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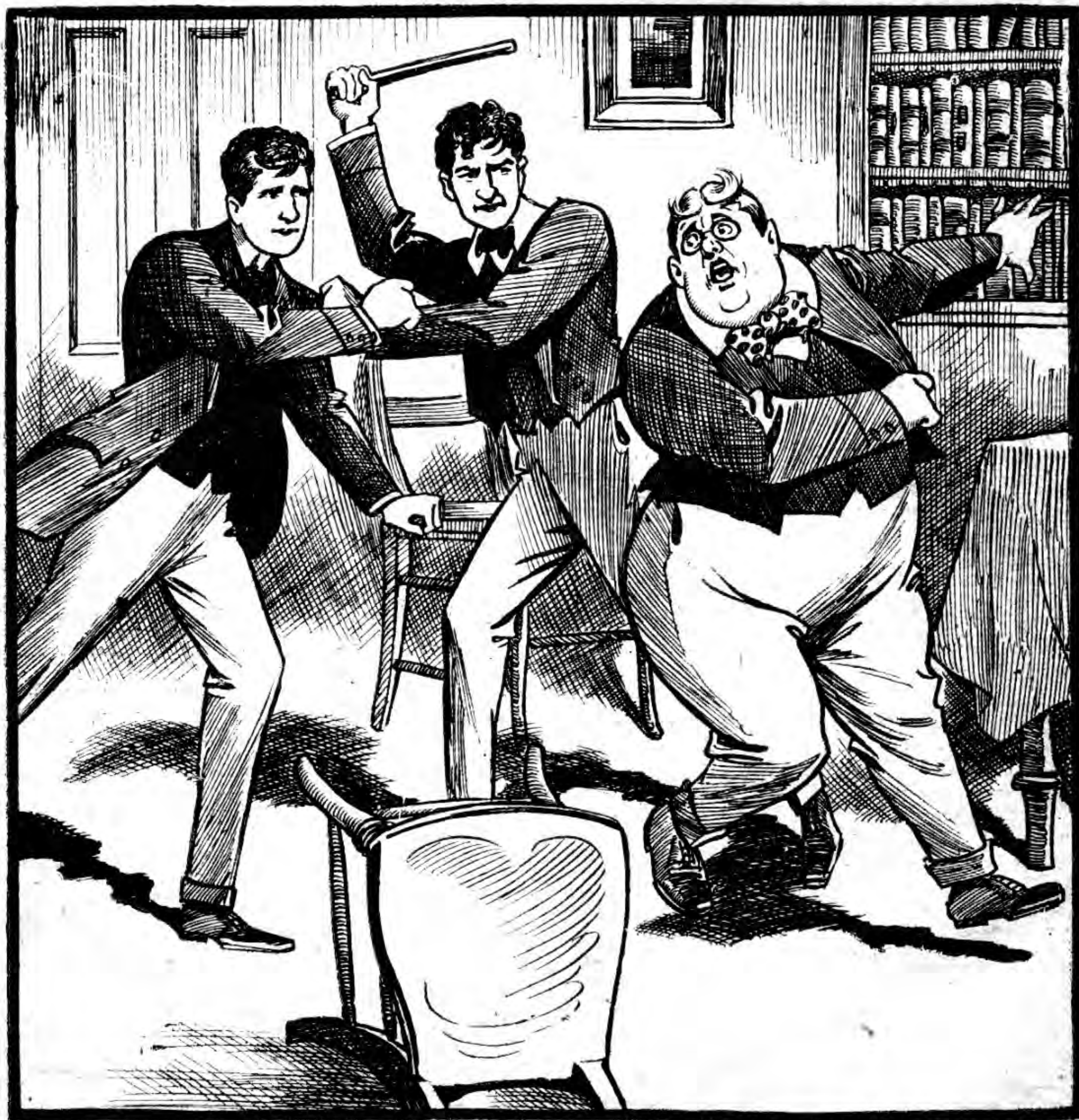
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THE MISSING MASTERPIECE!



NOT THE WAY TO TREAT A VISITOR!

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THE MISSING MASTERPIECE!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In Hiding!

"HUSH!"

Harry Wharton & Co. "hushed" in sheer astonishment.

The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove were in Study No. 1, discussing sardines, war-bread, and the football prospects. The door opened softly, and Hobson of the Shell stepped quickly inside, closing the door after him as softly as he had opened it.

He held up his hand to the Removites as he murmured "Hush!" in sign of silence.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry was beginning.

"Hush!"

"What the thump——" said Frank Nugent.

"Hush!"

"Well, my hat!" murmured Harry Wharton.

Hobson was looking very anxious, and the five juniors stared and blinked at him in silence. Outside, in the Remove passage, footsteps could be heard. As they approached the door of Study No. 1 the anxiety on Hobson's face intensified.

Then the Removites understood, or thought they understood. Some person unknown was in search of James Hobson, and the Shell fellow had dodged into Study No. 1 to escape.

The Remove fellows had little to do with Hobson of the Shell as a rule, Hobson being rather strong on the lofty dignity of "Middle School," and looking on the Lower Fourth as mere fags. The Lower Fourth, in return, looked on Hobson as a fathead, and often told him so. But they were quite willing to give shelter to Hobson, or anybody else, in the hour of danger.

The footsteps passed Study No. 1, and died away up the passage. Hobson breathed more freely.

"Loder of the Sixth?" asked Johnny Bull. "That rotter bullying again—what?"

Hobson shook his head.

"Not your Form-master after you?" asked Nugent.

"No."

"You can hide under the table if you like," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Bob will screen you with his boots."

"Why, you silly ass——" began Bob Cherry warmly. Even Bob's boots were not really large enough to screen Hobson of the Shell.

"I—I might, perhaps," said Hobson slowly, "if—if you fellows wouldn't mind me——"

"Not at all!"

"The not-at-allfulness is terrific, my esteemed Hobson!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Hobson hesitated.

He was listening intently at the door, and he started a little as the sound of returning footsteps was heard. There

was also a sound of the opening and shutting of doors.

"He's coming back, looking into the studies!" muttered Hobson.

"Who on earth is it?" asked Wharton, in amazement.

The Shell fellow did not answer that question. He looked dreadfully worried.

"The table's still at your service," said Frank Nugent, laughing.

"If—if you don't mind," stammered Hobson, "I—I think I'll get out of sight. You won't mention that you've seen me?"

"Not a word, old scout!"

Hobson, making up his mind to it, dived under the study table. Harry Wharton drew the table-cover well over, to hide him as much as possible; and the Famous Five drew their chairs round the table and sat down. The Shell fellow was completely screened from sight.

"I say, you chaps," came Hobson's voice from below, "go on talking. Don't let him smell a rat if he looks in!"

"Right you are, old top!"

Footsteps were close to the study door now. The chums of the Remove all began to talk at once as the footsteps stopped outside. Football jaw was in full blast when a tap came at the door and it opened.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked curiously to see who it was. They naturally supposed that some wrathful prefect was after Hobson, with an ashplant in his hand. To their astonishment it was Claude Hoskins, Hobson's chum and study-mate, who looked into No. 1. Hoskins was looking rather annoyed and impatient.

"You fellows seen Hobson?" he exclaimed.

The Famous Five stared.

Evidently it was his study-mate whom Hobson was dodging with such deadly earnestness. It was really amazing. Hobson, who was a great man at games, and a thoroughly outdoor fellow, was quite unlike Claude Hoskins, who was a musical genius—more or less—and devoted to the piano, the violin, and the study of harmony and counterpoint. Unlike as they were, they were on very friendly terms. It looked as if there had been trouble; but, even so, it was surprising, for Hobson could have knocked Hoskins into a cocked hat with one hand, and so there was no apparent reason why he should dodge him so sedulously. The Famous Five, in their amazement, stared at Hoskins without replying.

