

"Well, until you think differently, you needn't trouble to speak to me again!" said Wharton savagely.

Nugent looked at him. His own temper was very patient, but it was rising now; but he checked the words on his lips. He did not wish the breach to go any further, if it could be helped. He quitted the study without another word.

Wharton half rose, but he sat down again. He drew his

books towards him, and began his preparation, with a knitted brow.

Bob Cherry and Nugent, both with somewhat clouded looks, joined the rest of the Co. in the passage. Johnny Bull had a squirt full of ink all ready for Coker, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh had a pea-shooter. Squiff and Tom Brown and Peter Todd had joined the raggers, also armed with pea-shooters.

"Come on!" called out Bob.

"Isn't Wharton coming?"

"No."

"Oh, rot!" said Squiff. "I'll call him! He can't miss this! You don't see Coker as Hamlet every day!"

Sampson Quincy Ifley Field ran along to No. 1, and put his head in at the door.

"Come on, Wharton!"

"You can leave me out," said Harry, without looking up.

"But we're going for Coker," said Squiff.

"Blow Coker!"

Squiff looked at him curiously.

"Anything wrong?"

"No."

"You look as if some common mortal had come between the wind and your nobility, you know," grinned Squiff.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Thanks for the tip. I won't," said Squiff, imperturbably.

"I'll give you a tip in return, if you like."

"You needn't trouble."

"No trouble at all, my son! At the present moment you look as if you're trying to live up to Skinner's caricature of you," said Squiff. "Don't do it!"

The Australian junior quitted the study without waiting for a reply, leaving Wharton with a flushed and angry face. Squiff's remark had a somewhat unpleasant truth in it, and it went home. Wharton knew that the general opinion would be that "Mr. Magnificent Wharton" was sticking on his dignity, like Achilles sulking in his tent. It was ridiculous, and it was exasperating, and it added to the bitterness in his breast. But he did not follow his chums, and the little joke on Coker of the Fifth proceeded without the assistance of the captain of the Remove.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Mischief-Makers!

"WOW-OH! Wow!"

Thus Skinner, as he sat in his study and rubbed his nose tenderly.

His nose had swollen a little, and it was very red and very tender. Harry Wharton had hardly realised how much force he had put into the blow; but Skinner, naturally, had fully realised it. Skinner was feeling hurt and very savage. He would have given a term's pocket-money to have been athletic, like Squiff or Tom Brown or Bob Cherry, so that he could have stood up to Wharton in the gym, and called him to account for that hasty blow. But that was not in Skinner's line. As a matter of fact, he was a little taller than Wharton, and could easily have made himself fit to tackle him; but slacking and smoking did not conduce to fitness, and the weedy waster of the Remove was not capable of shining as a fighting-man.

Vernon-Smith, Skinner's study-mate, looked impatient. He sympathised with Skinner to a certain extent. But he was fed-up with Skinner's sufferings.

"You're not a very cheery chap in a study, Skinny," he remarked. "Can't you shut up for a bit?"

"My nose hurts."

"Well, chaps have had a pain in the nose before, without weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth," suggested the Bounder.

"You can get out of the study if you don't like it!" snarled Skinner.

The Bounder yawned and threw down his book.

"Well, I will!" he remarked. "I hope you'll have got over the pain when I come in for prep. You really get on a chap's nerves, you know."

Vernon-Smith lounged out of the study, leaving Skinner alone with his nose. Skinner sat in the armchair and caressed it, and murmured things. The door opened a little later, and he looked up suddenly as Bolsover major and Snoop and Stott came in. As they were his pals, he supposed that they had come to sympathise, but sympathy did not help his painful nose.

"Well, how are you feeling?" asked Bolsover major.

"Rotten!" growled Skinner.

"How's your nose?" asked Snoop.

"Look at it!"

"Well, it does look a giddy cherry-blossom!" said Bolsover

major, with a grin. "You won't get rid of that for a week, Skinner."

"You'll be an ornament to the Remove!" grinned Stott. "People will see you coming, by Jove, with that nose!"

"If that's all you've got to say you may as well clear!" growled Skinner. "I've had enough of that from Smithy!"

"We've been talking about it," said Bolsover major. "We're your friends, Skinner. We're not going to see you treated like that."

"Certainly not!" chimed in Snoop. "Who's Wharton, to take it on himself to knock down a chap at his own sweet will? Might have been me!"

"Or me, or Bolsover," observed Stott.

"Not me!" said Bolsover. "Wharton would think twice before he punched my nose. He punched Skinner's nose because Skinney takes it lying down."

"Well, he did lie down, and no mistake!"

"He, he, he!"

"What can I do?" growled Skinner. "I suppose you don't think I can lick the beast, do you? He can make rings round me!"

"You can try."

"Oh, rot!"

"It isn't rot!" said Bolsover major. "That's what we've come about, Skinner. You can't be treated like this. I suppose Wharton isn't Grand Panjandrum and Brother of the Sun and Moon, like the Emperor of China. He hadn't any right to punch your nose, I suppose. You've got to call him to account."

"Oh, rot!" grunted Skinner. He began to have a glimmering of the purpose of this friendly visit, and it made him uneasy.

"Now, look here, Skinner. Wharton knocked you down, didn't he?"

"Yes!" snarled Skinner.

"You can't take it quietly."

"I prefer to say nothing about the matter. You know I can't tackle him."

"Yes, you can. And I'll be your second."

"We'll all back you up, Skinney!"

Skinner gritted his teeth.

"I'm jolly well not going to fight Wharton, if that's what you mean! After all, I don't suppose he really meant it. He was in a temper."

"Turning the other cheek—what?" sneered Bolsover major. "That won't do, Skinney. I dare say Wharton was in a temper. But he can't punch fellows' noses because he's in a temper. He's not Sultan of the Remove, I suppose, and we're not in Turkey. The proper thing to do when a fellow punches your nose is to fight him! I'll take your challenge to Wharton."

"I'm not going to send him a challenge!"

"Don't you see?" broke in Snoop eagerly. "The rotter's in the wrong already. All the fellows are down on him. If he licks you as well, that'll make them still more down on him, as you're not a match for him."

"I dare say it would. But I'm not going to be licked because you've got your knife into Wharton!" growled Skinner.

"You've been knocked down," roared Bolsover major, "and I can jolly well tell you, Skinner, that if you take it quietly, you'll jolly soon be knocked down again! If you like it, I'll give you some of it!"

"Look here—"

"You won't get hurt much," said Bolsover contemptuously. "You'll fight with the gloves on. What are you afraid of?"

"I—I'm not afraid!" mumbled the unhappy Skinner. "But—but—"

"But—but!" mimicked Bolsover. "A fellow punches your nose, and you're not afraid; but you let him do it. You'll have every fag at Greyfriars punching your nose after this, if you don't stand up for yourself. We're your friends, and we're not going to see you disgrace yourself. I know I'm not going to pal with a funk, for one!"

"I'm not a funk! But—but I can't tackle him!" said Skinner desperately. "He knew I couldn't tackle him, or he wouldn't have done it."

"You've got to stand up for yourself. Suppose Loder of the Sixth punched Wharton's nose, do you think he'd take it quietly? He's got no more chance against Loder than you have against him. But he'd fight till he was knocked into a cocked hat rather than have his nose punched. A chap is supposed to consider his personal dignity a bit, even if he gets a licking for it. Wharton will lick you right enough, but you'll have shown that you're not a fellow to be knocked about without some trouble to follow."

"That's all very well. But—"

"Oh, don't keep on butting like a billygoat!" said Bolsover

major impatiently. "Tackle Wharton, like a decent chap. You might lick him—after all, you're a bit bigger than he is—if you've got the pluck. But if he licks you, you'll have everybody on your side. The fellows will say you couldn't have done more. And it will be up against Wharton, fighting a chap who's not his match. It's enough to bring him off his perch."

Skinner shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He realised the cunning of Bolsover's little scheme. It was such a scheme as he might have thought of himself, with another fellow as principal. But he was to get the licking in the scheme, and that made all the difference.

"Still, if you like to have your nose punched, that's a different thing," said the bully of the Remove scornfully. "I'll jolly well punch it myself, if that's the case. As a matter of fact, you're my pal, and you've got to fight Wharton, or else fight me! You can't disgrace me by backing down."

"You want to use me to score over Wharton," growled Skinner. "I'm jolly well not going to be used!"

"Oh, have a little pluck, do! I suppose you're not a worm, to be trodden on whenever Mr. Magnificent Wharton pleases?"

"I'm not a punch-ball, to be thumped in the gym!"

"You'll be thumped in this study if you don't show a bit of pluck! You'll have fags in the Third pulling your ear next. Have a little pluck!"

Skinner crimsoned.

"I'm not afraid of him, hang him! Only—"

"Well, give me a message for him, and I'll take it," said Bolsover major. "Suppose you agree to let the matter drop if he apologised? That's fair. You can't do less."

"Nothing less than that," said Snoop.

Skinner gritted his teeth. He was in the hands of the Philistines. Bolsover major did not mean to let that opportunity pass for scoring over the fellow whom he regarded as his rival.

Skinner reflected that he might as well be licked by Wharton as by Bolsover major—for that was really his choice.

And certainly there was a revengeful satisfaction in placing the captain of the Remove still more hopelessly in the wrong, and exhibiting him in the light of a bully.

A victory over Skinner would not redound to Wharton's credit, while a fight would certainly give Skinner a leg-up. It would show pluck. Not many fellows in the Remove were keen to face Wharton in a serious contest, though there were plenty who would have been ready to do so for good cause.

Skinner had cause enough—there was no doubt about that. He would be licked, but he would fall with glory. But it was the licking that Skinner disliked!

But he made up his mind.

"Well," said Bolsover, who had been watching Skinner's face with considerable amusement, "you're going to take it on?"

"Well, I suppose it's up to me!" grunted Skinner ungraciously.

"Of course it is! Shall I take him a message?"

"Give him the chance of saying he's sorry!" said Skinner uneasily.

"Oh, I'll do that, of course!" grinned Bolsover. "If the Great Magnificent chooses to climb down, all serene!"

And Bolsover & Co. left the study, leaving Skinner in a very anxious frame of mind. Vernon-Smith came in, eyeing Skinner curiously.

"You haven't let those fellows egg you on to play the giddy goat, Skinney?" he asked. "I've just heard them—"

"I've sent a challenge to Wharton!" said Skinner loftily.

Now that he was fairly in for it, Skinner felt that he might as well claim all the credit possible.

"Then you're an ass!" said the Bounder. "You can't touch him!"

"I suppose I can't let myself be knocked down without saying a word afterwards?"

"Well, it's not quite like that. You're an ass to let it go farther! You haven't an earthly against Wharton!"

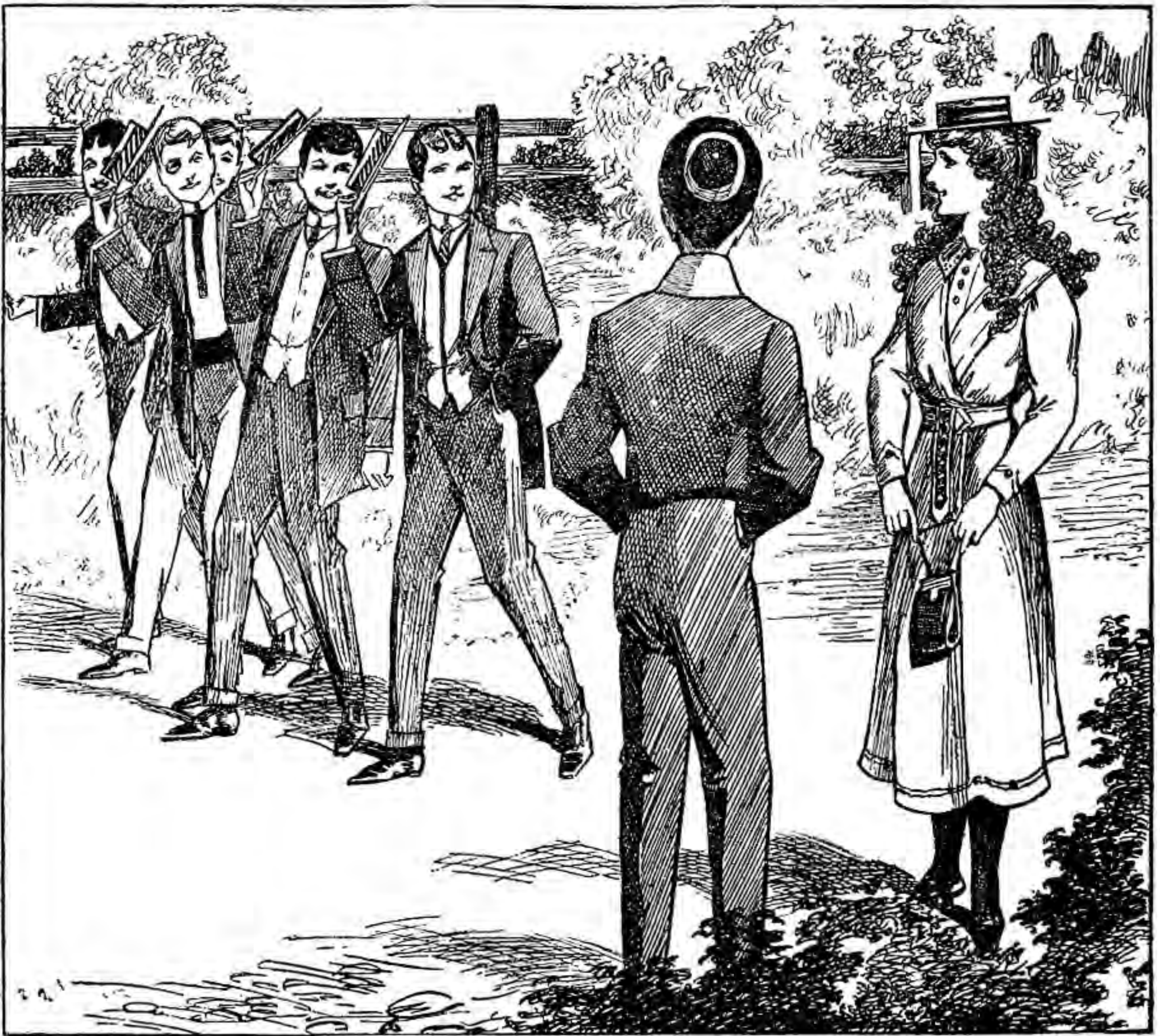
"I'm going to do my best!" said Skinner sullenly.

The Bounder grinned.

"You're a betting chap, Skinner. I'm open to offer you five to one in quids that you don't survive the second round!"

Skinner was a "betting chap," but he did not accept that generous offer. He only grunted.

ANSWERS



The Highcliffe fellows raised their straw hats to Marjorie, looking at Wharton with supercilious smiles.
(See Chapter 11.)