Hoskins stared at them in return impatiently.

"Have you seen him?" he repeated.

"Seen Hobson?" stuttered Wharton.

"Yes, Hobson! Bunter told me he saw him go up into the Remove passage, and I'm looking for him," said Claude Hoskins. "He seems to have vanished. I've looked into all the dashed studies!"

"Oh! You—you're looking for Hobson?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Yes. He must still be in the passage

somewhere. He hasn't passed me," said Hoskins. "I've looked in the box-room, too!"

"There's the staircase at the end," said Nugent. "Have you looked there?"

"Well, I glanced up; but there's nothing up there but lumber-rooms. Hobson wouldn't go up there, I suppose? Where on earth can he have got to?" said Hoskins in exasperation.

"Gentle shepherd, tell me where!" sang Bob softly.

"You fellows seen him?"

"I saw him at dinner," said Wharton diplomatically.

"Fathead! I suppose everybody saw him at dinner!" hooted Hoskins.

"Yes, very likely," agreed Wharton.

"Perhaps he doesn't want to meet you?" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Rot!"

"Eh?"

"He's forgotten the appointment, I suppose," said Hoskins. "Hobby is always thinking of footer and stuff. You see, I've bagged the music-room from five-forty to six-fifteen, and I've promised Hobby to play him my march in F."

"Oh!" ejaculated the Famous Five in chorus.

They began to understand more clearly the mysterious actions of James Hobson of the Shell.

"It's six now," said Hoskins, with a worried look, little dreaming that his vanished study-mate was under the table within a few feet of him. "If I don't find him soon it'll be too late. Scott of the Fourth has bagged the room from six-fifteen on, and you know what an obstinate beast Scott is! He wouldn't put off his piano-thumping for Beethoven himself. And now that dashed duffer, Hobson, has vanished!"

And Hoskins gave a snort of exasperation.

With heroic efforts the Famous Five kept their smiles back. They looked as serious as owls.

"That's too bad!" said Harry Wharton gravely. "Why, if Hobby doesn't turn up, he will miss hearing your march altogether!"

"That's just it!" said Hoskins. "There's barely time now. And I've been making some improvements in the march. I don't mind telling you fellows that my arrangements of minor ninths is a corker—a regular corker! Scott says it sounds to him like a saw-mill going out of order. That's just like Scott! Now, my arrangements of minor ninths will——"

"Why not mix 'em with a few major tenths?" asked Bob Cherry innocently.

Hoskins looked at him. It was a look that ought to have withered Robert Cherry to a cinder on the spot. The genius of the Shell seemed at a loss for words for a moment or two. Then he found one that seemed adequate.

"Idiot!"

"Eh?" ejaculated Bob.

"Fathead!"

"Look here, Hoskins——"

"Dummy!"

With that final epithet, which seemed to relieve his feelings, Claude Hoskins stepped out of the study, and closed the door after him with a terrific bang.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry, in astonishment. "What's the matter with him? Isn't a major tenth as good as a minor ninth?"

"Ha, ha! Is there such a thing as a major tenth?"

"Blessed if I know! Is there such a thing as a minor ninth, if you come to that?"

"Must be if Hosky has shoved 'em into his march." Wharton glanced under the table. "Safe now, Hobson! He's gone downstairs."

Hobson crawled out from under the table, looking very red and warm, and a little dusty. He blinked at the grinning chums of the Remove.

"Saved!" said Bob Cherry, in the best manner of the Remove Dramatic Society.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tain't really a laughing matter, you fellows!" gasped Hobson. "It takes old Hoskins twenty minutes at least to play through that march of his, and then he's as likely as not to ask you if you noticed some special bit, and play it all over again to show you the beauty of it. He did it to me three times one half-holiday."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wouldn't hurt his feelings for worlds!" said Hobson. "He's a good chap, and my chum. But there's a limit to what a fellow can stand, isn't there?"

The chums of the Remove yelled. Downstairs Hoskins was still seeking Hobson desperately in order that his chum should enjoy that great treat before Scott of the Fourth bagged the music-room at six-fifteen. But it was pretty evident that Hobson did not intend to be found before six-fifteen at the earliest.

"Of course, you fellows won't say a word about this?" said Hobson hastily. "I'm putting you on your honour, of course."

"Not a giddy syllable!" gurgled Bob Cherry. "We feel for you, old man. Hoskins got me into the music-room once. I know what it's like."

"Of course, he's jolly clever," said Hobson loyally. "Hoskins is a regular genius, you know. He talks no end of long words I don't understand, and I pretend to understand in case he should explain. He knows no end about music and stuff. I admire him no end, but——"

There was plainly a big "but" in the matter.

"The understandfulness is terrific, my worthy Hobson!" said Hurree Singh. "Stick here tightly till the esteemed quarter strikes."

"Well, if you chaps don't mind——" said Hobson.

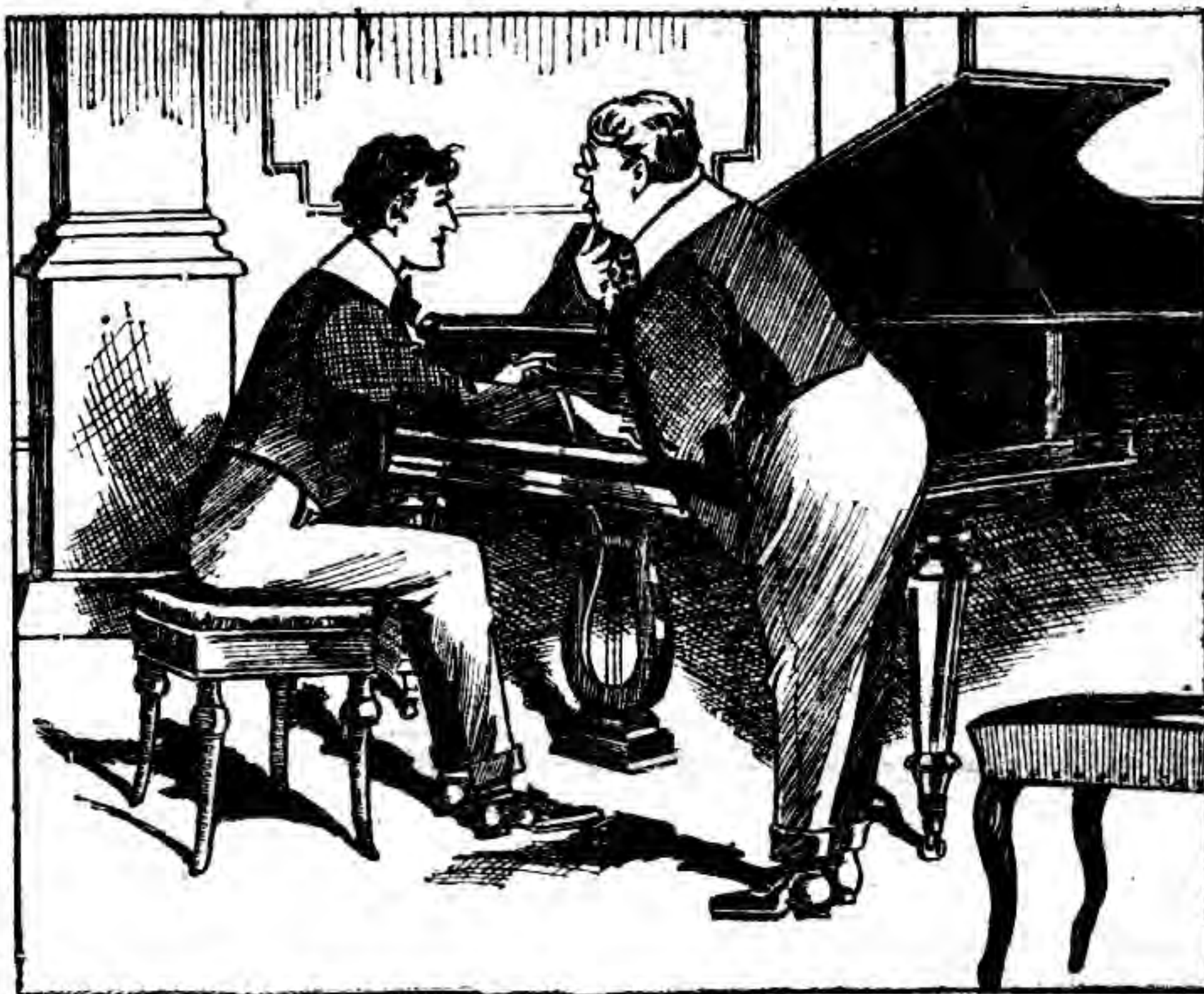
"Had your tea?" asked Wharton.

"No. I've been keeping clear of the study."

"Ha, ha! Join us, then. Lots of sardines, and there's some more water in the teapot."

"I will, and thanks!" said Hobson. And he sat down at the table in great relief. "It will be all right after six-fifteen. That chap Scott of the Fourth is a splendid fellow. He won't give up the music-room once he's bagged it. You fellows going in for footer much this season?"

That question made Hobson one of the company at once, and the captain of the Shell quite enjoyed tea in Study No. 1. It had turned half-past six when he showed up in his own quarters in the Shell. He found Claude Hoskins there, with a quill pen and a sheet of music-paper, at work.



Music hath charms! (See Chapter 2.)

"Too late!" said Hoskins, looking up.

"Eh?" said Hobson guiltily.

"Can't have the music-room now!"

"I—I say, old chap, that's too bad!" said Hobson, with chummy hypocrisy. "You were going to play me your sonata in——"

"My march!"

"I mean your march. Another time?"

"It's a shame for you to miss it," said Hoskins, unbending. "I can fix it for to-morrow, after morning lessons, Hobby, if you like."

"Oh, g-g-g-g-good!" stammered Hobson.

"I'm making some alterations in the piece," explained Hoskins. "I want you to help me in this, Hobby. My idea is to play it over and over——"

"Oh!"

"Every time you hear it you'll catch on better, you see. I'm practically using you as an audience to try the effect. After a dozen times——"

"D-d-did you say a dozen?" said Hobson faintly.

"Yes; after a dozen times you'll catch on no end. This will improve your ear a lot, Hobby, old chap. Now, don't interrupt me. I'm deep in my contrapuntal studies."

Fortunately, Hoskins was too deep in counterpoint to observe the expression on Hobson's face. James Hobson of the Shell had an expression that might have touched a heart of stone.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Little Music!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

It was the following morning, and the Remove had just been dismissed by Mr. Quelch. Harry Wharton & Co. had walked out into the quadrangle in a leisurely manner, but as Billy Bunter rolled up to them and began to speak the Famous Five broke into a sudden rush.

As if moved by the same spring, they rushed onward, leaving Bunter blinking after them through his big spectacles in astonishment.

"I say, you fellows!" roared Bunter.

The five juniors rushed on.

"What the dickens is on?" ejaculated Bunter, staring after them. "Where are they rushing in such a hurry?"

A couple of dozen or so yards away the Famous Five dropped into a walk, and sauntered on as before.

Bunter rolled after them, puffing and blowing. He had a good deal of weight to carry, and did not like exertion.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped, as he overtook them.

Then the Famous Five were electrified into sudden motion again. They broke into another rush, and vanished across the quad, leaving the Owl of the Remove stranded, as it were.

At a distance they dropped into a walk again.

But William George Bunter did not pursue them further. He understood by this time that the chums of the Remove would be endued with sudden energy whenever he got near them.

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter.

And he gave up the Famous Five. Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing were near at hand, and he bore down on them instead.

"I say, Smithy——"

"Don't say!" answered the Bunder. And he walked away with Redwing at a pace the fat junior could not equal.

Bunter snorted. His fascinating conversation seemed at a discount that day.

But something had to be done, for the matter was serious. Mrs. Mimble at the school shop had a new supply of tarts. Bunter had seen those tarts, and they had made his mouth water. But he had only seen them, for funds were low, and all Bunter's business at the tuckshop had to be transacted upon a strictly cash basis. Mrs. Mimble knew him.

The question was, therefore, who was to have the honour and distinction of making Bunter a loan? And there was a plentiful lack of eagerness for that distinguished honour among his Form-fellows.

"Good! Here's old Manly!" murmured Bunter, catching sight of Lord Mauleverer along with his relation, Sir

Jimmy Vivian. And Bunter rolled up to the two juniors with the most ingratiating smile.

"I say, Mauly—" he began.

"You cut off!" said Jimmy Vivian before Mauleverer could speak.

"Eh?"

"Op it!" said the baronet.

"I'm addressing Mauleverer," said Bunter, with dignity. "I'll thank you not to butt in, you ragamuffin!"

Sir Jimmy displayed a set of knuckles under Bunter's fat nose in the manner he had learned in his early days in Blucher's Rents, and certainly not at Greyfriars.

"See that?" he asked.

"Look here—"

"Like it round your kisser?" asked Sir Jimmy.

"Jimmy!" murmured Lord Mauleverer, shivering.

"He called me a little scrub!" said Jimmy Vivian. "You ain't goin' to lend 'im any money, Mauly. You buzz off, Bunter! I tell you if you 'ang around you'll get a oner on the boko!"

Lord Mauleverer drew his weird relation on, and Billy Bunter was left. He gave a sniff of supreme disdain. His unfortunate allusion to Sir Jimmy had not been forgotten by the baronet—rather unfortunately for Bunter. Lord Mauleverer had been drawn blank.

"Little guttersnipe!" grunted Bunter. "Hallo, there's Squiff! I say, Squiff, old chap— Don't walk away while I'm talking to you, Field, you beast! Well, of all the rotters! Wibley, old fellow, can you lend me— Yah! Rotter! I say, Toddy, old chap! Toddy! Peter Todd!"

"Nothing doing!" answered Peter Todd, without stopping.

Bunter gave another snort. Just then Hoskins of the Shell came out of the School House, looking round him anxiously.

"Seen Hobson, Bunter?" he asked.

Billy Bunter was about to reply "Blow Hobson!" when he paused in time. He remembered that he had seen Claude Hoskins open a letter that morning and take a postal-order out of it. That recollection caused William George Bunter to adopt his sweetest and politest manner.

"Hobson's gone out," he answered. "I saw him clear off a few minutes ago. I say, Hoskins, old chap—"

"Well, the silly ass!" exclaimed Hoskins, exasperated. "Fancy forgetting all about it again! It's too bad!"

"I say, Hoskins, can you lend me—"

"Sure you saw him go out, Bunter?"

"Oh, yes. He went out with Stewart. I say, Hoskins, I've been disappointed about a remittance. I was expecting a postal-order—"

"Oh, bother!" said Hoskins, utterly without sympathy for Bunter's sad disappointment. "Fancy that duffer marching off. I only stopped to cut up to the study for my music, and he vanishes! It's really too bad."

"Yes; but, I say—"

"And the music-room's booked after dinner," said Hoskins. "I remember Hobson asking whether it was."

"I say, Hoskins, I heard you playing your march yesterday," said Bunter. "It was ripping, old fellow!"

Hoskins gave the Owl of the Remove a benignant look. If Bunter had called him "old fellow" on any other occasion the Shell fellow would probably have replied far from politely. But, coupled with admiration for his music, Hoskins would have allowed Bunter to call him his long-lost brother.

"I never knew you were musical, Bunter," he said, quite graciously.