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Coker Comes for Wool and Returns Shorn!

THERE was a rush of feet in the Remove passage, and Bob Cherry & Co. came bolting into No. 1 study.
"Back up, Remove!" roared Bob.
"Here comes Coker!"

Apparently the interruption of the rehearsal had not pleased the Fifth Form Stage Club. At all events, Bob Cherry & Co. were rushing back to their quarters in hot haste, and a crowd of Fifth-Formers were on their track. Coker and Potter and Greene raged into the Remove passage, followed by Fitzgerald and Smith major and half a dozen others.

Harry Wharton jumped up.

"Back up, Remove!"

The alarm rang along the passage.

Removites turned out on all sides. Even Fisher T. Fish turned out to join in repelling a frontal attack upon the sacred quarters of the Remove.

There was a rush of the juniors from all the studies.

Coker & Co. were met on the landing, and there was a terrific scrimmage.

The seniors were bigger and stronger, but they were hopelessly outnumbered, and in a couple of minutes Coker & Co. were rolling down to the next landing.

A roar of defiance followed them.

"Come on, you rotters!"

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"Down with the Fifth!"

"Come on, Coker!"

Horace Coker scrambled up.

"Follow me!" he shouted.

"Better follow me intirely!" said Fitzgerald, and he led the way downstairs.

All but Coker had had enough of the hornets' nest they had stirred up.

But Horace Coker did not even notice that his followers were executing a strategic retreat.

He rushed up the stairs again, bent on vengeance.

"Collar him!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Hurrah!"

"Collar Coker!"

Horace Coker charged the Removites manfully, and was seized on all sides and whirled over.

"Yaroo!" roared Coker. "Rescue! Back up, Fifth!"

But the Fifth had gone.

There was no rescue for Horace. In the grasp of the yelling Removites, he struggled desperately.

"Bump him down the stairs!" yelled Mark Linley.

"Hurrah! Bump him!" shrieked Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaroo!"

Bump, bump, bump, bump!

From stair to stair went Coker of the Fifth, smiting each stair in turn with a mighty smite.

DELICIOUS TUCK-HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 10.

There was a sudden howl from Hazeldene, on the lower stairs.

"Cave!"

Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, came up the lower staircase two steps at a time. He was frowning.

"Boys!"

"Yaroo!" Coker was roaring. "Leggo, you young demons! I'll smash you! Yow-ow!"

"Boys!" thundered Mr. Prout.

"Yah! Leggo!"

The Removites let go. Coker rolled over, and sat upon a stair, almost at the feet of his angry Form-master, blinking. Mr. Prout gazed down at him with indignant wrath.

"Coker, how dare you!"

"Groogh!" gasped Coker.

"I am astonished at you, Coker!"

"Gerrooh!"

"I am shocked!" thundered Mr. Prout. "It is not surprising that unruly juniors play these noisy games on the stairs, but I am surprised to see a senior boy taking part in such horseplay!"

"Wow! Wow!"

"A Fifth Form boy, Coker, is expected to have some sense of personal dignity!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"And not to utter ridiculous ejaculations, Coker!"

"Wow!"

"Rowdiness is excusable to a certain extent in thoughtless juniors. It is quite inexcusable in a Fifth-Former, Coker. How such a noisy and obstreperous game can appeal to you I cannot imagine!"

The Removites tried hard not to grin. Coker was speechless. It was bad enough to be bumped down the stairs, but to have it supposed that he was taking part in a "noisy game" with the fags of the Lower Fourth—that was a little too much. Coker could not find words to express his feelings.

"If there is any recurrence of this, Coker, I shall cane you!" said Mr. Prout majestically.

"I—I—I—" stuttered Coker.

"I should be sorry to inflict corporal punishment upon a member of my Form; but if a senior boy is lost to all sense of personal dignity—"

"I—I didn't—I—I wasn't—"

"Do not interrupt me, Coker! I have seen you with my own eyes taking part in a childish game on the stairs, and making a great deal of noise!"

"I—I—I—"

"It is inexcusable. You will write out two hundred lines of the *Æneid*, Coker, and bring them to me this evening!"

"But I—I—I—" shrieked Coker.

"Enough! Go to your study at once!"

"But I tell you I—"

"Will you obey me, Coker, or will you not?" thundered Mr. Prout.

Coker choked back his wrath, and obeyed. His feelings were indescribable as he marched off. Mr. Prout gave the juniors a chiding frown, and followed him. The Removites respectfully waited till he was gone before they gave expression to their merriment.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry, wiping away his tears. "Coker was born to look for trouble and find it. Poor old Coker!"

"A noisy game on the stairs!" wept Squiff. "Poor old Coker! No sense of his personal dignity, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove crowd dispersed in great spirits. Mr. Prout's peculiar mistake had a very exhilarating effect on them. Bob Cherry sat on the table in No. 1 study and gasped.

"Like Coker's check to follow us here!" he said. "He knows we don't allow strange dogs in the Remove passage! But old Prout—Ha, ha, ha!"

"The Proutfulness was terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter with your nose, Wharton?"

"Fitzgerald's fist," said Wharton, laughing. The "scrap" with the Fifth had restored him to good humour.

"Well, it jolly nearly matches Skinner's now," said Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo, Bolsover! Where did you dig up that eye?"

"Some silly ass gouged his elbow into it," growled Bolsover major, coming into the study.

"My hat! I knew I knocked my elbow on something—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover major rubbed his eye.

"Well, it couldn't be helped, I suppose," he said. "I gave Potter a lift under the jaw, and that's some comfort. Cheeky rotters to come here! What was the row about?"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

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"We interrupted their rehearsal. They had just got to the wedding scene in 'Hamlet'—"

"Eh? There isn't a wedding scene in 'Hamlet.'"

"There is—in Coker's edition of 'Hamlet.' Ophelia recovers, and marries Hamlet in the last act."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover.

"Then the pea-shooters started, and the Fifth seemed to get waxy," said Bob. "But I don't see why there shouldn't be a pea-shooter scene in Coker's 'Hamlet,' along with the other alterations. I hope we shall be able to introduce the same scene when the play comes off—if the Stage Club don't lynch Coker before it comes off."

"Good egg!" said Bolsover major. "Well, now I've come here on business."

"Go ahead!"

"It's with Wharton."

"Hallo!" said Wharton, looking up. He was dabbing his nose with a somewhat reddened handkerchief. "What's wanted?"

"I've a message from Skinner."

Wharton's brow darkened.

"I don't want to hear anything from Skinner," he said.

"But you've got no choice about this," said Bolsover major coolly. "Skinner's sent you a challenge. You can either apologise for biffing him on the nose, or you can stand up to him with the gloves on, and you can take your choice."

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Declined!

HARRY WHARTON'S brows contracted darkly.

There was an uncomfortable silence in the study.

Frank Nugent looked out of the window. Bob Cherry began to hum a tune. Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh looked very uncomfortable.

Bolsover major looked round with a jeering expression. Skinner's challenge was extremely unwelcome in the study. For that reason it afforded the amiable Bolsover a keen pleasure to bring it there. Bolsover's fixed opinion was that Wharton badly wanted pulling down off his perch. He was prepared to do anything he could towards that very desirable end.

"Well," said Bolsover, "you're not in a hurry to speak, Wharton! I suppose you're going to meet Skinner? Of course, you can apologise if you like."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, and you know it!" said Wharton tartly.

"Then you'll meet Skinner in the gym?"

There was a pause.

"No, I won't," said the captain of the Remove, at last.

"You won't!" ejaculated Bolsover major.

"No! I don't want to fight Skinner."

"Don't you think that you ought to have thought about that before you knocked him down?"

"That's my business, not yours."

Bolsover major snorted.

"All serene! You punch a fellow's nose, and you refuse to fight him afterwards. I suppose a common or garden member of the Form isn't quite fit for you to lay your dainty fingers on—what? The idea is for Remove chaps to be knocked over like skittles whenever Mr. Magnificent Wharton is in a temper—hey?"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!"

"Well, you can't run the Remove on those lines," said Bolsover major emphatically. "If you punch a chap's nose, you'll have to answer for it. You can't refuse Skinner's challenge."

"I do refuse it."

"I suppose you're not afraid of Skinner?"

Wharton laughed involuntarily. He did not think that anybody at Greyfriars would suppose that he was afraid of Skinner.

"You can think so if you like," he said, shrugging his shoulders.

"I dare say the fellows will think you're funking."

"Let them!"

"You don't care twopence what the Remove thinks. I suppose?" snorted Bolsover.

"Not three-halfpence."

"So that's your answer?"

"Yes. And I don't believe Skinner wanted to send me a challenge, either. Some mischief-making cad has egged him on to do it."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

Bolsover major turned crimson.

"Well, the matter won't end here," he said. "I'll take your answer back to Skinner. Skinner's my pal, and I'm seeing him through. I dare say you'll make up your mind to light him when he tweaks your nose in public."

And Bolsover major stamped out of the study, disappointed and furious. Silence followed his departure. Wharton looked round at his friends.

"I suppose you fellows don't think that I ought to fight Skinner?" he asked. "You know that weedy waster can't stand up to me."

"That's true enough," said Bob.

"What do you think, Nugent?"

Nugent made an uncomfortable movement.

"You oughtn't to fight him," he said. "Skinner's no match for you. But—"

"Oh, out with it!"

"You ought to tell him you're sorry, and let the matter end."

"Apologise, you mean?"

"Well, yes."

"And when should I hear the end of it, if I apologised to a crawling worm-like Skinner?" growled Wharton.

"That isn't the point. It's up to a chap who's in the wrong to admit it."

"So I'm in the wrong?"

"Yes, I think so. Ask the other fellows."

Wharton's face set.

"I'm not going to apologise for punching a cheeky cad. And I'm not going to be dragged into a fight with a weedy slacker to please Bolsover. I'll fight Bolsover if he wants me to. I'm not going to be dragged into hammering a weedy rotter like Skinner. I was an ass to ask your opinion. I might have known you would be against me."

"You've no right to say anything of the kind."

"Peace, my children, peace!" said Bob Cherry uncomfortably. "Let dogs delight to bark and bite, you know, let Hobson and Croker brawl and fight—"

"The blessedness of peace is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gravely. "I beg the esteemed Wharton not to let his angerful passions rise. The stitch in time shows a wise head, and goes longest to the well, as your English proverb says."

"I can see you're all against me," said Wharton bitterly.

"Well, I think you're an ass!" said Johnny Bull, who was famous for his remarkably candid speech.

"Same here," assented Bob.

"The samefulness is terrific."

Wharton gave his chums a dark look, and left the study without replying. The four looked at one another grimly.

"What a blessed storm in a teacup!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, blow Skinner!" said Bob Cherry. "I've a jolly good mind to go and give him another on the same spot!"

Nugent did not speak.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh went along to their own quarters, and Nugent was left alone. He was in a very uncomfortable mood.

Wharton did not return to the study.

There was a breach between the two chums now, and Frank had a miserable feeling that the split in the study would widen instead of healing.

He looked round frowningly as footsteps neared the door. Skinner, with his arm linked in Bolsover major's, appeared there. Snoop and Stott bringing up the rear.

"Wharton here?" demanded Bolsover, looking round the study. "Hallo! Where has he hidden himself?"

"He hasn't hidden himself, and you know it!" snapped Nugent.

"Well, where is he? Skinner wants to see him—don't you, Skinner?"

"Ye-es," said Skinner, not at all enthusiastically.

"Find out!" growled Nugent.

"Come on, you fellows!" said Bolsover major. "We'll find him. We'll see whether he won't fight a chap after punching his nose!"

Bolsover & Co. marched off downstairs to look for the captain of the Remove. Frank Nugent, after some moments' hesitation, followed them. Hazeldene met him on the stairs.

"What's the row?" he asked. "I hear Skinner's hunting Wharton up and down the house, and Wharton's dodging him."

"Rot!" growled Frank. "Skinner's looking for a thrashing, and Wharton doesn't want to give him one. I suppose he must have it if he wants it."

And, with a frowning brow, he followed Bolsover & Co. into the Common-room. Hazel followed him, and other fellows gathered from all quarters. Bolsover & Co. were on the war-path, and there was evidently going to be trouble.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Fight!

HARRY WHARTON was in the junior Common-room. He had sat down to play chess with Mark Linley when the enemy arrived. His face was still very moody. His temper had placed him in a false position, and he realised it; but he was not prepared to extricate himself from it by undergoing the humiliation of apologising.

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tion Bolsover had planned for him. He could not lick Skinner without discredit to himself; yet it was impossible to avoid the challenge if Skinner persisted in it. And Skinner was quite under Bolsover's thumb, and the bully of the Remove was determined not to let the matter drop. And the feeling that the general opinion was against him only added to the angry obstinacy in Wharton's breast.

"Here he is!" announced Bolsover, as he led his flock into the Common-room. "You're wanted, Wharton."

Wharton's eyes were fixed on the chess-board, and he kept them there. Bolsover major marched up to the table, his arm still linked in Skinner's. The hero would probably have executed a strategic retreat on the spot if the Remove bully had not taken precautions.

"Perhaps the Magnificent One will kindly give us his noble attention for a few moments?" suggested Snoop; and there was a laugh.

Wharton did not look up.

"Wharton!" roared Bolsover.

No answer.

"Skinner wants to speak to you!"

"Can't Skinner speak for himself?" suggested Vernon-Smith. "Has Skinner engaged you as his trumpeter, Bolsover?"

"You shut up, Smithy! Skinner has challenged Wharton, and Wharton isn't going to funk it!"

Wharton looked up at last.

"If you've come here looking for trouble, Bolsover, I'm your man," he said quietly. "I'm ready to step into the gym whenever you please."

"You can't get out of it like that," said Bolsover coolly. "Skinner's the injured party. Look at his nose, you fellows."

"Well, it does look a picture," grinned Hazeldene.

Skinner rubbed his nose and scowled.

"Speak up, Skinner!" chimed in Treluce.

"I've sent you a challenge, Wharton," said Skinner. Bolsover major had pinched his arm as a hint to get to business.

"I've reused it," said Wharton.

"You punched my nose."

"You asked for it."

"You're going to fight me for it?"

"Well, I won't!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Ogilvy. "You can't refuse, Wharton. What the dickens—you can't punch fellows' noses as you please! We're not in Germany—and you're not a Kaiser, I suppose?"

"You'll have to fight Skinner if he insists," said Russell. "You should have kept your paws to yourself, you know."

"When I want your opinion I'll ask for it, Russell!"

"I'll give it to you without being asked!" exclaimed Russell angrily. "You're acting like a cheeky bully!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Billy Bunter. "Really, Wharton, I'm surprised at you! I should advise Skinner to punch your nose, as you did his. In Skinner's place, I should certainly lick you, Wharton."

Wharton laughed; he could not help it. The fat and unwieldy Owl of the Remove was not likely to lick anybody.

"Go it, Skinner!" said Bolsover major encouragingly, and giving the unfortunate Skinner's arm another twist by way of further encouragement.

"Look here, Wharton, you've got to fight or apologise!" said Skinner.

"I won't do, either!"

"Then you're a funk!" said Skinner.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"So you don't mind being called a funk?" sneered Treluce.

"Not at all—by Skinner."

Bolsover major gave Skinner a glare. It was time to proceed to more drastic measures.

"Well, I'll give you the coward's blow, then!" gasped Skinner.

Wharton's eyes glinted.

"You'd better not, Skinner."

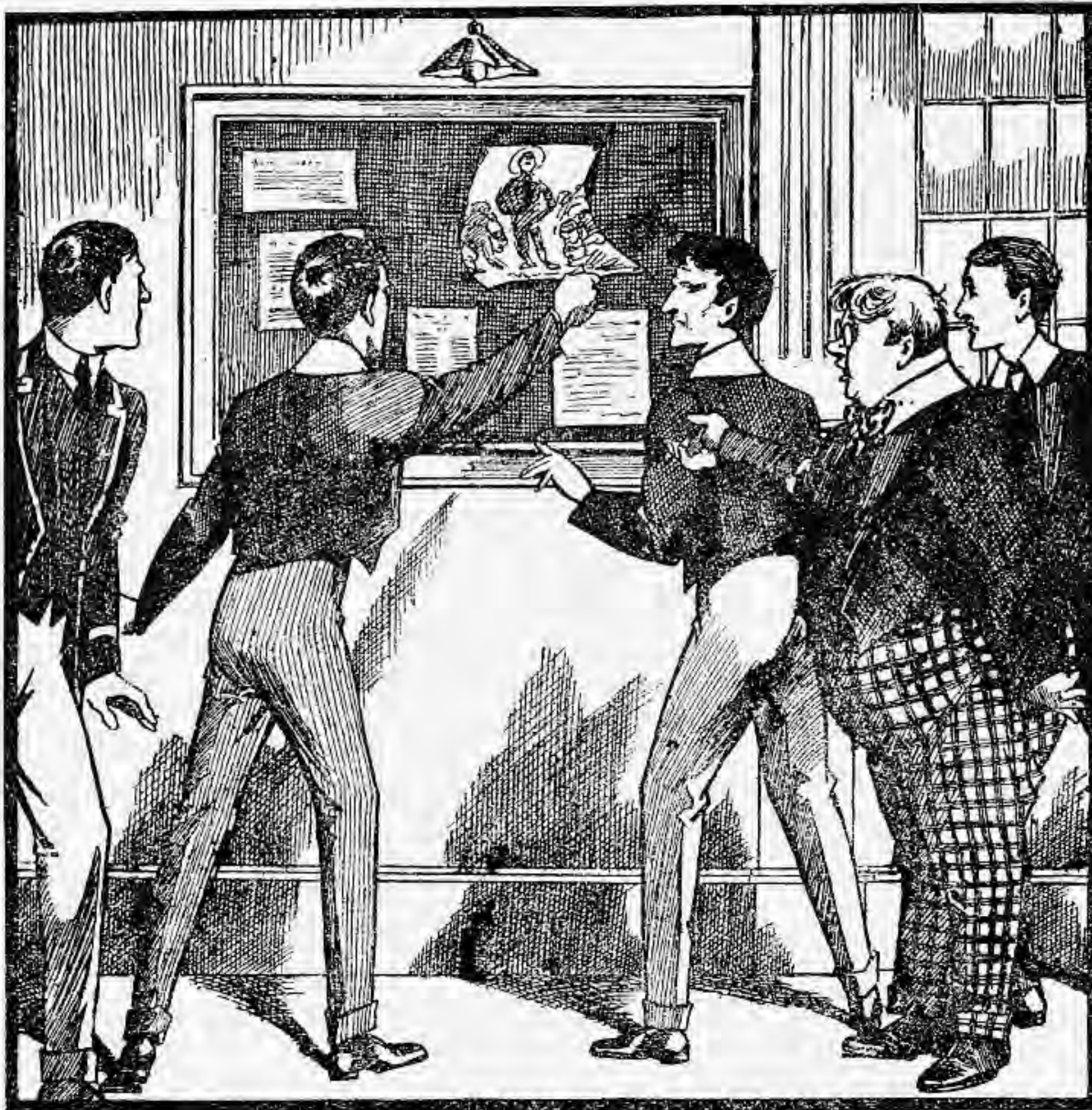
"Will you fight me?"

"No!"

"Then take that!"

Skinner's fist lashed out at Wharton's set face. Wharton's hand whipped up like lightning, and Skinner's wrist was caught before the blow could reach its mark. Skinner struggled to free his hand, but he could not. He lashed out with the other hand, and his other wrist was caught in a grip like a vice. Then Skinner was helpless. He wriggled and struggled in Wharton's grasp, but in vain, and there was a howl of laughter from the juniors. The dramatic coward's blow could not be struck, under the circumstances.

Wharton looked grimly at Skinner's flushed, furious face. The humiliation of his position, held like an infant in a



With a flushed face, Wharton reached up to tear the offending paper from the board. "Let that alone!" cried Skinner. (See Chapter 1.)

stronger grip, roused Skinner to fury, and he forgot his desire to avoid the fight. He struggled desperately to release his hands.

"Let me go, you rotter!" he shouted.

Wharton smiled contemptuously.

"What chance do you think you've got if I meet you, you ass?" he exclaimed. "Why don't you chuck it?"

"Chuck it, and don't be an ass, Skinner!" said Nugent.

Skinner panted.

"Help me, Bolsover, you rotter!"

"Let him go, Wharton!"

"Mind your own business!"

"Then I'll jolly well make you!"

Bolsover major made a grasp at Wharton, and he had to let Skinner go. He turned on Bolsover angrily, and as he did so Skinner struck him full in the face. The blow caught him by surprise, and he reeled back over his chair, and rolled on the floor of the Common-room.

There was a buzz as Wharton went down. Skinner, almost scared at what he had done, stood blinking at him.

Wharton scrambled to his feet, his face white with rage.

"We're even now," said Skinner, backing away. "I'm willing to let it drop if you are."

"That's fair!" grinned Russell.

Wharton made no reply, but he rushed at Skinner. Frank Nugent caught him by the shoulder and stopped him.

"Let me go!" shouted Wharton.

"Hold on, Harry—"

"Let me go!"

"Hold on, I tell you! Let the matter drop here," said Frank.

Wharton glared at him.

"You may be funk enough to take a blow in the face, but I'm not!" he shouted.

"It's no more than you expected Skinner to take."

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"Oh, don't talk to me!"

Wharton shook off Nugent's grasp, and rushed at Skinner.

"Now put up your hands, you cad! I'll fight you now—till you can't stand!"

"Not here!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "You'll have Quelch in if there's a row. Come into the gym."

"I'm—I'm going to have the gloves on," stammered Skinner. "I'm not a rotten prize-fighter! I—I'm not going to fight without gloves!"

Wharton laughed scornfully.

"Come into the gym, then, confound you!"

"Come on, Skinney," said Bolsover major. "I'm going to be your second."

Bolsover marched Skinner off triumphantly. Harry Wharton followed, with a black brow. Nugent joined him.

"I suppose I'm going to be your second?" he said quietly.

"You can please yourself about that."

"Then I'll be your second, Harry."

Wharton growled, and made no other reply. The party arrived in the gym, followed by about half the Remove.

The famous Co. were all on the spot now, but for once Wharton's chums could not feel proud of their leader. The look on his face showed that there was a

bad time in store for Harold Skinner, and it would not be a pleasant spectacle to see the athletic captain of the Remove hammering a weedy slacker who was not half his match.

The two juniors threw off their jackets and donned the gloves. Skinner's expression was the reverse of joyful. He looked a good deal as if he was going to execution; and, indeed, if he had been capable of licking anybody, he would rather have licked Bolsover major, for getting him into this scrape, than Wharton.

"Rounds, I suppose?" said Vernon-Smith, taking out his watch.

Wharton's lip curled.

"How many rounds do you think there are in that slacker?" he said. "One round will be enough for him."

"Oh, don't swank!" said Snoop.

Wharton turned on him savagely.

"What's that?"

"Oh, n-u-nothing!" gasped Snoop, dodging behind Bolsover major with a haste that made the juniors roar.

"Well, shall I keep the rounds, or not?" asked the Bouncer.

"I don't care twopence."

"Yes, do," said Skinner.

"Right-ho! Ready?"

"Ye-es."

"Seconds out of the ring!" said the Bouncer.

Nugent paused. Bolsover major backed out, leaving his champion alone. But Frank spoke to his chum in a hurried whisper.

"Harry, let the poor brute down lightly."

"After what he's done?" growled Wharton.

"He's no match for you. You know what all the fellows will think of you if you hammer him. Keep your temper."

"Oh, let my temper alone! I've heard a little too much about that. If you think I'm going to act like a beastly

bully, you needn't be my second."

Nugent bit his lip hard.

"Seconds, clear off!" said Vernon-Smith; and Nugent stepped out of the ring.

"Time!"

THE 8th CHAPTER.

Broken Friendship!

"Time!"

The fight began.

The Removites looked on with keen interest, curious to see what kind of a fight the black sheep of the Form would put up against his athletic opponent. Skinner, finding himself fairly in for it, did his best. He started the attack. He got home a couple of blows, and then he found himself, as it appeared to him, the centre of a whirlwind.

Blows rained on him, and he was knocked right and left. Before the two minutes allowed for the round had expired Skinner went to the floor, gasping.

Vernon-Smith, grinning, began to count.

"One, two, three, four, five—"

Skinner staggered up.

"Hang you, I'm not done yet!" he snarled.

He rushed at Wharton. His blows were brushed aside, and a hard glove smote him on the chin and hurled him backwards.

"Time!"

Bolsover major dragged Skinner up, and made a knee for him.

Skinner sank on it, blinking and gasping.

"I—I can't go on!" he stuttered.

"Yes, you can," growled Bolsover. "And for goodness' sake put a bit more beef into it! You've hardly touched him yet."

"Grooh! Ow, my chin!"

Wharton had stepped back, but he did not go to Nugent. He caught the look on Frank's face, and read the condemnation there. His face flushed with anger. He waited grimly for the next round.

"Time!" said Vernon-Smith.

Wharton stepped up quickly. Skinner left Bolsover's knee with visible reluctance and toed the line.

"Go it, Skinner!" sang out Snoop encouragingly.

The second round began.

Skinner attacked desperately, eager to get it over. He did not have long to wait. A drive straight from the shoulder knocked him off his feet, and he went down on his back with a crash. There he lay, dazed.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—"

"Buck up, Skinner!"

"Get a move on, old chap!"

"Eight, nine—out!"

The Bouncer slipped his watch back into his pocket. The fight was over; the defeated champion had been counted out, much to his relief. Bolsover major snorted with disgust.

"Call that a fight?" he growled.

Skinner groaned.

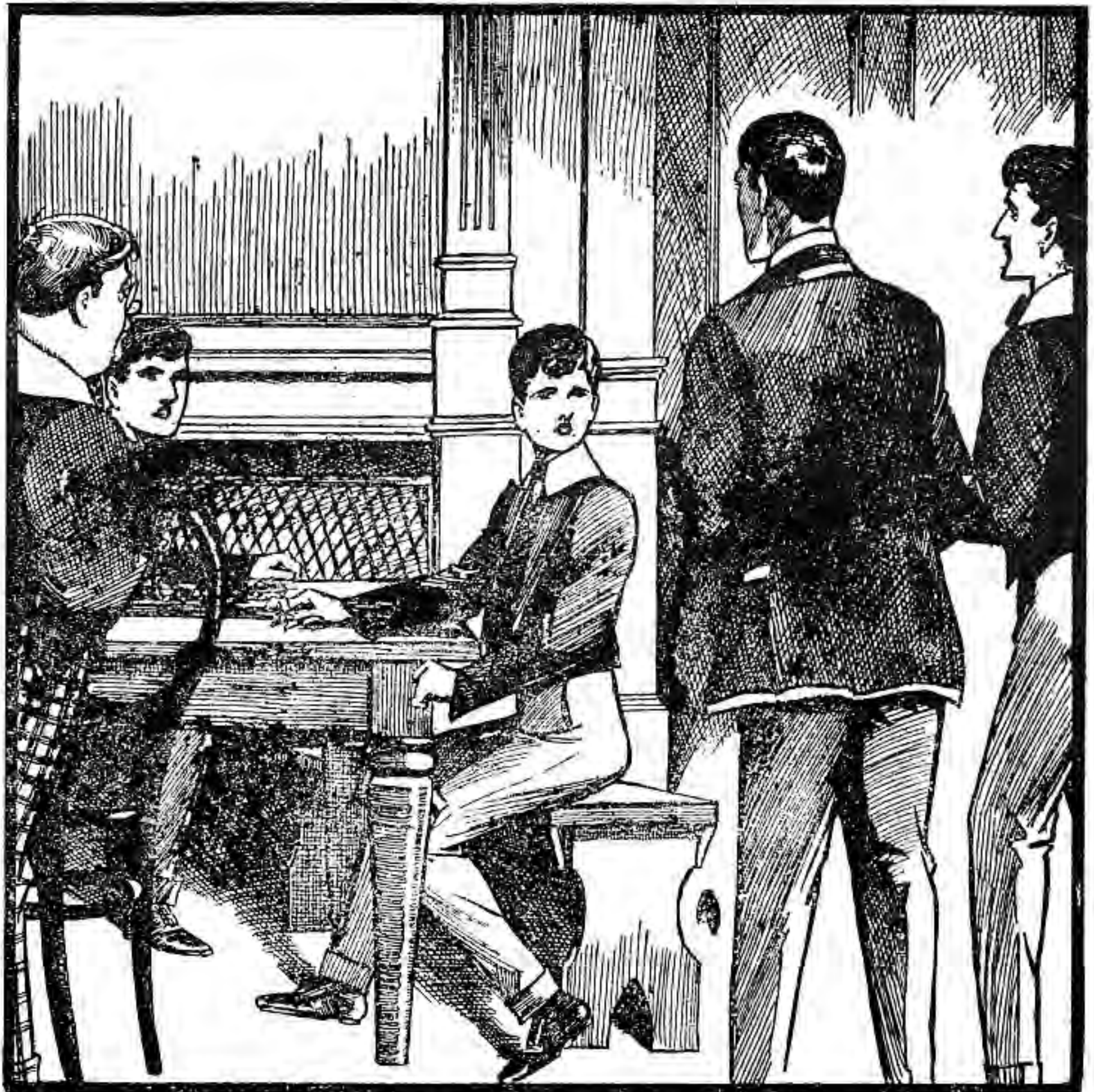
Bolsover jerked him to his feet.