"Oh, I am awfully!" said Bunter, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 558.

wondering whether Hoskins had his postal-order about him. "I—I enjoy it, you know. Sousa's marches, you know—"

"You were speaking of music!" snapped Hoskins.

"Ahem! I—I wonder if you'd play your march to me, old chap?" said Bunter. "I've often been going to ask you."

Hoskins smiled.

"I don't mind," he said. "I've been making something of a rearrangement, and I really think I've scored with those minor ninths, Bunter."

"I'm sure of it," assented Bunter, who hadn't the vaguest notion what a minor ninth was. "You're just the chap that would, Hoskins. I say, do you happen to have half-a-crown about you?"

"Eh? Yes."

"I've been disappointed about a postal-order, Hoskins. I—"

"Well, come on," said Hoskins, without heeding. "If you understand anything at all about music, Bunter, I think you'll like my march. This way!"

Bunter suppressed a groan, and accompanied the genius of the Shell to the music-room. He had been willing to express the most heartfelt admiration for Hoskins' march in F, but he had not bargained for having to listen to it, too. But he would have listened to a performance of Richard Strauss just then for the loan of a half-crown, so he made up his mind to bear it. The grand piano in the music-room was open, and Hoskins' march was on the desk all ready. Claude Hoskins planted himself on the music-stool.

"I say, old chap—" began Bunter, with a faint hope of getting at the half-crown before the music started.

"Sit down," said Hoskins, without even hearing him. "Now, just tell me what you think of this, Bunter."

Crash!

Hoskins began.

There seemed to be a good deal of fortissimo about Claude Hoskins' march in F. Bunter wondered how the piano stood it, and wondered still more how he was going to stand it himself. And he was not sure of the half-crown, either. But the remembrance of Mrs. Mumble's new tarts encouraged him, and he stood it manfully.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed, as there came a pause. "Splendid! I—I especially like the—the minor nineteenth. I say, Hoskins, if—"

Crash!

Hoskins was going it again.

Billy Bunter realised that this was not the end yet. It was merely a pause that had inspired him with false hopes.

Desmond of the Remove looked in at the door.

"Howly mother av Moses! Is it an air-raid intirely?" he demanded.

Hoskins did not even hear him.

Micky fled with his fingers to his ears. Bunter remained where he was in silent anguish.

With a final terrific crash of chords that seemed on very ill terms with one another, Hoskins ceased. He spun round on the music-stool and looked at Bunter.

"There!" he said.

"Splendid!" gasped Bunter, feeling that he had never realised before what an inestimable boon silence was. "Topping! I think that's better than Wagner, Hoskins."

"There are some good things in Wagner," said Hoskins condescendingly. "I've looked over his scores. But that theory of the unending melody—that's tosh!"

"Of course it is," said Bunter, wondering what on earth was the theory of the unending melody. "Simply tripe, I'm sure. I say, Hoskins—"

"I'm glad to see you showing this interest in music, Bunter. 'You ain't the fat duffer I've always thought you,' said Hoskins. 'I'll give you an idea of my fantasia—'"

"Your—your what?"

"My fantasia—in F sharp minor. Like this—"

Hoskins was spinning round on the music-stool to the piano again, when Bunter caught him desperately by the arm. After the march in F, flesh and blood could not stand the fantasia in F sharp minor.

"Hold on!" gasped Bunter. "I say, Hoskins, I've been disappointed about a postal-order—"

"Eh?"

"Could you lend me half-a-crown till to-morrow morning, old fellow?" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, yes. Listen to this!"

Crash!

Hoskins jerked his arm away from Bunter, and started. Billy Bunter suppressed a groan. If Hoskins hadn't answered "Yes" before beginning, the Owl of the Remove would certainly not have borne the fantasia in F sharp minor to the end. But with a certain half-crown at the finish, he bore it nobly. Fortunately, the fantasia was not so long as the march. Hoskins finished with a terrific flourish, and spun round like a tectotum.

"There!"

"Tip-top!" gasped Bunter. "If you'll hand me—"

"Like to hear my rondo?" asked Hoskins, all geniality now.

"Awfully; but—but there goes the dinner-bell," stuttered Bunter, greatly relieved to hear it. "We shall have to cut."

"Oh, blow dinner!" said Hoskins enthusiastically. "This is really a pleasure to me, Bunter, finding a chap who really appreciates music. I'll cut dinner if you will."

Bunter restrained his feelings with difficulty. Cutting dinner was a sacrifice he would not have made for the half-crown, and certainly not for the great pleasure of listening to Hoskins' compositions one after another.

"I—I'd like to, but I'm afraid Quelch would be ratty," he stuttered. "Come on, old fellow! Another time, you know—"

Hoskins closed the piano with a snap.

"Oh, all right!" he said.

"About that half-crown, Hoskins—"

"Eh? What half-crown?" asked Hoskins, seeming to wake up. "What are you talking about?"

"You were going to lend me half-a-crown—"

"Was I? Oh, yes! All right."

To Bunter's great relief, Hoskins shoved his hand into his pocket. The loan was coming off, after all! Bunter had not suffered in vain!

But Hoskins' hand was empty when he drew it out.

"By gad!" he said. "I forgot! I'm stony."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Sorry," said Hoskins carelessly.

"But—but—but you had a postal-order this morning?" howled Bunter. "I saw it!"

"Yes. I sent it off by post for a new lot of music-paper," said Hoskins. "I'd forgotten. Come on, Bunter; you'll be late!"

Bunter seemed rooted to the floor. He had listened to the march in F, and to the fantasia in F sharp minor, and had narrowly escaped the rondo—only to discover that Claude Hoskins was stony, and that there was not to be a loan, after all. Mrs. Mumble's tarts were as far off as ever.

"You—you—you swindler!" ejaculated Bunter at last.

"Eh?" said Hoskins, in astonishment.

Bunter followed him out of the music-room, breathing wrath.

"You idiot!" he spluttered.

"Gone off your rocker?" asked Hoskins, in wonder.

"You—you—you potty chump!" yelled Bunter. "After kicking up that fearful row, you won't lend me half-a-crown! Do you want to know what your music's like, you howling ass? It's like a lot of tom-cats on the tiles, mixed up with air-raids and a thunderstorm! Yah!"

With that pronouncement, which really did him credit as a musical critic, Billy Bunter rolled away, leaving Hoskins gasping.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

With Improvements by Skinner!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. walked down to Little Side after dinner. Football practice was in full swing at Greyfriars now, and the chums of the Remove intended to punt the ball about a little before afternoon classes. A match with the Shell was coming off soon, and Wharton was getting his men into shape.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Hosky!" said Bob. "Surely he hasn't brought his mighty intellect down to the level of footer!"

Claude Hoskins was sauntering near the football-ground, his hands in his pockets, his brow wrinkled in thought.

Occasionally he detached a hand from his pocket to brush aside a wisp of hair from his forehead.

It was a curly wisp of hair, and gave Hoskins a poetical look—or, at least, Hoskins was persuaded that it did.

Sarcastic persons hinted that Hoskins cultivated the curl on his forehead with great assiduity, and spent hours and hours before the glass arranging it; indeed, he was suspected of using curling-tongs on it.

Bob Cherry clapped the Shell fellow on the shoulder, and woke him up from a deep reverie, doubtless upon the subject of minor ninths or thirteenthths, or something of that fearsome kind.

"Yow!" ejaculated Hoskins.

"Coming along to footer?" asked Bob. Hoskins blinked at him.

"Footer!" he repeated.

"Yes, footer! F-O-O-T-E-R!" said Bob, spelling it out for Hoskins, as if to help him to grasp his meaning.

"Oh, footer!" said Hoskins. "No! No time for footer! Hobson wants me to play, but I don't see how I can find the time."

"Oh, my hat!" said Johnny Bull. "You can find time for mixing up sharps and flats on paper, but you can't find time for footer!"