"You're not hurt. Get your jacket on. Call that a fight? Br-r-r!"

"Ow-ow! Wow!" mumbled Skinner.

Nugent held Wharton's jacket for him. Wharton slipped

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Wharton looked up from the chess-board. "If you've come here looking for trouble, Bolsover, I'm your man," he said quietly. (See Chapter 7.)

it on, and, without a word to his chum, strode out of the gym.

Skinner limped away more slowly, leaning heavily on Snoop. The punishment he had received would not have hurt a fit fellow much; but Skinner was weedy and out of condition, and he felt as if he had been through a threshing-machine.

There was no satisfaction in the victory for Wharton. He was angry and disturbed and ill at ease when he returned to his study and strove to centre his mind on his preparation. His look was so forbidding when Nugent came in that Frank did not speak, but sat down quietly to his work.

It was not easy for Wharton to concentrate his mind upon work in his present mood, but by sheer force of will he did so. Work was finished at last, and he rose to his feet.

Nugent put aside his books.

It was Nugent's intention to say nothing of his thoughts, and to allow everything to go on as before, if he could. But he was aware that that would not be easy. His unspoken condemnation, which he could not help, had its influence, and he did not expect his chum to endure it patiently. And it was hardly possible to chat in the old cheery way as if nothing had happened. Nugent made the effort, but it could hardly be called a success.

"Coming down to the Common-room?" he asked.

Wharton paused before he replied.

"We'd better have this out," he said abruptly. "We can't dig in this study together scowling at one another."

"I wasn't aware that I scowled."

"Do you think it isn't plain enough what you're thinking?" exclaimed Wharton scornfully. "I expected you to stand by me as my friend, and instead of that you've joined with all the rest!"

"If all the rest are down on you, Harry, that ought to be a pretty plain hint that you've put yourself in the wrong."

"I don't admit it for a moment."

"Well, there's no need to quarrel about it. Let the matter drop."

"That's impossible. You think I treated Skinner brutally in hammering him after he had struck me."

"You had struck him."

"That's different."

Nugent's eyes gleamed.

"If you think that's different, Wharton, it's because what Skinner & Co. say about you is true—that you look on yourself as a little tin god. You seem to be trying to justify everything they say about you."

"Well, you don't want to pal with a little tin god," said Wharton bitterly.

"I'll get out of the study, if you like," said Nugent tartly. "It isn't particularly agreeable here."

"You won't! It was your study before I came to Greyfriars. I'll get out."

Harry Wharton walked out of the study as he spoke, without giving his chum time to reply.

Nugent looked after him in silence, his eyes glittering and deep anger rising in his breast.

There had been little disagreements in the study before, but it had never come to this. But if Wharton could throw over an old friendship as lightly as that his friendship was not worth keeping, and it could go.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked into the study. An expression of concern came over his dusky face as he caught Nugent's expression.

"The esteemed Wharton has gone down?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Let us go followfully."

Nugent shook his head.

"I trust hopefully that there has been no more troublefulness in this august study?" remarked the nabob anxiously.

"There has," said Nugent abruptly. "I suppose all the Remove will know soon. Wharton and I aren't on speaking terms now. It's nothing to bother about."

"The regretfulness is terrific. But the blowfulness over will be soonful," said Hurree Singh. "It is a stormful agitation in an esteemed teacup."

Nugent grinned faintly.

"I think not. But never mind. You needn't be dragged into our row, Inky."

"I shall preservefully keep the sameful friendship for both the esteemed and ridiculous duffers," said the nabob gravely.

When the Remove went to the dormitory that night Wharton and Nugent did not speak. Skinner, though still feeling somewhat sore, grinned as he noted it. It was a revenge for him, at least. He was glad to see the split in No. 1 Study. But it was distressing to the members of the famous Co., so long shoulder to shoulder, and now divided. And the position was awkward for Bob and Johnny Bull and Inky, who were still on chummy terms with both the parted friends. If the breach continued, it looked as if they would have to take one side or the other; it could scarcely be avoided. And that would be the end of the Famous Five. Moreover, there was little doubt which side they would take.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Chance for Bunter!

THE split in the study was soon known far and wide, and excited a good deal of comment among the juniors.

Wharton and Nugent had been such good chums that it took the Remove quite by surprise. And it was difficult to suppose that anybody could quarrel with so good-tempered a fellow as Nugent, unless he was deliberately looking for trouble.

The Remove agreed that Wharton was to blame, as indeed he was.

Some of the fellows said so; but Wharton appeared to be deaf to remarks made in his presence, and Nugent broke out with unexpected sharpness of temper if anyone uttered a word against his former chum.

The rest of the Co. did not know how to deal with the matter.

Johnny Bull proposed knocking their heads together till they found some common-sense; a proposal that made Bob and Inky grin, but which they did not adopt.

Squiff and Peter Todd, and Tom Brown and Vernon-Smith, and some other fellows, tried their good offices with a view to healing the breach; but they might as well have saved their labour. The breach was not to be healed.

The two old chums met without speaking or looking at one another, and they did not meet when they could help it.

As most of their work and play were in common, awkward situations continually arose. Both were prominent members of the Remove Dramatic Society, of which Wibley was the head, and it was a little difficult to see how they were to rehearse together under the circumstances. Wharton settled that difficulty by resigning his part in the forthcoming play and keeping away from the rehearsals. Nugent, who would not appear to have driven him away, resigned his part also—a proceeding that made Wibley almost tear his hair. Wibley visited both of them in turn, and slanged them till he was out of breath, getting nothing from either of them in response.

Wharton, as captain of the Remove, could not resign from the cricket; but Nugent did not care to play under the circumstances, and he gave up his place in the team.

That gave Wharton a twinge. He felt that he was keeping Frank out of the cricket. But he made no sign.

Meanwhile, Wharton had ceased to "dig" in No. 1 Study.

The study was Frank's by right of priority. Billy Bunter had been his study-mate there before Wharton came to Greyfriars. Nugent would not have insisted on his rights, by any means; but Wharton settled the matter by taking his books and things away. He would not ask any other fellow to let him share his study, however, and he began to do his prep in the Form-room. Vernon-Smith invited him into his quarters; but, as Skinner was there also, Wharton could scarcely accept. But after a day or two he settled down in No. 14, with Johnny Bull and Fisher T. Fish.

The chums were completely separated now. When there was a row with Coker of the Fifth, if Wharton was present Nugent was sure to be absent. When there was a rag with the Highcliffe fellows, Wharton stayed out if Nugent took a part. Perhaps, inwardly, each was waiting for the other to come round. But each was too proud to think of making the first advances.

In a few days most of the Remove ceased to think about

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the matter. It was settled that Wharton and Nugent did not chum together, and that was all.

Billy Bunter, meanwhile, was thinking the matter out. Billy Bunter honoured No. 7 Study with his presence, but he was not wholly satisfied there. Peter Todd had a somewhat heavy hand, and he was wont to resort to a cricket-stump when Bunter raided the study cupboard, and scoffed all the available supplies at one fell swoop. And on Saturday Billy Bunter rolled into No. 1 Study, and bestowed a very friendly blink on Nugent.

"All alone—what?" he asked.

"Yes, fatty," growled Nugent.

"Wharton isn't coming back—what?"

"No, ass!"

"Oh, really, Nugent, you shouldn't call an old pal names, you know!" remonstrated Bunter. "I've come here to speak to you like a pal."

"Then buzz off!"

"Wharton was always rather a high-handed beast, wasn't he?" pursued Billy Bunter confidentially. "I—I say, wh-what are you going to do with that bat?"

"Lick you, if you say another word about Wharton!" growled Frank.

"Oh, really, Nugent! Haven't you quarrelled with the beast? I'm on your side, you know. I'm sticking up for you."

"Oh, shut up!"

Billy Bunter glared at Nugent through his big glasses. This was a very ungrateful return for his kind sympathy and friendliness.

"Well, if you can't be civil, I'll clear," he growled.

"Good!"

"Ahem! The fact is, Nugent, I used to be in this study with you before Wharton came."

"Don't remind a chap of a horrid time like that, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, you know! I was going to say that I'm willing to dig with you again. I really couldn't stand it while Wharton was here, but I could get on with you, Nugent."

"You couldn't," said Nugent grimly. "It takes two to make a bargain, you know. Shut the door after you."

"Look here, Nugent!" roared Bunter. "If you don't want me in the study—"

"I don't. Good-bye!"

"He, he, he! I can take a joke," said Bunter quite cheerfully. "He, he, he! It's settled that I'm coming back, then."

"You fat owl—"

"I'm not going to stick with Toddy any longer. He's too mean about grub," said Bunter. "He kicked up an awful fuss yesterday because I ate all the sardines and finished the cake. I can't stand a mean fellow. Now, you're not mean, Nugent."

"Thanks!" said Nugent, grinning. "But if you ate all my sardines and cake, I think I should kick up a fuss, too."

"Well, you see, you've got more money than Toddy. He's only the son of a miserable solicitor, or something. You have better feeds in here. Of course, you don't want to feed alone. It's unsocial. I'm going to give you my company, Nugent, so that you won't feel lonely."

"You needn't trouble."

"No trouble at all. I'm coming back," said Bunter. "I shall expect a pretty decent tea every day, that's all. I make no other conditions. Of course, I should expect you to cash a postal-order for me occasionally."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Nugent.

"You'll find me an improvement after Wharton," urged Bunter. "It will be a bit different from having that ratty bouncer about. Now, I'm a good-tempered chap; nothing ratty about me. I sha'n't fly out at a word, you know. In fact, you'll be jolly comfy here, with a decent chap like me, instead of a sulky, rotten-tempered, ratty bouncer like that — Yaroooooop!"

Billy Bunter was interrupted by the cricket-bat clumping on his fat person.

He jumped away with a roar.

"Wharrer you at? Stoppit! Yooooop!"

Clump—clump!

Billy Bunter made a desperate spring for the door.

Nugent's boot rose in the air and caught the fat junior fairly on the bound. Bunter went through the doorway like a shell from a mortar.

There was a terrific bump in the passage.

Slam!

Billy Bunter sat up and roared:

"Yow-ow! Help! Fire! Murder! Yaroooooh!"

Peter Todd looked out of his study.

"Hallo! What's the matter, fatty?"

"Yow-ow-ow! Come and help a chap up, Toddy, you silly, grinning, cackling ass!"

Peter took Bunter by a fat ear and helped him up. Bunter roared still more loudly. Peter's help was not grateful or comforting.

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EVERY
MONDAY,

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ONE
PENNY.

"Leggo, you skinny beast!" howled Bunter. "Leggo my ear, you rotter! Yow-ow!"

"Now, what's the row about?" demanded Peter.

"Ow-yow! It's that cad Nugent. Because I wouldn't go back and dig in No. 1 with him," spluttered Bunter. "I told him I couldn't do it. He fairly begged me; but I felt I had to refuse—"

"Ha, ha!"

"There's nothing to cackle at, you rotter! I refuse to go back to No. 1, if Nugent begs me on his bended knees! Yow-ow-ow!"

"I can see him doing it," grinned Peter. "Bunter, old man, you know I keep a stump for you when you tell whoppers. Wait a minute till I get that stump!"

Peter Todd stepped back into his study. When he looked out again, a few moments later, William George Bunter had disappeared. He had not waited for the stump.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Gives It Up!

ON Sunday morning it was a custom with the Famous Five to take a Sunday walk together after morning chapel. Their Sunday walk generally led them in the direction of Cliff House, and they sometimes walked home with Marjorie Hazeldene and her friends Phyllis and Clara.

But when Sunday came this time the inseparable five were no longer together. Nugent went out with Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry, and the patient and good-tempered Inky bestowed his company on Wharton. And as it was quite certain that Bob Cherry's footsteps would wander inevitably towards Cliff House, Harry Wharton took another direction, which happened to be towards Highcliffe. In the lane he met Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar, and chatted with them for some time, and on his way home he fell in with Ponsonby & Co., his old enemies. It was a rule with the Greyfriars chums never to enter into a rag on Sunday, but Ponsonby & Co. were not so particular; and, as they were in force, they became warlike at once. There was a scrap before Wharton and Hurree Singh got clear of the enemy, and they returned to Greyfriars in a somewhat dusty state.

"Our luckfulness is out," the nabob remarked, as he mopped his nose. "If our esteemed chums had been with us the atrocious and ridiculous Ponsonby would have been mopped up terrifically."

"Yes, I wish Bob and Johnny had been there," said Harry.

"I also wish the esteemed Franky had been there," said the nabob gently, and Wharton made no reply.

Bob Cherry and his companions came in cheerfully for dinner. Hazel came in with them, and after dinner Hazel sought out Wharton.

"Marjorie asked after you," he said.

Wharton nodded.

"She doesn't know you and Nugent have been rowing," said Hazeldene. "Of course, it's no business of mine. But it's rather awkward. You know Marjorie and Clara and Phyllis are coming over on Wednesday to tea?"

"Yes."

"Well, they generally have tea in your study. It seems that you've changed out. I suppose you'll be there?"

Wharton coloured.

"No," he said, after a pause.

"Well, it's your own business," said Hazel carelessly.

"The girls will think you and Nugent a pair of asses."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed!" said Hazel coolly. "I shouldn't wonder if Phyllis jabs you. She does jaw a chap, you know. And I suppose you can hardly punch her nose."

"Don't be an ass!" exclaimed Wharton irritably.

"Not at all. But Phyllis isn't in the Remove, you know, so you can't knock her down, can you?" said Hazel agreeably. And he walked away before Wharton could make any rejoinder.

Wharton drove his hands deep into his pockets and strode away. It was an uncomfortable situation. Matters had changed in No. 1 Study since Marjorie & Co.'s last visit, and it was certainly awkward. He was no longer on speaking terms with his former chum, and he could not join the usually merry tea-party in No. 1 Study. Under the circumstances, he could not sit at the same table with Nugent—the situation would be altogether too awkward.

The quarrel, in fact, made matters uncomfortable all round. The girls would wonder at his absence. They would soon see that something was wrong. Phyllis had chipped in once when there was a misunderstanding between Wharton and Bob Cherry, and had set the matter right. His quarrel with

Nugent was quite a different matter, and he shrank from any comment on the subject. But it was impossible for things to go on as they had gone before.

Marjorie & Co. would think them a pair of silly fellows. He knew that, and it was not a gratifying reflection. They would think that the two had quarrelled about nothing, or next to nothing. After all, what was the quarrel about? Nugent had considered that he had acted badly towards Skinner. His own conscience was not quite easy on that subject. If Skinner had been a different kind of chap—if he had been a decent fellow, like Squiff, or Tom Brown, or Linley—Wharton would have told him frankly that he was sorry.

But to humiliate himself to a rotter like Skinner was too bitter a pill. Skinner would make it as humiliating as possible for him; he would consider it a triumph, and crow over it. Wharton could not quite make up his mind to go through that, yet he had an uneasy feeling that he ought to do so, and to accept it as a punishment for having been in the wrong in the first place. But suppose he had been in the wrong! Nugent might have stood by him, all the same, he thought. He would have stood by Nugent. He did not quite realise that the quarrel was chiefly of his own making.

Billy Bunter joined him as he paced restlessly under the elms. The fat junior came up, with an agreeable grin.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Oh, don't bother!" said Harry crossly. He was usually very patient with the Owl of the Remove, but his temper was sore now.

Bunter jumped back in alarm.

"Hands off!" he exclaimed.

Wharton burst into an angry laugh.

"You young ass, what are you afraid of?"

"Of course, I'm not afraid of you, or anybody," sniffed Bunter, "only spectacles do get in a chap's way in a scrap. Otherwise, I'd lick you fast enough, if I had any of your cheek. And if you think you're going to punch me like you do Skinner, you're jolly well mistaken! I'm not a chap to be bullied, I can tell you!"

Wharton controlled his temper with an effort. It was not agreeable to be regarded, even by a duffer like Bunter, as a fellow who could not be approached without caution—like that famous King of Prussia whose amiable habit it was to lay his cane about everybody who came within reach.

"Pax, you know!" said Bunter, blinking at him. "I've really come here as a pal, Harry, old chap. Don't get waxy, you know. That cur, Nugent—"

"What?"

"That rotten worm Nugent—"

"Shut up, you fat cad!"

"He wanted me to go back into No. 1, you know," pursued Bunter. "Simply begged of me. But I had to refuse. 'No,' I told him. 'I'm not coming back without Harry—'"

"Oh, do dry up!"

"I've got an idea," said Bunter confidentially. "You can lick Nugent, you know. Don't walk away while I'm talking to you, Wharton." Bunter toddled after the captain of the Remove. "This is my idea, Harry, old chap. You can lick Nugent. I'll come with you and hold your jacket. Then we'll turn the beast out of the study, and we'll have it. See?"

Wharton walked on at a pace Billy Bunter found it difficult to equal. The Owl's little fat legs were going like machinery.

"I say, Wharton, what do you say? We'll have No. 1 Study, you know, and Nugent can go and eat cokenuts. Of course, I should expect something decent for tea. It will be a bit hard parting with Toddy, who's so attached to me, but really I think I'd rather dig with my old pal. And I'm willing to agree to an arrangement for whacking out our remittances. I'll go halves with you with all my postal-orders, and you'll divvy up your remittances with me. That will be ripping, you know, and fair on both sides. Wharton, you beast, I can't keep up with you! I say, old chap—Yah, you beast!"

Billy Bunter was left to waste his sweetness on the desert

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air. He could not stay the pace. He shook a fat fist after Wharton as he disappeared out of the gates.

"Yah! Rotter!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the trouble?" asked Bob Cherry's cheery voice.

Bunter blinked at him.

"That rotter Wharton—" he began. "Oh, yaroooh! Beast!"

Bob Cherry sauntered away, leaving Bunter to extricate himself from his hat. And although the split in the study continued, neither Wharton nor Nugent had the honour of chumming up with William George Bunter.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Marjorie's Counsel!

"MARJORIE!" exclaimed Wharton. It was Wednesday afternoon.

There was a cricket-match on that afternoon between the Remove and the Third. The heroes of the Third were very small beer in the cricket line, and the captain of the Remove had announced his intention of standing out of the match.

Sampson Quincy Ifley Field had undertaken the task of captaining the Remove, and Frank Nugent was in his team. The rest of the Co. were in the eleven, and Harry Wharton had gone out for a ramble on the cliffs. Marjorie and Clara and Phyllis were coming over later to see the match, and Wharton had not expected to see anything of them.

But as he walked down the road by the cliffs he caught sight of Marjorie ahead, and hurried to overtake her.

The girl greeted him with a bright smile.

"I thought you were going over to Greyfriars?" said Harry.

"Yes; I'm going back to Cliff House for Phyllis and Clara now," explained Marjorie. "I've been to the village to see Mrs. Chirpey. The match hasn't begun yet, as you are here?"

Wharton coloured.

"I'm not playing this afternoon," he said. "It's only a fag match, anyway. Tubb & Co. will be jolly pleased to see you watching their cricket, though."

"Then you are going to be an onlooker?" smiled Marjorie.

"Well, no. I shall be away this afternoon."

Marjorie gave him an odd look. It occurred to Harry that Hazeldene had been talking. Hazel did not conceal his opinion that Wharton was to blame in the late dispute, and probably he had aired his views at Cliff House. Not that it mattered, as Marjorie would certainly have learned it all at Greyfriars that afternoon.

Wharton walked by her side, flushed and uncomfortable. Marjorie did not speak.

"I—I"—Wharton broke the silence at last—"I suppose you've heard that—that Nugent and I are not on good terms now?"

"Yes, I heard."

"It's nothing you know, only a row."

Marjorie smiled slightly.

"But you were such good friends," she said.

"Yes, we were. Nugent was jolly decent to me when I first came to Greyfriars," said Harry. "I had a bit of trouble at first, and he stood by me like a brick. We've been chums ever since."

"Isn't it rather a pity for it to end like this?" said Marjorie softly. "I am sure Frank can't have done anything, really, to make all that difference."

Wharton's face softened a good deal. Marjorie did not assume that Nugent was in the right as a matter of course, as all the Remove fellows did. In fact, it did not seem to occur to her that Wharton was in the wrong. The captain of the Remove gave her a grateful glance.

"Nugent hasn't done anything," he said quickly.

"But you haven't?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then the quarrel is all about nothing?" said Marjorie, laughing. "Hav'n't you better make it up at once?"

"It isn't exactly like that, either," said Harry. "If—if you're interested, Marjorie, I'd like to tell you, and—and ask your advice."

"Of course I'm interested, Harry! I was very sorry to hear that anything of the kind had happened."

"There isn't really anything in dispute," said Harry, colouring again. "It was really Skinner's fault. He was making game of me, and I lost my temper, and—and hit out. I—I know I shouldn't have done it, as he's a weedy beast."

"You shouldn't, Harry!"

"No, I know I shouldn't. But I did, you know!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

In the Hands of the Enemy!

"NUGENT, by gad!"

"And alone!" grinned Gadsby.

Ponsonby laughed merrily.

"Our luck's in!" he remarked. "It's jolly queer, too! Those rotters are generally together, and then it's too much of a fag to tackle them."

"Absolutely!" yawned Vavasour.

"But we gave his Highness Wharton and the nigger something to remember us by the other day," grinned Monson, "and now here's Nugent walking into our arms like a dear, good little boy."

The Highcliffians grinned with satisfaction. Ponsonby & Co. never could keep up their end with their old rivals, the Famous Five, unless they had heavy odds on their side. There were five of them now—and here was Frank Nugent, coming up the lonely, tree-shaded lane by himself. And the lively young gentlemen of Highcliffe decided at once that it was too good an opportunity to be lost.

Nugent had not seen them yet.

He was walking along the lane with his hands in his pockets and a moody expression on his handsome face. He had not chosen to play in the match with the Third. His aid was not needed in so easy a game, and Micky Desmond had willingly taken his place. Frank was not in a happy mood that sunny afternoon.

The split in the study weighed on his mind.

There was nothing he could do to heal it—Wharton had chosen to quarrel with him, and Wharton was in the wrong. Nugent could not change his opinion of the Skinner affair, if he wanted to—right was right, and wrong was wrong. He had been very patient, but he could not pretend to approve of what he condemned—that was too much even for his best chum to ask.

But he felt the break in his old friendship keenly. He wondered, too, whether he had been a little to blame—whether he might not have been more tactful. Yet, why should he always have the task of dealing warily with another fellow's temper lest there should be trouble? If a fellow could not control his temper he must be prepared to lose his friends.

But he was miserable, all the same. The old pleasant companionship had been broken up, and there was nothing to replace it. And the quarrel was already leading to division in the Co.—it did not please Nugent that the friends of both parties sided with him; it only made him miserable to reflect that Wharton would lose his other friends if this went on.

When he caught sight of the Highcliffe fellows, he was quite close to them. They were watching him with grinning faces. Nugent was in no mood for a row with Ponsonby & Co., and he would have passed on unheeding. But Ponsonby did not mean him to escape so easily. He made a sign to his followers, and they lined up in Nugent's way. The Greyfriars junior had to halt.

"Let me pass!" rapped out Nugent angrily.

"Not so fast, dear boy!" smiled Ponsonby. "It's quite a time since we had the pleasure of seeing you. Don't tear yourself away at once!"

"Such a pleasure seein' you, old scout!" grinned Gadsby.

"In fact, we can't bear to part with you!" said Ponsonby. "We don't intend to, really! Now, don't be a naughty, rough boy, and push against your old pals. You may get hurt, you know."

The Highcliffians promptly collared the Greyfriars junior, who had made to thrust his way past.

"Let me go!" shouted Frank angrily.

"Hold the cad!" said Ponsonby calmly. "He's goin' through it before we let him go! How kind of him to seek us out in a lonely spot! What?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Nugent hit out fiercely. He knew that a ragging was intended, and that he had to fight his way out. But the odds of five to one were rather too heavy for him. Gadsby and Monson grasped his arms, and Drury threw an arm round his neck. Ponsonby gripped him by the collar. He struggled in vain!

"Naughty, naughty!" grinned Ponsonby. "Don't wriggle, dear boy. I shall twist your collar if you do, like that—"

"Oh, you rotter?"

"And pull your ears, like that!"

Nugent panted with rage. He was firmly held, and Ponsonby was at liberty to pull his ears, which he did with great enjoyment.

The Highcliffe nuts were grinning with glee. Ponsonby felt in his pockets, and drew out a whipcord.

"Well, if you were sorry afterwards—"

"I was, in a way."

"Then you only had to tell Skinner so."

"But—but Skinner isn't the kind of fellow a chap can speak to like that. He would take advantage of it. He isn't like Bob, or Squiff, or—or Nugent."

"That makes it harder, of course; but you ought to do what is right in your own eyes, even if it is hard."

"Oh!" said Harry.

"You asked me to advise you, you know," added Marjorie hastily.

"Of course," said Harry. "But—but that's what Nugent thought. I had a scrap with Skinner afterwards, and he was rather hammered. Nugent thought I was too hard on him. I didn't really mean to be, but—but I was savage. I—I know I was wrong," he added, lowering his eyes.

Marjorie did not speak.

"Now I've made you think the same as Nugent does, that I'm a quarrelsome, bullying rotter!" said Wharton bitterly.

"I shouldn't ever think such a thing of you, Harry, and I am sure Nugent doesn't. But I wish you hadn't fought Skinner! He isn't a match for you."

"But I hadn't any choice. I refused at first, and he struck me. Nugent thought I ought to stand it, because I had struck him. Of course, I couldn't!"

Marjorie was silent.

"You agree with Nugent, then?"

"Well, yes. It was no worse for you than for Skinner, was it?"

"If I say I think it was, you'll think that I look on myself as a little tin god. That's how Nugent put it."

"But there wouldn't be anything else for me to think, Harry."

"Oh!" said Wharton again.

They walked on in silence for some time. Cliff House came in sight. The captain of the Remove halted.

"I hope you are not offended, Harry," said Marjorie, stopping, too. "You asked me to speak, you know?"

Wharton smiled grimly.

"Yes, I asked for it, and now I've got it!" he said. "Of course, I'm not offended, Marjorie. You think I've been an ass, and I think so, too. I suppose it's my beastly temper. Perhaps I am rather a conceited duffer, as Skinner says."

"I don't think so," said Marjorie, smiling. "But I think you have been very quick to take offence."

"Oh, don't!" said Harry, wincing. "That's the same as saying I am touchy. A touchy fellow is horrible."

"Well, touchiness isn't pleasant, but it is easy to make up for being hasty," said Marjorie. "I wish you would set the matter right with Frank."

"And admit myself in the wrong all along the line?"

"Yes, if you feel you are in the wrong!"

"I suppose I am," said Harry uneasily. "But—but I can't eat humble pie to Skinner. He would crow."

"Would it hurt you very much if a mean fellow crowed?"

"I—I suppose it wouldn't, if you come to that. I suppose I'm a bigger ass than I supposed," confessed Harry. "I—I—I'll tell Skinner I'm sorry! I suppose I ought to, and if he crows, let him! After all, I can stand it!"

"Of course you can!" said Marjorie. "And then Frank—"

Wharton made a restless movement.

"I can't ask him to make it up," he said. "He was down on me!"

"But he wouldn't be down on you if you made it right with Skinner."

"N-no! But—but I—I can't!" said Harry. "If he shows that he's willing, I could. But—but I can't speak first!"

"That is wrong, Harry," said Marjorie gravely. "I don't like to hear you talk like that."

There were footsteps on the road, and Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe came sauntering down from the cliffs.

The Highcliffe fellows raised their straw hats to Marjorie, looked at Wharton with supercilious smiles, and passed on. Wharton's cheeks flushed, but he gave no other signs of having observed the Highcliffian's insolence.

Ponsonby & Co. disappeared down the lane towards Greyfriars, laughing amongst themselves. Wharton could guess that they were discussing the encounter of a few days before, when he and Hurree Singh had had decidedly the worst of it.

"I must go," said Marjorie. "Clara and Phyllis will be waiting for me. Good-bye, Harry!"

"Good-bye, Marjorie!"

The girl ran off to Cliff House. Wharton, with a moody brow, turned and strode away. He was feeling dissatisfied and uneasy. He had asked Marjorie for counsel, and she had given him good counsel; but it was a difficult matter to make up his mind to act upon it.

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"Put his paws together!" he ordered. He bound the whipcord round Nugent's wrists, knotting it with cruel tightness. The Greyfriars junior was helpless now.

"Now jerk up his leg—bend it at the knee!" said Ponsonby. "We're going to make him hop."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Nugent still struggled, and his knee smote Gadsby on the nose as he stooped to grasp it. Gadsby gave a roar, and toppled back, clasping his nose in anguish.

"Oh! Ah! Ugh! Yah! Ooooooh!" "Pin him!" yelled Ponsonby.

Gadsby's nose had received a hard knock, and it streamed red. He sprang at Nugent, and struck him savagely, and the Greyfriars junior fell to the ground.

"Here, cheese that, Gaddy!" muttered Drury. Even Drury was a little disgusted at hitting a fellow whose hands were tied.

"Look at my nose!" howled Gadsby. "I'm goin' to give him some more!"

"Hands off!" said Ponsonby.

"Look here, Pon—" "Hands off, I tell you! We're goin' to make the cad hop!"

Gadsby growled, but he did not strike again. Nugent's eyes were blazing at him from the ground. His right leg was bent at the knee, and tied securely. Then he was dragged up, standing on one leg.