Hoskins gave him a pitying look. A fellow who could describe composition as mixing up sharps and flats on paper was a fellow intellectually far below the level of a Hun or a Yahoo, in Hoskins' opinion.

"Mind, I can see something in the game," said Hoskins. "I've been thinking about footer, in fact."

"Better play it than think it," said Nugent.

Hoskins shook his head.

"I mean, from a musical point of view," he said. "I've been thinking of a Soccer symphony."

"Oh, crikey!"

"I've got it in my head," said Hoskins, brushing aside his curl again. "The rough idea, you know. If you fellows like to come along to the music-room now, I'll give you an idea of it. We can turn Scott out."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Squiff

howling to us," said Bob Cherry hurriedly; and the Famous Five walked on quickly.

The Co. seemed somehow to prefer Soccer itself to a Soccer symphony.

Hoskins gave a sniff.

He glanced towards the players in search of Hobson; but the captain of the Shell was not at the practice, though a good many of his team were. Claude Hoskins strolled away towards the School House. He liked Hobson's company, for Hobson was a listener of unusual powers of endurance. Besides, Hobson really admired his study-mate, and he was often heard describing the wonderful things old Claude could do—Hobson's admiration being chiefly based upon the fact that he hadn't the remotest comprehension of the things old Claude did. Wild horses would not have dragged Hobson to the music-room, if he could have avoided it, to hear Claude's arrangements of minor ninths; but he thought it awfully clever of Hoskins to understand all about minor ninths. The chums often had a long and one-sided conversation; Hoskins talking music, and Hobson thinking about football, and saying "Yes," or "No," or "Really, old chap!"

As Hobson was not to be seen out of doors, Hoskins went up to the study. He heard someone moving within as he came up, and began at once:

"Hobby, old fellow, I was going to tell you about——" Then he broke off. "Hallo, Skinner! What are you doing here?"

It was not James Hobson in the study, after all. It was Harold Skinner of the Remove.

Skinner was standing at the table, and he spun round with a guilty look as Hoskins came in.

Hoskins gave him a very suspicious glance.

Skinner was a humorous fellow, whose little jokes were not always good-natured, and a Remove fellow certainly had no business in Hoskins' study.

"What do you want here?" demanded Hoskins.

"Ahem! I—I looked in to—to speak to Hobson!" stammered Skinner.

"What are you doing with my quill pen?"

"I—I just picked it up to—to look at it."

"Put it down!"

Skinner put it down.

"Now get out!" said Hoskins.

Skinner got out.

Hoskins looked round the study suspiciously. But there was no evidence that Skinner had been playing any practical joke. Claude Hoskins was turning over the music, with which the table was littered, when Hobson came in suddenly.

Hobson jumped as he saw his chum.

"Oh! I—I thought you were out of doors!" he stammered.

"Lucky you came in," said Hoskins.

"Scott clears off at one forty-five, and there's time——"

He picked up the celebrated march in F.

James Hobson suppressed a groan. He was fairly caught; and he could have kicked himself for coming in just then.

But he yielded to his hard fate, and Hoskins walked him off to the music-room, march in hand. Sounds of music were proceeding from the room. Scott of the Fourth was still busy there. The Shell fellows waited till he had finished his piano practice, and the moment he left the stool Claude Hoskins settled on it. Scott looked at his music-sheet with a grin.

"That the merry march?" he asked.

"Yes; you can hear it if you like."

"All right; I'll keep near the door, to

bolt when it gets dangerous," said Scott humorously.

Hoskins disdained to reply to that frivolous remark. He placed his music on the desk, and began to play. As the bars crashed out Hobson's face assumed an expression that was almost alarming, and Scott gave a shriek. Even Hoskins himself looked startled.

"Stop it!" yelled Scott. "Do you call that music?"

"Go it, Hoskins!" said Hobson loyally. "It's splendid, old chap!" Friendship could go no further than that. The man who gave his life for his friend was not a patch on James Hobson.

Crash! Crash!

Scott stopped his ears, and ran for his life.

Hoskins paused, very puzzled.

"Ripping!" said Hobson bravely.

"There's something up," said Hoskins. "It's horrid!"

"Eh?"

"Blessed if I see—— Dash it all, that accidental oughtn't to be there! And that rest—that's not right!" Hoskins gave a yell. "Somebody's been tampering with my music!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Some villain's been putting in sharps and flats and rests where they're not wanted!" shrieked Hoskins. "Couldn't you see it was all wrong, Hobson, you ass? Scott could!"

Hobson was dumb.

It was true that Hoskins had been producing the most horrid discords on the piano; but Hobson had supposed that that was part of the music. His hearty admiration had been a little misplaced, as it happened.

Hoskins jumped up from the music-stool; the first time on record that he had ever left it willingly.

"That villain Skinner! That's what he was doing in my study—mucking up my march!" he howled. "He's stuck it all over with accidentals! I've been playing in impossible keys! I—I—I'll scalp him!"

"The rotter!" gasped Hobson. "I—I must say I noticed it was rather—rather out of tune in the—the opening bar. It sounded awful!"

"He hasn't touched the opening bar!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Hobson gave it up.

"I'll scalp him! I'll boil him in oil!" shrieked Hobson. "Fancy a chap messing up a piece of music! Why, a Hun wouldn't do that—the Kaiser himself wouldn't be capable of it! Come on, and help me slaughter him!"

"Certainly, old chap!" said Hobson, feeling that he was on safe ground there. He was at least equal to slaughtering Skinner.

Hoskins rushed out of the music-room, with his chum at his heels. Wrathful as he was, he stayed to take his precious march up to the study and put it in the table drawer. Then he rushed out of the study to search for Skinner. Hobson followed him, but not far. Perhaps, on second thoughts, he considered that Hoskins was able to deal with Skinner on his own. Claude Hoskins did not even notice that his chum was not with him, however. He sped into the quadrangle with wrath and vengeance in his gleaming eyes.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's up?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, who was coming back to the School House with his chums.

"Where's Skinner?" yelled Hoskins.

"Skinner? Over yonder by the elms," said Harry Wharton. "What the——"

Hoskins rushed on. The Famous Five stared after him amazed. Skinner was under the elms, talking and laughing with

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his chums, Snoop and Stott. Apparently he was relating some excellent joke to them, which tickled them very highly, to judge by their chuckles.

"Look out!" exclaimed Snoop suddenly.

Skinner turned round just as Hoskins came tearing up. The exasperated musician did not speak. He clutched Skinner round the neck and got his head into chancery.

"Yaroooh!" roared Skinner. "Yah! Oh! Help! He's mad! Draggimoff!"

Pommel, pommel, pommel!

Thump, thump, thump!

"Help! Yooop! Yah! Oh!" roared Skinner, struggling wildly in Hoskins' grasp. "Draggimoff! Yankimoff! Yoooooop!"

Thump! Pommel! Thump! Bang!

Snoop and Stott stood staring without interfering. Skinner would have fared very badly had not Harry Wharton & Co. rushed up, seized the infuriated Hoskins, and dragged him off.

"Yow-ow-ow-wooop!" came from Skinner, as he staggered against a tree, quite dazed and knocked out.

Hoskins struggled in the hands of the Famous Five.

"Let me go!" he roared. "Lemme go! I'll smash him! I'll slaughter him! I'll spifficate him!"

"My dear man, you've nearly spifficated him already!" said Bob Cherry, fixing a grip of iron on Hoskins' collar. "Etsy does it! Shell fellows are not allowed to spifficate the Remove!"

"The bumpfulness is the proper caper!" suggested Hurree Singh.

"Yow-ow-ow-wo!" moaned Skinner.

"But what has Skinner done?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"He's mucked up my march!" yelled Hoskins. "Stuck in sharps and flats all over it—"

"Does that make any difference?" asked Johnny Bull. "What does it matter?"