He had to hop to keep himself from falling. A fall on the hard road, with his hands tied, would have hurt.

"Now, hop it!" chuckled Ponsonby.

"You rotten funks!" shouted Nugent.

"Are you going to hop it?"

"No, hang you!"

"Then, we'll help you! Stir him with your boot, Gaddy!"

"What-ho!" grinned Gaddy.

Gadsby's boot clumped on Nugent from behind. The nuts stood round chortling. With Gaddy's boot behind, Nugent had to "hop it," as Ponsonby commanded. He hopped desperately along the road to escape the savage lunges from Gadsby, and the Highcliffians roared with laughter.

"Make him hop into the ditch!" said Vavasour.

The young rascals were warming to the work now. With all the outward polish of manner they cultivated sedulously Ponsonby & Co. were at heart thorough hooligans. Ponsonby would never have dreamed of using the present participle without dropping the "g"; but upon more important matters he was not nearly so particular.

"Yaas, into the ditch with him!" said Gadsby. "Go it, you Greyfriars cad! Hop it!"

Nugent hopped desperately.

"All together!" grinned Ponsonby.

"Oh, you rotten cads!" gasped Nugent. "If a few of our fellows were here—"

"But they're not," said Ponsonby cheerily; "and if they were we'd serve them all the same. Hop it! You're goin' into the ditch, and you may as well make up your mind to it. We're goin' to teach you Greyfriars cads your place, or we'll know the reason why! Now then, in you go!"

"Kick the rotter in!" said Vavasour.

There were five boots hammering on Nugent now, as he hopped on the verge of the ditch by the roadside. There was no escape for him. He struggled to keep out of the ditch, but he had no chance.

But as the young ruffians were driving him fairly over the edge a figure appeared round the bend in the lane.

It was Harry Wharton!

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove caught sight of the group. Nugent saw him at the same moment.

Wharton halted a moment.

"Ware Greyfriars cads!" murmured Gadsby.

Nugent did not call out. If any other Greyfriars fellow had appeared in sight he would have shouted "Rescue!" But he did not call to Wharton.

The five Highcliffians faced round towards the new-comer, expecting interference at once. They were still five to one, for Nugent could not join in a tussle with his hands tied.

"We'll serve him the same!" grinned Ponsonby. "The cad's alone. This is luck!"

"Yes, rather!"

"You rotters!" shouted Wharton.

He thought he knew Ponsonby & Co. pretty well, but he had never expected to see them amusing themselves with such brutality as this.

He came right on.

Ponsonby & Co. did not need to attack him. He did not wait to be attacked. He came on like a whirlwind, and in a second the Highcliffians—five to one, as they were—were getting all the fighting they wanted, and a little more.

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Fight Against Five!

HARRY WHARTON'S eyes were blazing as he rushed upon the Highcliffians.

He had forgotten the terms he was on with Nugent. All he realised was that his old chum was in the hands of the enemy, and was being brutally used. That was enough for him.

Nugent, quite exhausted, sank down by the roadside, his aching leg giving way on the verge of the ditch. He struggled with the cord on his wrists, but he could not get loose. The fighting was left to Wharton.

And the captain of the Remove seemed equal to it.

With the first rush he had knocked Gadsby flying, and the unfortunate Gaddy went headlong into the ditch with a terrific splash.

Then his right, which seemed as hard as iron, caught Ponsonby under the chin and fairly lifted him off his feet. Ponsonby crashed down on his back, and lay gasping, feeling as if his chin had been driven up through his head.

Then Wharton was struggling with Vavasour, Drury, and Monson.

The odds were three to one, but the three were slackers, and by no means of the stuff of which heroes are made.

Vavasour backed out of the conflict at once, keeping behind his companions, quite satisfied with one hard punch that made him dizzy.

Gadsby and Monson fastened on the captain of the Remove like cats, striving to drag him down, and yelling to their comrades to come on.

But Ponsonby was still lying dazed, and Gadsby was struggling out of the ditch, while Vavasour was keeping out of reach. For the moment Wharton had only two foes to deal with.

The struggle was what Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh would have described as terrific.

The three combatants lost their footing and rolled in the road, Drury undermost, Wharton over him, and Monson sprawling on Wharton.

Wharton wrenched himself loose, and leaped up, with Monson in his grasp.

He exerted all his strength, and hurled Monson into the ditch, where he landed with a splash and a yell.

Drury staggered up just in time to catch a drive fairly in the eye, and he went down again as if he had been shot.

Wharton panted. For the moment he was unassailed.

He ran to Nugent.

"Franky, old man—"

"Look out, Harry!"

Ponsonby and Drury were up again, and coming on. Wharton had to turn and face them. There was no time to release his chum.

"Back up!" yelled Ponsonby. "Vavasour, you funk, come on!"

"I—I'm comin'!" stammered Vavasour.

"Gaddy—Monson, back up!"

"Groooooogh!" came from Gaddy and Monson.

They were crawling miserably out of the ditch, drenched to the skin, and smothered with mud, and with all the fight taken out of them.

Nugent watched, panting. He could not get loose; he could not help Wharton. But never had he felt prouder of his old chum than at that moment!

Drury went down, his other eye closing up, and Wharton struggled in the grasp of Ponsonby and Vavasour. Vavasour reeled away from an elbow that crashed into his ribs, and retired, panting. Then Wharton was struggling with Ponsonby, and Pon, after a savage resistance, went into the ditch.

Wharton made a rush at Vavasour, and that courageous youth, with a howl, fairly fled down the road.

Drury panted on the ground.

"Keep off, you rotter!" he gasped, as Wharton turned on him. "I give you best! Keep off!"

Wharton gave him hardly a glance. He ran to Nugent again, and this time he was not interfered with. He opened his penknife and cut the whipcord, and helped Frank to his feet.

"Hurt, old chap?"

Nugent grinned breathlessly.

"Yes, a bit. Never mind! Go for those cads! I can help you now. Shove that rotter into the ditch!"

Drury did not wait to be shoved into the ditch. He fled down the road after Vavasour.

Gadsby and Monson backed away, dripping mud and slime. Ponsonby struggled out of the ditch, muddy from head to foot.

Wharton burst into a laugh as he looked at the three draggled young rascals, no longer looking like the elegant nuts of Highcliffe.

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With furious looks they tramped away, not at all desirous of continuing the conflict, though the odds were still on their side.

"By Jove! You did pile it in, Harry!" said Nugent. "You've had a knock or two, too."

Wharton passed his hand over his face.

He had not escaped unscathed. One of his eyes was closing, his nose was swollen and streaming red, there were cuts and bruises on his face.

"That's all right!" he said.

There was a pause.

In the excitement of the combat the two juniors had quite forgotten that they were not on speaking terms—that they were no longer friends.

Nugent broke the silence.

"Thanks, very much!" he said. "It was ripping of you, considering—"

Wharton flushed.

"Did you think I'd leave you in their hands, Frank, because— Oh, hang it! I—I've just seen Marjorie. She gave me some good advice."

"Did she?" said Nugent in wonder.

"Yes." Wharton's face was crimson. "Franky, I've been an ass! I—I don't mind admitting it. I—I suppose that's enough for me to say?"

Nugent's face brightened.

"More than enough," he said. "I didn't want a row!"

"Well, I didn't either, if you come to that. But—but I was in the wrong about Skinner, and—and I'm going to tell him I'm sorry."

"Good for you!" said Nugent. "If you think so yourself—"

"I do think so now! And—and it was fatheaded to cut up so rusty about his silly picture," said Harry. "Let's get back, Franky. You look done up, and my nose wants bathing."

There was a whir of bicycles on the road as the two chums, reconciled now, reached the gates of Greyfriars. They looked back, and Marjorie and Clara and Phyllis alighted from their machines at the gate.

"My hat!" ejaculated Clara. "What have you boys been doing with your faces?"

The two juniors laughed.

"Not—not—" began Marjorie, in alarm.

Wharton understood what she was thinking, and he interrupted hastily.

"We had a row with some Highcliffe chaps," he said. "It wasn't really our fault. Such things will happen, you know!"

"Oh!" said Marjorie.

"There were five of the rotters," said Nugent. "They tied up my hands, and then Harry came up and mopped them up. I wish you had seen him!"

"Oh, rot!" said Wharton, colouring.

The juniors and the Cliff House girls walked in together.

"Then it is all right now, Harry?" Marjorie asked, in a low voice.

Wharton nodded and smiled.

"Yes. I've taken your advice."

"I'm so glad! I don't think you will be sorry for it, Harry."

"I'm jolly glad, Marjorie!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry met them in the quadrangle. Bob was happy, having scored forty runs. "You're late, you know. Never mind! This way! The Third are putting up a terrific game. Inky says their playfulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob gave the two juniors a curious look as he marched the girls away to the cricket-ground. Wharton and Nugent went into the School House to repair damages. They needed it badly.

About ten minutes later they joined their friends on Little Side, looking much less dusty and damaged, though their faces still showed very plain signs of conflict. Billy Bunter rolled up to them, blinking at them with great curiosity.

"I say, you fellows, which of you was licked?" he asked.

"Eh? What?"

"Did you lick him, Nugent?"

"Him! Who?"

"Wharton, of course! You've been fighting, haven't you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter. "Did you lick Nugent, Wharton, or did he lick you?"

"Sorry to disappoint you," said Wharton, "but we haven't been fighting. It was a Highcliffe row."

"Hallo! You two silly chumps stopped playing the giddy ox?" asked Johnny Bull.

Wharton laughed.

"Yes! Exactly! Or, rather, I've stopped playing the giddy ox, and Nugent has agreed to look over it."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Nugent. "It was my fault as much as yours. It's all right now, Johnny!"

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EVERY MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

"Good!" said Johnny Bull. "My idea was to jam your silly heads together till you made it up. Only, Bob and Inky didn't see it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There goes Inky's wicket!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came off the pitch. He had already observed Wharton and Nugent, evidently on good terms, and his dusky face was full of satisfaction.

"The cloudfulness has rolled by!" he remarked. "I am terrifically overjoyed, and the congratulatefulness is great. I felicitate my esteemed and ridiculous chums wholeheartfully!"

The clouds had indeed rolled by, and the famous Co. were united once more, much to the satisfaction of their friends.

Harold Skinner had the surprise of his life that afternoon.

He was lounging on the cricket-ground, with Bolsover major and Snoop, when Harry Wharton came up. Skinner looked a little uneasy, and Bolsover major looked truculent. But the captain of the Remove soon showed that he was not on the war-path.

"I want to speak to you, Skinner," he began quietly.

"You needn't trouble," said Skinner.

"I want to beg your pardon."

"Eh?"

Skinner jumped. A dozen fellows who heard Wharton speak stared at him in surprise. It was, indeed, a genuine surprise from the fellow who was supposed to regard himself as a "little tin god."

"I was a duffer to cut up rusty about that silly picture," went on Harry, evidently determined to go through with it, his cheeks colouring a little as he spoke. "It was rotten of me to hit out as I did. I ask your pardon for it. I can't do more than that, can I?"

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Skinner. "I say, what's the little game?"

"The—the what?"

"This is rather a surprise from Mr. Magnificent Wharton, you know!" sneered Skinner. "The Great and Magnificent One does not usually condescend to waste good manners on common mortals! What's the game?"

"He, he, he!" cackled Snoop.

Wharton's flush deepened.

"I'm speaking sincerely enough," he said. "I'm sorry, that's all. And you can stick your picture up in the Common-room if you like. I sha'n't say a word about it. You can paper the Common-room and the hall with them, if you like, so far as I'm concerned. And if you like to look over what's happened, there's my hand on it!"

He held out his hand.

"Well, that's decent enough," said Bolsover major, though rather grudgingly. "That's all a chap can do, Skinner!"

Skinner shrugged his narrow shoulders. He did not take Wharton's hand, and it dropped again.

"You see, I don't believe in these scenes," jeered Skinner. "I suppose there's some little game on, and I don't quite catch on to it. Anyway, you can go and eat coke, and be hanged to you!"

Wharton turned away without replying.

He was strongly tempted at that moment to repeat the blow that had caused all the trouble, and to plant his fist full in Skinner's jeering face. But he did not do so. He walked away to the pavilion quietly.

"Well, the rotter's taken down a peg this time, anyway!" grinned Skinner.

"It's you that's the top rotter!" growled Bolsover major. "He spoke up decently enough. You're a worm, Skinner!"

"Oh, rats!"

When the chums of the Remove came into the Common-room that evening there was a new adornment on the wall. It was an enlarged edition of Skinner's famous caricature of Mr. Magnificent Wharton. He had taken the captain of the Remove at his word, and some of the fellows were curious to see the result.

But there was no result.

Harry Wharton glanced at the picture, smiled, and took no further notice of it.

"Jolly good picture, Wharton! What?" sniggered Snoop.

"Jolly good!" agreed Harry. "Skinner can draw!"

"True to life, isn't it?" pursued Snoop.

"I hope not," said Harry quietly.