"You—you—you crass idiot!"

"Eh?"

"Bump him!" said Frank Nugent.

"Bump him for punching Skinner, bump him for calling names, and bump him for his march!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo!" yelled Hoskins. "I tell you—Yaroooh!"

Bump, bump, bump!

The Famous Five left Claude Hoskins sitting on the ground gasping. He was not feeling equal to punching Skinner any more; and Skinner was hurriedly departing. Hoskins staggered up at last, and limped away to his study, to spend the last few minutes that remained before classes in erasing the improvements Skinner had made in his celebrated march in F.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Terrible Catastrophe!

HORACE MANFRED HACKER, the master of the Shell, frowned. Mr. Hacker had come to take the Shell, and his quick, sharp eye noticed at once that one member of his Form was absent. Claude Hoskins was not in his usual place.

Mr. Hacker was a stickler for punctuality. For that reason he had sometimes had occasion to be down on Hoskins. Hoskins was always punctual in the music-room, but not always in the Form-room. Sometimes when the bell rang he was busy dabbling down weird-looking characters on fragments of paper, and did not even hear the bell. What were classics, or geography, or history, or maths to a fellow who had just thought of something new and original in the way of minor thirteenth?

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"Hoskins is not here!" said Mr. Hacker sourly. "Where is Hoskins? He is late again! Really, that boy passes all patience. Chowne, you may go and find Hoskins."

"Yes, sir!" said Chowne.

Chowne felt rather grateful to Hoskins for thus getting him a few more minutes out of the Form-room, and the rest of the Shell followed Chowne with envious glances. Mr. Hacker proceeded with business; and in five minutes Chowne of the Shell returned, with a very peculiar expression on his chubby face.

He came alone, and Hacker fixed a look of grim inquiry upon him.

"Have you not succeeded in finding Hoskins, Chowne?" he snapped.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Where is he?"

"In his study, sir."

"What? And why has he not come to the Form-room?" exclaimed Mr. Hacker.

"He's busy, sir."

"What?"

Mr. Hacker thundered out the word, while the Shell fellows stared. They had never heard before of a fellow who was too busy to attend classes when his Form-master sent for him.

"Chowne, are you speaking seriously?"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Chowne.

"What did Hoskins say to you?"

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"I—I'd rather n-n-not say, sir!" stammered Chowne.

"I command you to say at once!"

"He—he said I—I could go and eat coke, sir!" stammered Chowne.

There was a gasp from the Shell. Hobson looked quite alarmed. Mr. Hacker looked as he might have looked if a volcano had suddenly burst into eruption at his feet. He found his voice at last.

"Chowne, you tell me seriously that, on conveying my command to Hoskins to come to the Form-room he—he made that absurd remark?"

"Ye-es, sir."

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Hacker. "Boys, you will keep order here while I am absent for a few minutes."

Mr. Hacker picked up a cane from his desk, and went out of the Form-room with hasty strides. He left the Shell in a buzz of amazement.

In two minutes Mr. Hacker was in the Shell passage, and glaring into Study No. 3 there. There was Claude Hoskins, with an expression of the wildest excitement and wrath on his face, and his poetical curl standing almost on end. He seemed to have been turning out the study for a spring cleaning, to judge by the look of it.

"Hoskins!" thundered Mr. Hacker.

"It's gone!"

"What?"

"It's gone! It's been taken—stolen!"

"Are you out of your senses, Hoskins?"

"Gone! Taken! Stolen!"

"Hoskins, do you mean to imply that something has been stolen from your study?" asked Mr. Hacker, his wrath subsiding a little. Hoskins was almost weeping with rage and dismay.

"Yes, sir! Oh, dear! The villain! Oh! It's gone!"

"Something of value, Hoskins?"

"Yes, sir! Immense value!" groaned Hoskins.

"Come, come," said Mr. Hacker, "I do not see how you could have any possession of immense value in your study. You exaggerate, Hoskins! You have missed money—"

"Money"—Hoskins almost snorted with contempt at the suggestion—"money! I shouldn't be upset like this about money!"

"Then what have you missed, Hoskins?"

"My march, sir!"

"Your what?"

"My march!" almost sobbed Hoskins. "I've put two terms' work into that march, sir, and now it's been taken away—stolen!"

"I think you must be insane!" gasped Mr. Hacker. "I ask you what has been stolen from your study, and you give me the name of a calendar month. Is this deliberate impertinence, Hoskins?"

"Not March—march!" shouted Hoskins. "My march, sir—my march in F. Six pages!"

"Is it possible that you are alluding to a musical composition, Hoskins?"

"Of course, sir! I left it in the table drawer when I went to look for Skinner, and when I came in it was gone—gone!" groaned Hoskins. "My march in F! I—I say, wharrer you doing? Yaroooh!"

Hoskins really did not need to ask that question. It was plain enough what Mr. Hacker was doing. He was grasping Claude Hoskins by the collar and shaking him.

"You absurd boy!" exclaimed Mr. Hacker. "You have remained away from classes because you have lost some utterly ridiculous and worthless rubbish—"

"Yaroooop! Leggo!"

"I shall cane you severely, Hoskins! Go to the Form-room at once!" shouted Mr. Hacker, bundling Hoskins out of the study.

He expected the junior to flee before him. To his amazement Hoskins stood his ground. A lioness deprived of her cubs was a sweet and gentle creature compared with an amateur musician deprived of his march in F, if Mr. Hacker had only known it.

"I can't go, can I?" shouted Hoskins at his amazed Form-master. "I've got to find my march, haven't I? Let a chap alone!"

"What? Wha-a-at?"

"My march in F—"

"Go to the Form-room at once, Hoskins!" shrieked Mr. Hacker.

And as Hoskins did not move, Mr. Hacker grasped him by the collar again and marched him off—not a march in F, but a very quick march. Hoskins had to go, then; but—painful to relate—he came very near kicking his Form-master's shins. Fortunately, Hoskins restrained himself, and did not commit that unspeakable outrage, and he was led into the Form-room by the collar.

Then there was a rhythmic sound of swishing, and even the march in F was driven out of Claude Hoskins' mind for a few minutes as Mr. Hacker laid on the cane.

"Now, go to your place, Hoskins!" said the master of the Shell sternly.

Hoskins hesitated one moment, casting a rebellious look towards the door. But the caning had been enough for him, and

he went to his place. During that afternoon he did not hear one word that Mr. Hacker uttered in the way of instruction, and was scarcely aware of the fact that he was given lines almost as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. One thought haunted him—the terrible loss he had sustained—what had become of his march in F—what felonious hand had purloined it—what the thief might be doing with it? It could hardly be expected that, in such circumstances, Claude Hoskins would be able to put his mind into Form work.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Awful!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Maddier than ever!" remarked Bob Cherry cheerily.

"Madder than an esteemed and respectable hatter!" concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Remove had just come out, a few minutes after the Shell; and one of the first things that met their view was Claude Hoskins talking, or, rather, shouting, to an accompaniment of wild gesticulations.

The Famous Five paused to look on, as did many other fellows. Hoskins was in such a state of excitement as he had never been in before. Often enough he had been seen excited; when, for instance, a new combination of minor ninths had occurred to his fertile brain, or when he had arrived in the music-room to find that some wag had locked the piano and taken away the key. But even that excitement was, compared with his present state, like moonlight unto sunlight, or water unto wine. Now he seemed on the verge of apoplexy. His hands waved in the air as if he were conducting an invisible orchestra, and a flood of words streamed from his mouth, as inexhaustible as the eloquence of a political bigwig engaged upon an epoch-making speech.

Hobson seemed to be trying to comfort him; but Hoskins, like the troubled Hebrew lady of ancient times, mourned, and would not be comforted.

Several Shell fellows stood round him, and they seemed sympathetic, though their sympathy did not keep them from grinning.

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"The matterfulness must be terrific."

"What's the row, Hobson?"

"Listen to the band!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Gone! Clean gone! Stolen!" Hoskins gasped. "Taken out of the table drawer! You saw me put it there, Hobson; you were with me—just before I went for Skinner, you know! You saw me, didn't you?"

Hoskins paused, but not for a reply—only for breath. He ran on without giving Hobson a chance of replying.

"My march in F! You know, my march in F? F major, you know? Some awful villain has pinched it, and—what's become of it? Think of it! That march will come out with some awful thief's name on it, and he will get the credit! If it makes a sensation, it will be put down to him—the awful villain may become famous as the composer of my march in F major!"

"Great pip!" murmured Bob.

"It's got to be found!" shouted Hoskins. "I'm going to the Head! I'm going to the police! I call you as a witness, Hobson, that it was my march if it's published by the awful rotter who's boned it. You can remember it—you've heard it played! Impossible to mistake it—especially that arrangement of minor ninths. But who could have

done it? Where is it?" Hoskins tore his hair, nearly ruining the curl on his forehead. "It's enough to drive a chap potty, ain't it? My march in F, you know—F major!"

"It'll turn up!" gasped Hobson, getting in a word at last.

"It's been stolen, I'll tell you!"

"Well, it can't have been stolen," said Stewart of the Shell comfortingly. "Nobody in his senses would steal such muck—"

"What?"

"I—I mean—"

"Idiot!"

"I meaner say—"

"Dummy!"

"Look here—"

"Crass idiot!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Stewart. "If that's all a chap gets for sympathy you can go and be blown—you and your march, too! Rats!"

And Stewart marched off indignantly.

"I say, Hosky, where are you going?" exclaimed Hobson, catching his chum by the arm as he started striding towards the doorway.

"I'm going to the Head about it!"

"But I say—"

Hoskins shook off his chum's hand, and bolted into the House. The juniors stared after him blankly. They were sorry for Claude Hoskins, though they rather shared Stewart's opinion of his musical performance. To bother the Head over such a matter as a missing music manuscript seemed amazing cheek to them, and they wondered how the Head would take it. It was pretty certain that Dr. Locke would not regard the matter as being so terrifically serious as it seemed to Claude Hoskins.

"Poor old Hosky!" said Bob Cherry. "It's the artistic temperament, you know—it makes a chap a bit potty! Now, if he went in for footer instead of minor nintheenths, or twentieths, or whatever they are—"

"Some ass playing a practical joke on him, of course," said Wharton. "It's too bad, though!"

"Serve him jolly well right!" growled Skinner.

"Likely as not he's mislaid it," said Nugent. "He's an absent-minded ass! I've seen him tap his tuning-fork on a chap's head to get his blessed note."

James Hobson rubbed his head reminiscently.

"Don't you know what's become of his piffle, Hobby?" asked Wharton.

"Eh?"

"You're his study-mate. Haven't you seen it about?"

"I—I—"

"Used it to light the fire with, perhaps?" suggested Vernon-Smith. And there was a laugh.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Hobson. "I wouldn't do that!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Hosky!"

All eyes were turned up on Claude Hoskins as he came out. He had a dazed look. The interview with the Head had not apparently gone well.

"What did the Head say?" asked half a dozen voices.

"Liked?" chuckled Billy Bunter.

Hoskins gasped.

"Have you fellows ever noticed anything queer about Dr. Locke?" he asked.

"A bit weak in the crumpet—what?"

"The Head—weak in the crumpet?" said Wharton, with a stare.

"Yes! I think he's potty!" said Hoskins. "He must be from what he said to me. Fairly took my breath away. He doesn't think it matters in the least about my march in F being missing!"

"You don't say so!" murmured Nugent.

"He said it was impertinent of me to

interrupt him about such a frivolous matter!" said Hoskins. "Frivolous, you know! My march in F! Frivolous! F major, you know! Frivolous! Can you believe it?"

"D-d-d-did he?"

"He did! And he said that I should not suppose that, at my age, I could compose a piece of music of any value. As if age had anything to do with it! But it's always the same with these old jossers—"

"These what?" gasped Hobson.

"Old jossers! They don't understand that the future belongs to youth!" said Hoskins. "They don't hear the young generation knocking at the door, as some play-writing chap puts it. They go on in their stodgy way! Frivolous! No value—my march in F major of no value! Ha, ha! That's the Head's opinion! They make a man like that Head of a public school! Ha, ha!"

Hoskins laughed bitterly and sardonically.

The other fellows laughed, too, though not sardonically. They were not feeling sardonic. They were tickled. They found Hoskins' views entertaining.

"And that's all?" asked Hobson.

"No, that isn't all! The Head's forbidden me to apply to the police about it!"

"You—you suggested that?" said Hobson faintly.

"Of course! If the Head's silver had been stolen he'd have called in the police fast enough! What's his silver compared with my march in F?"

"Oh!"

"They couldn't publish his silver, and become famous!" said Hoskins. "That's what a thief may do with my march in F. For the present, I sha'n't call in the police—"

"Perhaps they wouldn't come if you did!" suggested Vernon-Smith.

Hoskins did not heed that suggestion.

"For the present I sha'n't call them in. But if my march doesn't turn up I shall have no other resource. The thief must be about Greyfriars somewhere, waiting for an opportunity to dispose of his plunder, perhaps—"

"Oh dear!"

"Perhaps it's been pinched for a joke on you!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"It's possible!" admitted Hoskins.

"There may be some idiot so utterly crass as to play jokes with a fellow's march in F. I'm going to find out. You'll help me, Hobby?"

"I—I'll do anything you like, old chap," said Hobson dispiritedly.

"It's a shame, for your sake, too," said Hoskins. "I was going to play it to you this evening twice over. I've bagged the music-room. I was going to play it to you twice every day, as I've told you, till you knew it nearly by heart. Now I can't—till I find it."

"No, you can't, can you?" said Hobson. And if Hoskins had been a suspicious fellow he would have observed that Hobson made that remark more cheerfully.

"Can't you remember it, and make a fresh copy?" asked Johnny Bull.

"No, ass!"

"Then I'll tell you what," said Johnny, not much pleased by that reply. "I can tell you how to manage it. Dip a fly in the ink, and set him crawling over your music-paper, and then play the result. It will sound just as good as your march in F."

Johnny Bull marched away after making that illuminating suggestion—which was just as well, for Hoskins was looking homicidal. Hoskins wasted no more time in words—he had wasted a good deal already; but he dragged his chum Hobby away to help him hunt for

the lost music. And Hobson, having the dazzling prospect before him of hearing the march, when found, played to him twice a day, was very enthusiastic in the search—perhaps!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Luck!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. found Hoskins of the Shell rather entertaining; but they really felt sympathetic towards the distracted composer. It was, they agreed, too bad that he should be deprived of his wonderful march after all the work he had put into it. And that evening Wharton looked into Hoskins' study to ask whether the great work had been found. He found Hobson and Hoskins there at their prep. Hobson looked rather worried, and Hoskins more so.

"Has it turned up?" asked Harry.

Claude Hoskins shook his head mournfully.

"No. I don't expect it to. The thief's keeping it jolly safe, of course."

"You—you think it has been stolen?"

"I know it has!"

"More likely a lark," hinted Harry.

Hoskins shook his head. He was evidently determined to take a pessimistic view of the matter. Besides, he—and only he—knew the immense value of that march in F.

"Some practical joker," suggested Wharton.

"Rot!" said Hoskins. "Suppose you missed a million pounds—"

"Eh?"

"Would you think some practical joker had taken it for a lark?"

"Well, no."

"Well, then, I don't think this is a practical joke, either!"

"Was your march worth a million pounds?" asked Wharton innocently.