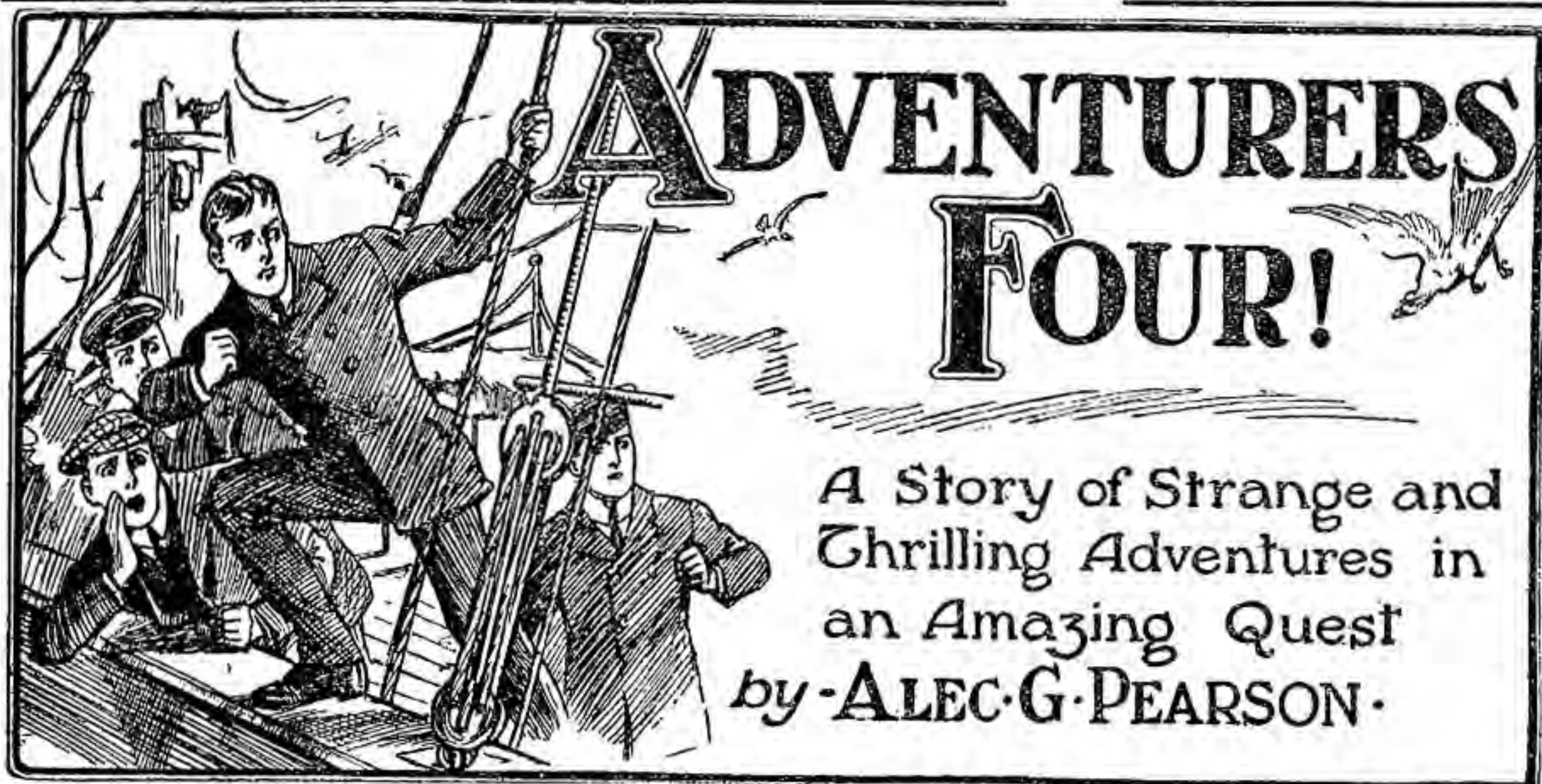
Harry Wharton had set himself right in the eyes of his friends. That evening he took up his old quarters in No. 1 Study, and there was never likely to be another Split in the Study.

THE END.

(Do not miss next week's splendid story of Greyfriars — "THE SENTENCE OF THE SCHOOL!" by FRANK RICHARDS.)

Our Magnificent Adventure Serial Story.

START TO-DAY!



PREVIOUS INSTALMENTS BRIEFLY TOLD.

Hal Mackenzie receives a mysterious Message, urging him to come out to the Southern Andes and learn the secret of the Tower of the Golden Star. He sets out upon the voyage accompanied by his chums, Jim Holdsworth, Bob Sigsbee, and Pat O'Hara.

After exciting experiences in the hands of a treacherous captain, they arrive at Buenos Ayres.

They proceed upon their journey into the mountains, and eventually arrive at the Black Sentinel—a rock cut in the figure of a huge man.

Later they discover the skeleton of a man, Guzman Cavallo, a Spaniard, together with an old parchment telling how he had set out one hundred and fifty years previously in quest of the Golden Star.

After a further three days' journeying they arrive at the Valley of the Shadows, of which Aymara, the daughter of a native chief, had told them.

Here they are captured by half-breeds, Pat having previously stumbled into the hut of Captain Garotte, their leader. Pat succeeds in escaping, and manages to cut the cords which are binding his chums to their mules. Sigsbee fires at Garotte, and misses him; but his shot causes a terrific explosion in a wooden shed at the back of the leader. Several of the half-breeds are killed, the remainder flee in terror, and Sigsbee is wounded.

The adventurers are unable to find any trace of Garotte, dead or alive, neither can they discover the cause of the explosion.

(Now read on.)

An Amazing Sight!

"Well? Suppose what?" asked Hal.

"I don't quite know," replied Jim. "A queer idea just flashed through my brain-pan. I'll let it rest for the present. Let's have a look at those queer guns they fire the metal barbs from. I've been wondering what sort of cartridges are used—if any."

There were plenty of these weapons scattered about, which had been abandoned by the breeds when they fled in panic. Hal examined one of them. On opening the breech he found in the chamber a lump of a hard, yellowish-grey substance. It was hit by a striker, the same as a cartridge in an ordinary rifle when the trigger is pulled.

Fitting a barb into the barrel, he closed the breech and fired. There was a slight, muffled report, and the missile struck a tree about five hundred yards away. He slipped another barb into the barrel, and fired again, obtaining a second hit almost on the same spot as the first.

"This cartridge—I call it that for want of a better name—may be used any number of times," he said. "Think of what it would mean, Jim, if we could use the stuff in our rifles. No need for a fresh cartridge for each shot."

"But you'd need a fresh bullet each time," replied Jim.

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"Of course, a new style of rifle would have to be fashioned," Hal admitted. "But we needn't bother about that now." He looked queerly at Jim. "What was that idea that flashed through your brain? Any objection to telling me? Perhaps a similar idea has got into my head."

"You haven't given the idea a long rest," replied Jim, laughing; "but since I've seen the stuff in those guns—the propelling power—it's developed. Kind of rapid growth, don't you know. Well, you remember what your friend, Martin Travers, wrote in that letter which came to you in such a queer fashion—about the secret he had learned in the Tower of the Golden Star."

Hal nodded.

"A secret which would astound the world if made known," he said.

"Exactly," said Tom. "Well, my idea is that the propelling power, which takes the place of cordite or gunpowder in the breeds' guns, is the same material as the stuff which exploded in the shed. Also, that it is the same stuff which gave the permanent, brilliant light which shone from the eyes of the giant Black Sentinel that keeps everlasting watch on the border of this queer country."

"What else?"

"Only this. That it has some connection with the Secret of the Golden Star."

"Which we are here to discover," added Hal. "My idea is the same as yours, Jim. We shall find out soon whether we are right or wrong, if we live to reach our destination. For, according to my reckoning, we're not more than a day's march from the tower now."

One day's rest was an absolute necessity before they could proceed on their journey, for they were all stiff and sore, and pretty well done-up, after what they had gone through during the past sixteen hours. And Sigsbee had to be specially considered, for although his wound wasn't serious, it was very painful. A long sleep was what he required more than anything to put him right.

"How about staying where we are?" Hal suggested. "This stone hut, or the part of it that is left undamaged, is comfortable enough. And we command a view of the whole valley from it. Captain Garotte knew how to look after number one when he fitted this place up for his quarters."

"I'd name him for a gentleman who likes to take his ease, while his followers do the hard work," said O'Hara. "He's great on giving orders."

"He has the brains, and the cunning," replied Hal.

"I dare say that without him the breeds would be no more than a pack of savages. However, it doesn't do to jump to conclusions."

"There's not a breed in sight in the whole valley, so far as I can see," said Jim.

"That ain't a proof that they've cleared out altogether," put in Sigsbee. "I allow they're right smart in the way they

DELICIOUS TUCK-HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1D.

can hide themselves. They get to cover 'most as quick as rabbits. There must always be one of us doing sentry-go."

"We three'll arrange about that," said Hal. "You're to do nothing but eat and sleep until to-morrow morning. Now, I think we'd better collect all our traps, and see if anything's missing. The breeds may not have brought away everything from the hollow."

"What about these breeds who are wounded?" said Jim. "Most of them seem to be pretty bad. They're a treacherous lot of hounds, and can't be treated as brave and honourable foes, but we can't leave them to die in agony for want of a little attention."

"If we give them some food and wather," said O'Hara, "and plaster up their hurts a bit, 'tis all, and more than they've a right to expect."

It is the good old British fashion to be ready to help a fallen foe, even though—as in the present case—the foe is utterly unworthy of any consideration.

And all the thanks they got for their humanity were sullen and scowling looks, and from some a muttered curse. But they merely shrugged their shoulders, did all that was possible for the wounded men, and then left them.

"They haven't as much gratitude as a pack of coyotes," growled Sigsbee.

"Well, they'll have to look after themselves from now on," said Hal. "And in case some of them pull round enough to be able to get away, we'll remove all weapons to the inside of the hut."

"'Tis safest," agreed O'Hara. "Unless we tie the laste hurts av the blackguards up."

"Oh, we can't be hampered with prisoners!" replied Hal. "Let them go if they can, it won't make any difference to us."

None of the breeds made any attempt to move off during the day, but after nightfall three of them contrived to get away. They seemed to be as indifferent to the sufferings of their more helpless companions as wolves would be of the wounded in their pack after a fight.

Pat O'Hara likened them to wolves, remarking:

"If they felt that way they'd just tear their helpless mates to pieces and ate them!"

The remainder of the day and the night passed without incident, and at about eight o'clock on the following morning they resumed their journey. They took with them half a dozen of the best of the half-breeds' guns, of which there were a couple of score lying about, and as many of the barbs as they could conveniently carry.

They could be used for killing game, and thus their own ammunition would be saved, which was a consideration, for the stock was getting low.

How glad they were to get clear of that mysterious and depressing Valley of the Shadows! It took them three hours to cross it, and about half-way they skirted the edge of a morass, a square mile in extent. It was the black patch they had noticed from their first camp.

Jim threw a heavy piece of wood into it. In a couple of minutes it sank out of sight, as though it had been drawn down by unseen hands.

"Not much chance for a fellow who walked into that bog on a dark and foggy night," he said. "That piece of wood would have floated in water; but it sank in that black and horrible morass."

"Let's hurry away from it," muttered O'Hara. "'Tis the cowl'd feelin' it gives me at the roots av me hair!"

They pressed on, and at the far side of the valley found a broad, smooth path which led up into the mountains, and was easy of ascent. By sunset they had left the valley seven miles behind them, and were a thousand feet above it. They were then at the entrance of an immense ravine, which cut right into the heart of the mountain for a considerable distance.

It was about a mile in width, and on each side sheer walls of rock rose to a height of many hundreds of feet. Along the bottom there was a narrow causeway, so well-defined that it was clearly the work of human hands.

For a matter of two miles they followed this causeway, and then they came to a bend in the ravine beyond which they had not been able to see. By this time it was dark, and they decided to camp as soon as they could find water.

"There must be some hereabouts," said Hal, "the mules are sniffing it. When we round the bend we shall happen on a pool, I dare say."

When they did round the bend they came to a halt with exclamations of amazement. For it was a wonderful sight which greeted their eyes. The great ravine ran straight now for several miles, and near the far end of it a golden star, the size of a man's body, blazed in splendour. It appeared to be suspended in the air.

The light it gave forth was of a pale gold colour, and even at that distance it dazzled the eyes to look straight at it. It was one of the most marvellous sights they had ever seen, and they were well accustomed to seeing strange things.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE SENTENCE OF THE SCHOOL!"

EVERY
MONDAY,

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

"The Golden Star!" cried Jim. "The end of our journey!"

"Be the sowl av Saint Pathrick," exclaimed O'Hara, "this bates me intoirely! What kapes it hanging in the air?"

"It isn't," replied Hal. "Look underneath it when your eyes are accustomed to the light. Can you make out the outline of a high tower?"

"I can make it out," said Jim. "A square tower, well over a hundred feet in height, I should think."

"That's the tower that Martin Travers spoke of in his letter," pursued Hal. "And the star is fixed in some way to the top of it."

"It sure is," agreed Sigsbee. "But how is that brilliant golden light produced? It gets me. Do you reckon it's electricity?"

"Not in any form that we're acquainted with," replied Hal. "In that tower lies the secret of some new force, of which the world is still in ignorance, and of which we had a sample, in a different form, in the valley."

"How?"

"Well, that explosion, for instance."

"Gee! There ought to be a syndicate of American business men to run this show. They'd make things hum. The Golden Star Light and Explosive Company. Sounds all right, doesn't it?"

His comrades laughed heartily, and an echo of their laughter came back from the rocks. It sounded uncanny in that place of mystery.

"The saints protect us!" muttered O'Hara. "'Tis the spirits av the place mocking us!"

"Echoes, you chump!" said Jim. "It sounded beastly weird, though!"

"Say, those breeds know all about this Golden Star!" interposed Sigsbee. "The secret is theirs, anyway."

"Only partially, I should say," replied Hal, "with the possible exception of Captain Garotte. I expect they worship the star—sacred symbol kind of thing, you know—and they've learnt how to use that strange explosive substance in their guns. But they don't understand its full power. When that lot went off in the shed they were properly scared."

"It did seem a kind of surprise to them," admitted Sigsbee. "By ginger, those that weren't bowled over didn't stop running till they got out of the valley, I guess! But we shall be up against the skunks again."

"Not to-night, I hope," said Jim. "At all events, we've got to camp somewhere, whatever happens. Isn't that the gleam of water away ahead of us?"

They rode forward, and found that it was a shallow pool in a hollow of the rock. The water was clear and good, so they pitched their camp there. But they didn't venture to light a fire, for there was the chance of treacherous enemies lurking in the ravine. The exploration of the tower and its surroundings they decided to leave until the morning. It would be safer in the daylight. Their position was a tolerably secure one, for they were in the shadow of a huge boulder of rock, while the greater part of the ravine was illuminated by the light from the Golden Star.

Fortunately they had brought some cooked meat with them as a sort of emergency ration, so they were all right in the matter of eatables for supper. But as they couldn't make tea or coffee without a fire, the meal had to be washed down with cold water from the pool. And it was very cold.

"Me stomach's frozen intoirely wid it," declared Pat O'Hara, who disliked plain water as a beverage. "I'll not be able to slape warrm this night."

"Then you'd better keep all the watches," suggested Jim, grinning.

But Pat O'Hara didn't see that.

"Some day," he remarked, "I'm hoping to be able to get a full night's slape again."

Which, indeed, was what they all would have liked, for the constant vigilance they had been obliged to exercise was a heavy strain on them.

The night passed, and the first grey dawn of morning revealed to the astonished gaze of Hal and Sigsbee, who had the last watch, a weird face peering over the top of a boulder about fifty yards away.

It was a yellow and wrinkled face, and the scalp was as bald as an egg. The small, sunken eyes were very bright. Only the face was visible, the chin resting on the top of the rock.

"Say! What is it?" exclaimed Sigsbee. "Will it be a man, or a woman, do you think?"

"I wouldn't like to bet either on the sex or the species," said Hal, with a laugh. "I wonder what language it speaks?"

"Try it in Spanish," replied Sigsbee.

Hal did so, shouting out: "Come here! If you mean no harm, you will not be hurt!"

The creature evidently understood them, for it emerged from behind the rock and shuffled towards them. Hal decided that it was a woman.

Judging by her appearance, she was of great age. Her form was shrunken and bent, her arms were mere skin and bone, and her hands were like claws. She wore sandals on her feet, and the long, black garment which hung from her shoulders was fastened at the waist by a silver girdle. Set in the girdle was a star, a tiny imitation of the great star on the tower, and which glowed with the same mysterious light. Jim and O'Hara had by this time roused up, and they stared at the apparition in amazement.

"'Tis a banshee!" ejaculated the Irishman.

"Who are you?" asked Hal.

The wrinkled old hag peered from one to the other of the four adventurers, and then gave vent to a soft cackle of laughter.

"I might ask who you are, white men," she replied, speaking in the tongue of the half-breeds, which was a mixture of Spanish and Indian, though more of the former than the latter, "but that I already know. I have long expected you."

"Who told you that we were coming here?" demanded Hal.

"No one told me," was the reply. "There was no need, for nothing is hidden from me. You have come to learn the secret of the Golden Star. Others have sought to find out that secret also. What have they learnt? He, he, he!" Again she broke into cackling laughter. "I, alone, can answer that question."

"Who are you?" Hal asked a second time.

"I am Yarola, the Priestess of the Star," was the reply.

Within the Tower!

"The Priestess of the Star!" echoed Sigsbee. "Well, I allow you don't get overworked at that job. But mayhap you can give us some useful information, unless you're telling lies, which is more'n likely."

"I tell no lies, stranger!" snapped the old hag.

"I'm glad to hear it," replied Sigsbee. "Truthfulness is a rare virtue. Now, how long have you dwelt in this place?"

"I was here before you were born, white man," returned Yarola.

"I'm willing to believe that," said Sigsbee, "as I should reckon you to be close on a hundred years old."

"Ay! I was here before your father's father was born," continued the hag.

"Now you're putting too much of a strain on my bump of credulity," declared Sigsbee. "My grandfather's been dead these twenty years, and he was eighty when he died, so I reckon he was born quite a time ago. You'd better have a cup of coffee just to calm your high spirits, then you won't be wanting to pull our legs."

Now that it was daylight, and the danger of a surprise attack by the breeds—if they were lurking in the hills—was over for the time being, a fire had been lighted, and coffee was soon made. They were all rather glad of it, and Yarola seemed to enjoy the mug of the steaming hot beverage which was given to her.

She soaked a biscuit in it, and munched and mumbled "for all the world like some new kind of monkey," as Jim observed.

Perhaps the food and hot drink had warmed her up to a slight feeling of gratitude, for she suddenly exclaimed, in a tone of shrill warning:

"Ye were fools to come to this place, white men! Go back! It may not be too late, even now!"

"Faith! We've been called fools often enough for taking this journey," said Pat O'Hara, "and 'tis ourselves may deserve the title. But we're not going back till we've learnt one thing for sure and certain."

"And what is that you would learn?"

O'Hara leaned forward, and tapped her on the shoulder with his forefinger.

"'Tis this," he replied. "What has become ay the white man who fought the half-breeds in that tower a matter of a year ago? Is he alive or dead? If you lived here so long as you say, you'll know."

"So! You seek him—the White Wizard!" cried Yarola, and into her eyes there leaped an expression of hatred which was startling in that aged and withered specimen of humanity.

"A wizard, is it!" said O'Hara. "Well, them's not aisy to kill, so likely he'll be alive now."

"He is alive!" replied Yarola.

On hearing this statement, which they believed because

they were glad to believe it, all the four gave vent to a hearty cheer.

The hag gazed at them in some surprise. It was probably the first time in her long life that she had heard a hearty British cheer.

"It is their war-cry," she muttered.

"Yes, you may call it that," laughed Hal; "for in the thick of a fight it is the custom of the men of my country to give such a war-cry."

The old crone went on muttering to herself.

"They must be terrible in war, these white strangers from beyond the great water! Who could stand against men who cry out joyously in the face of danger? If there were more of them, the guardians of the tower would have to look to themselves. And did I not see with my own eyes how the White Wizard held at bay a hundred of the breeds?"

Hal scanned the face of the self-styled priestess closely. There was greed and avarice stamped all over it. He took a gold charm from his pocket, which, among other trinkets, he had carried with him in case they might be of use in trading with the Indians. He dangled the charm in front of her eyes.

"It is gold," he said. "A talisman. It shall be yours if you tell us truly where we can find the White Wizard."

"I can tell you!" she cried eagerly. "Yes, yes, I can tell you! Nay, more, I can lead you to him!"

"If you will do that," replied Hal, "you shall have another present, of greater value than this one."

"Give me the presents now," urged the old hag, "and we will start. It is not far to go—only to the tower. But you would not know how to enter unless I showed you the way."

She seemed as anxious now for them to go forward as she was a short time ago for them to go back. Gold is a wonderful persuader.

Hal gave her the charm, which she held between her skinny fingers, while she chuckled delightedly.

"You shall have the other," he said, "when you have shown us where our friend is."

They were as eager to go forward as the old priestess, and in a very short space of time they had the mules saddled up, and all that remained of their outfit—little enough now—strapped on to their backs.

Yarola was hoisted on to one of the mules, and the other two were led. Then the procession started. In less than an hour they halted in front of the tower, which was surrounded by a deep and wide moat full of clear water. The building was of immense strength, and very much larger than they had at first supposed. There were no windows in the wall facing them, but there were a number of loopholes. The entrance-gates were directly in front of them, but there was no bridge across the moat.

"If the water's too deep for wading," said Jim, "we shall have to swim across. But what about the old woman?"

"The ould witch doesn't look as if she was iver on friendly terms wid wather," observed O'Hara. "But what is she up to?"

Yarola had slipped down from the back of the mule, and was pressing her hands upon a square slab of rock. All round the edge of the moat the ground was paved with smooth stone. Presently one of these squares of stone, which was about six feet in length by the same in breadth, slid noiselessly out of sight, no doubt into grooves specially made to receive it. Yarola's pressure on the square block, which was raised slightly above the paved portion, had evidently released a spring, and set in motion some hidden mechanism.

She pointed down into the opening, where a flight of well-worn steps led to a small chamber, the floor of which was twenty feet beneath them.

"That is the way into the tower," she croaked. And then she burst into a horrible cackle of laughter. "Enter, white men—enter!"

"We can't take the mules down there," said Hal.

"They must be left behind," declared Yarola. "No animals may enter the tower."

There was no help for it; so after picketing them in a suitable place, and transferring their kits to their own backs, with all their weapons and ammunition, they prepared to make the descent.

"You lead the way, Yarola," said Hal—for he didn't fully trust her, notwithstanding the tempting bait of a further present of gold—"as you know the road. We will follow."

"Are you afraid, white men, now that you have come almost to your journey's end?" croaked the old hag. "He, he, he! Almost to your journey's end!"

"Say, I don't like the way she laughs!" growled Sigsbee. "Seems to me mighty amused at our expense! I'd like to know the joke!"

"Better stick pretty close to her, in case of a trap," Jim advised.

(Continued on page iv of cover.)



F. RAWLINSON,
Garston.



A. G. FOWLER,
Nottingham.



A LOYAL READER,
Isle of Wight.



R. WATERIDGE,
Basingstoke.



W. A. WILLIS,
Brisbane, Australia.



C. H. BULLEN,
Salford.



W. P.,
Bedford.



J. CONNOLLY,
Battersea.



LESLIE DORRELL,
Poplar.



L. J. LONGLEY,
Maidstone.



F. SMITH,
Bournemouth.



E. MATHINSON,
Bournemouth.



H. MUNRO,
Whetstone.



C. SMITH,
Warsop.



A LOYAL READER,
London.



M. FISHER,
Cwmbrila.



A. ANDERSON,
Largs, Scotland.



A LOYAL CHUM,
London.



T. BROOKS,
London, E.



J. RUSSELL,
Bolton.



G. F. C. LAND,
Plymouth.



W. HANKS,
Carnarvon.



C. H. S.,
Basingstoke.



W. ROBINSON,
Wellington, New Zealand.



L. C. PAGENELLI,
London, N.W.

ADVENTURERS FOUR.

(Continued from page 20.)

Sigsbee shook his hunting-knife in front of Yarola's face. It was a weapon she would be more familiar with than a revolver.

"Lead on!" he said sharply. "I don't hold with using threats to a woman; but you're different to others, and I tell you that if you play any tricks you won't live to boast about them!"

The old crone made no reply, except to mutter to herself some words in an unknown tongue. Then she led the way down the steps to the underground chamber, from which a tunnel branched out, passing underneath the moat.

A few minutes sufficed to get to the other end of the tunnel, and then to ascend a flight of steps similar to those which gave access to this strange entrance to the tower. When they emerged at the top, they found themselves on a broad, stone platform, close up against the massive wooden gates.

"They built strongly in those old days," said Hal. "Why, we four could hold this tower against a small army of breeds, provided they had no artillery."

"I guess that's so," replied Sigsbee. "And so far as artillery's concerned, I reckon 'twould be a middlin' tough job to get the heavy guns over the mountains into this ravine. But if we were boxed up in the tower, with a few hundred of the enemy waiting outside, we'd likely have to face a peril just as deadly as high-explosive shells."

"What would that be?"

"Starvation. 'Tain't reasonable to suppose this place is provisioned for a long siege. Gee! Look at the gates! They're opening of themselves!"

The massive wooden gates, which must have weighed several tons, were slowly swinging open, apparently without human agency. And they moved without a sound. It was the silence with which things were happening that made them more weirdly startling than would have been the case had the usual noises accompanied them. In all probability Yarola had pressed a secret spring, causing the gates to open, but they hadn't noticed her doing so.

The open gates revealed a courtyard, which was flooded with light. At first they thought it was the light of the sun, but on reflection they saw it couldn't be, as from the sun's position the greater part of the courtyard would have been in shadow from the high walls of the tower.

It was, indeed, more like the light given from softly-shaded electric glow-lamps.

The four adventurers passed through the gateway and into the courtyard, which they saw was covered in. Where the light came from was a mystery. No lamp of any description was visible.

"'Tis a bagful av sun's rays which have been caught and enptied in here—no less!" exclaimed O'Hara.

His comrades laughed, but somehow their laughter was soon checked in that mysterious atmosphere. But they were so absorbed in taking note of their surroundings that for the time they forgot all about Yarola the priestess.

She was still outside the gates, and she was watching them with an expression of malevolent triumph on her wrinkled face.

She stepped back softly. A minute later Jim turned round, and a sharp exclamation broke from his lips.

"The gates!" he cried. "They are closing!"

He sprang towards them, with a sort of wild idea, perhaps, of being able to hold them open. But he was too late! They shut without a sound. And from outside there came to their ears a shrill and mocking laugh.

Trapped in the Tower!

For a few moments they stood staring at the massive gates in silence. Without putting overmuch faith in the Priestess of the Star, they nevertheless believed that for the sake of the additional reward promised her, in the shape of another gold trinket, she would fulfil her part of the bargain. Therefore this sudden act of treachery took them by surprise.

"That blamed old hag has scored a point on us," growled Sigsbee, breaking the silence.

"Seems like it," replied Hal. "But perhaps the gates can be opened from the inside. There may be a spring, or something of that sort."

They made a thorough examination of the gates and the walls on each side, but no spring or knob or anything of the kind could they discover. If one existed on the inner side, it was very cunningly concealed.

"Enix, thin," exclaimed O'Hara, "will ye be after telling me that if the ould witch or any av the breeds came into

this tower they wouldn't be able to get out again if the gates were shut?"

"I don't know about that," replied Hal. "They may never enter the place, or if they do, they take care to leave the gates open. Or, there may be a way of opening the gates from inside, though we may never be able to discover it."

"Say, how much grub have we brought with us?" asked Sigsbee. "I mean, just what we're carrying ourselves."

"About enough for one day," replied Hal. "But the mules—"

He paused, and Sigsbee nodded his head.

"Yes," he said. "I reckon we've got a week's stock of provisions packed on the mules, but they happen to be on the other side of the ditch."

He referred to the surrounding moat as the ditch.

"Can you see a way out of this courtyard," continued the American, "except the way we came in? And that's closed against us. By ginger! Seems to me we needn't trouble much whether there's a white man shut up in this tower or not, because if there ever was one here he must be dead now. And so'll we be, when our food's all gone, and the water—we've precious little of that—all drank."

Until Sigsbee uttered these words they had not fully realised what a very serious plight they were in. The courtyard was enclosed by four walls, the gates being set in the outer one, and no sign of a door or an opening of any description could be seen.

The walls were built of large, smooth blocks of dressed stone, and the courtyard was roofed in, though from what source the mysterious golden light came was a puzzle.

"'Tis loike a giant stone box," exclaimed O'Hara. "wid the gates for a lid, so to spake, which same lid we can't open. And we shut up in it to starve. Not a ghost av a chance av making a foight for liberty. The saints deliver us!"

"There must be a way out," said Jim, forcing himself to appear more cheerful than he felt. "There are rooms in this beastly tower, I suppose, in addition to this courtyard. Of course there are! You remember what Martin Travers said in his letter? 'In the Tower of the Golden Star you will learn a secret—as I have done—which would astound the world if made known.' Well, he couldn't have learnt it in this boxed-up courtyard. Then again he wrote: 'The breeds are close to the tower now, and I am ready.' Could he have held them off from here?"

"There's something in what you say, Jim."

"There's a good deal," Jim declared. "Besides, he got that letter away from the tower somehow. How did he manage it?"

"You're asking a conundrum now, old son," replied Hal. "that no one but Travers can answer, so it's no use for us to waste any time trying to guess it." He scrutinised the stone walls and the huge gates again, but with no satisfactory result. "We might tap the walls and floor with the butts of our rifles," he added, "to find out if any part rings hollow."

They all set to work tapping on the stone walls and the floor with the butt-ends of their rifles, every tap rousing an echo in the enclosed courtyard, until at last it sounded as though a small army of masons were at work there.

In the midst of it all the mysterious light suddenly went out, leaving them in profound darkness, except for a thin ribbon of daylight which showed at the bottom of the great gates.

By a common impulse they ceased their labours, and a dead silence took the place of the clattering din.

"Now, who the blazes turned out the gas?" muttered O'Hara.

There was a laugh at O'Hara's remark; then Jim said:

"Can that old hag have switched it off from the outside, do you think?"

"Seems to me," replied Sigsbee, "that anything is possible in this tarnation place. Why—?" He paused, and then asked sharply: "Say, can you hear anything? I fancy down underneath—"

They all strained their ears to listen. A faint tapping could be heard, and it seemed to come from under their feet.

"'Tis one av the echoes got adrift an' lost itself," declared the Irishman.

Again there was a laugh, but it was hushed almost instantly, as Hal exclaimed:

"There's a current of air blowing through this courtyard. I never noticed it before. It must come from an opening. Better not move—"

"Listen!"

Another sound reached their ears now—the sound of footsteps. Someone was approaching, but from where? The footsteps came nearer—grew more distinct. Whoever it was seemed to be coming up a flight of steps. They gripped their weapons and stood ready, for they counted every man an enemy here.

(There will be another grand instalment of this exciting story in next Monday's issue of THE "MAGNET" LIBRARY. Order your copy in advance.)