"More than that!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I don't mean to say it would have fetched anything like that, if sold," explained Hoskins, rather unnecessarily. "But the value of a work of art can't be computed in pounds, shillings, and pence. The value of a genuine work of art is more than that of all the money in the universe. For instance, take Beethoven's symphonies. Are they worth more than the Bank of England, or not?"

"I suppose they are," admitted Wharton.

"That chap Beethoven was a Hun," remarked Hobson.

Hoskins snorted.

"You're an ass, Hobby!" he said.

"Well, wasn't he a Hun?" demanded Hobson rather warmly. "He was a Hun right enough. So was Handel."

"They were Germans," admitted Hoskins reluctantly. "But there is no nationality in Art, Hobby. You're an ass, as I remarked before!"

"So your march in F stands along with Beethoven's symphonies?" asked Wharton, trying not to smile.

"Not on the same footing," said Hoskins. "In some respects, Beethoven's work was better than mine."

"Only in some respects?" murmured Wharton, almost overcome by that statement.

"Certainly! For instance, my arrangement of minor ninths—"

"Coming!" called out Harry, in response to an imaginary call from the corridor. And he hastily departed, before Hoskins could get into full swing on the subject of minor ninths.

Hoskins grunted, and turned to his work again. He was working in a very desultory fashion. It was very difficult

to put his mind into prep when the march in F was still missing. At that very moment, as he sadly confided to Hobson, some unscrupulous rascal might be seeking fame and fortune by getting that march published in his own name. That stunning arrangement in minor ninths would go down to posterity as the work of the purloiner of the composition, and it would never be known what Claude Hoskins had done in the cause of British music. Really, such a possibility was very disturbing and exasperating—to the composer. Hobson did not seem to be alarmed.

Billy Bunter looked into the study a little later, to receive a glare from Claude Hoskins. Hoskins had not forgotten the very frank opinion Bunter had expressed on his music after the failure to negotiate a loan.

But the Owl of the Remove had his most ingratiating smile on.

"I say, Hoskins, old chap—" he began.

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"Get out!"

"Ahem! It's an awful shame, your sonata being pinched!" said Bunter.

"It wasn't a sonata, fathead!"

"I mean your march in K—"

"F, idiot!"

"Yes, I mean F," said Bunter hastily. "I was going to make a suggestion for getting it back, Hoskins. Suppose you offer a reward?"

"A what?" exclaimed Hoskins.

"Lots of fellows would hunt for it if there was a reward," said Bunter. "Say you offer two guineas. Then—"

"That's not a bad idea!" remarked Hoskins. "What do you think, Hobby?"

"Rotten!" said Hobson.

Hobson was glaring at Bunter. He did not seem to approve of the Owl's suggestion at all.

"It's a jolly good idea," said Bunter. "You stick up a notice on the board,

Hoskins, offering a reward, and I assure you I'll set to work at once. I'm a rather clever chap, you know. I'll find it for you!"

A sudden suspicion came into Hoskins' mind.

"Those who hide can find!" he exclaimed.

"Wha-a-at?" burred Bunter.

Hoskins jumped up.

"Have you bagged my march, to stick me for a reward for finding it?" he demanded.

"Oh, really, you know!" gasped Bunter. "Here, leggo my collar! I haven't seen your silly rot! Yaroo!"

Hoskins did not let him alone. He dragged him into the study by the collar. He knew a good deal of Bunter, and he had reason to be suspicious.

"Leggo!" roared Bunter. "Yah! Oooooop! Leggo! I tell you I don't know anything about your silly piffle! Ow!"

"Give me that ruler, Hobby!"

"Eh? What for?" exclaimed Hobson.

"I'll lick him till he owns up!"

"Yow! Help!" roared Bunter.

"But perhaps he doesn't know anything about it!" exclaimed the astonished Hobson.

"What does that matter?" snapped Hoskins. "He may, or he may not. But I can't afford to take chances when my march in F is at stake. I'll lick him, and if he knows he'll own up—see?"

"Well, my hat!"

"Give me the ruler, fathead, will you?"

"No, you thumping ass!" exclaimed Hobson. "Let Bunter alone! I'm certain—I mean, pretty certain, that he doesn't know anything about it!"

"Oh, rot! I'm going to make him own up if he does!"

"Help!" yelled Bunter, in great alarm. "Yaroo! Help! Fire!"

Hoskins reached for the ruler with his free hand, and there was a loud thwack as he brought it to bear on Bunter's plump person. With so much at stake, Claude Hoskins was not inclined to stick at trifles.

But Hobson chipped in. He jerked his study-mate away from Bunter, and held him off.

"Cut, you fat ass!" he exclaimed.

William George Bunter cut fast enough. He did not feel disposed to remain and discuss the question of a reward in these circumstances.

"Let me go, you ass!" howled Hoskins.

Hobson let him go, when Bunter was gone.

"You chump!" said Hoskins. "You silly ass! You—you frabjous jabber-wock! Bunter may know where my march is all the time."

"I don't believe he does."

"Why not?"

"Well, I don't think so."

"Oh, you can't think!" said Hoskins, with a sniff. "I suspect Bunter, and I suspect Skinner—"

"Oh, rot!" said Hobson uneasily.

"You were saying just now that you thought the rot—I mean, the march—was bagged by somebody who wanted to publish it."

"That's the only possible motive for stealing it."

"Well, Bunter or Skinner couldn't publish it, could they?"

"They may be simply agents for the thief. It's pretty clear to me that some villain has heard of my arrangement of minor ninths, and wants to get the credit for himself. Well, he must have employed some chap in the school to bone the march for him. Skinner, very likely—he's capable of it. You know

what he did—put sharps and flats into my music where they didn't belong. A fellow who would do that would do anything!"

"Oh, dear!" said Hobson.

"The matter's not going to drop," said Hoskins darkly. "I'm going to have that march back and expose the thief. I'm not going to have my fame bagged by envious rivals."

"Oh?"

"I can jolly well tell you that if I don't find it to-morrow I'm going to the police, whether the Head likes it or not!"

"Hosky, old chap——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Anyhow, you'd better do your prep, or Hacker will scalp you in the morning."

"Blow Hacker!"

But, though Claude Hoskins "blew" Hacker, he decided to do his prep, and he sat down very discontentedly to do it. It was a good deal like fiddling while Rome was burning; but Mr. Hacker was not to be reasoned with.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Co. Takes a Hand!

THE next day Claude Hoskins was the object of a good deal of sympathy, mixed with a still larger amount of merriment.

He went about looking like a ghost.

He was in trouble in the Form-room, for he simply could not put his mind into Form work, and Mr. Hacker made no allowances whatever for the worries of an ambitious musician deprived of his march in F.

Out of the Form-room he wandered like a spectre, and every fellow he met had to listen to his tale of woe.

It was agreed among the juniors that, terrific bore as Hoskins had been with his march in F, he was growing to be a still more terrific bore without it.

But the fellows were sorry for him, too. He took his loss so seriously, and was so convinced that some unscrupulous rival was plotting to annex the fame that was his due.

Needless to say that theory was held only by Claude Hoskins. Nobody else dreamed for a moment that the march was of sufficient value to tempt a thief or a rival composer.

The general view was that some fellow had taken the music and hidden it, for a joke on Hoskins; or perhaps because he was tired of hearing it crashed out in the music-room.

That some music-merchant, having heard of Hoskins' new and original treatment of the chord of the minor ninth, had planned to bag the glory and distinction due to Hoskins was a theory that made the Greyfriars fellows chortle.

Only Hoskins entertained that theory; but he entertained it with deadly and mournful seriousness, and would not be comforted.

"It's really too bad about poor old Hoskins and his rubbish," Bob Cherry remarked after lessons. "He's looking as a chap might look if some rogue had stolen his new footer. I suppose that's how he feels."

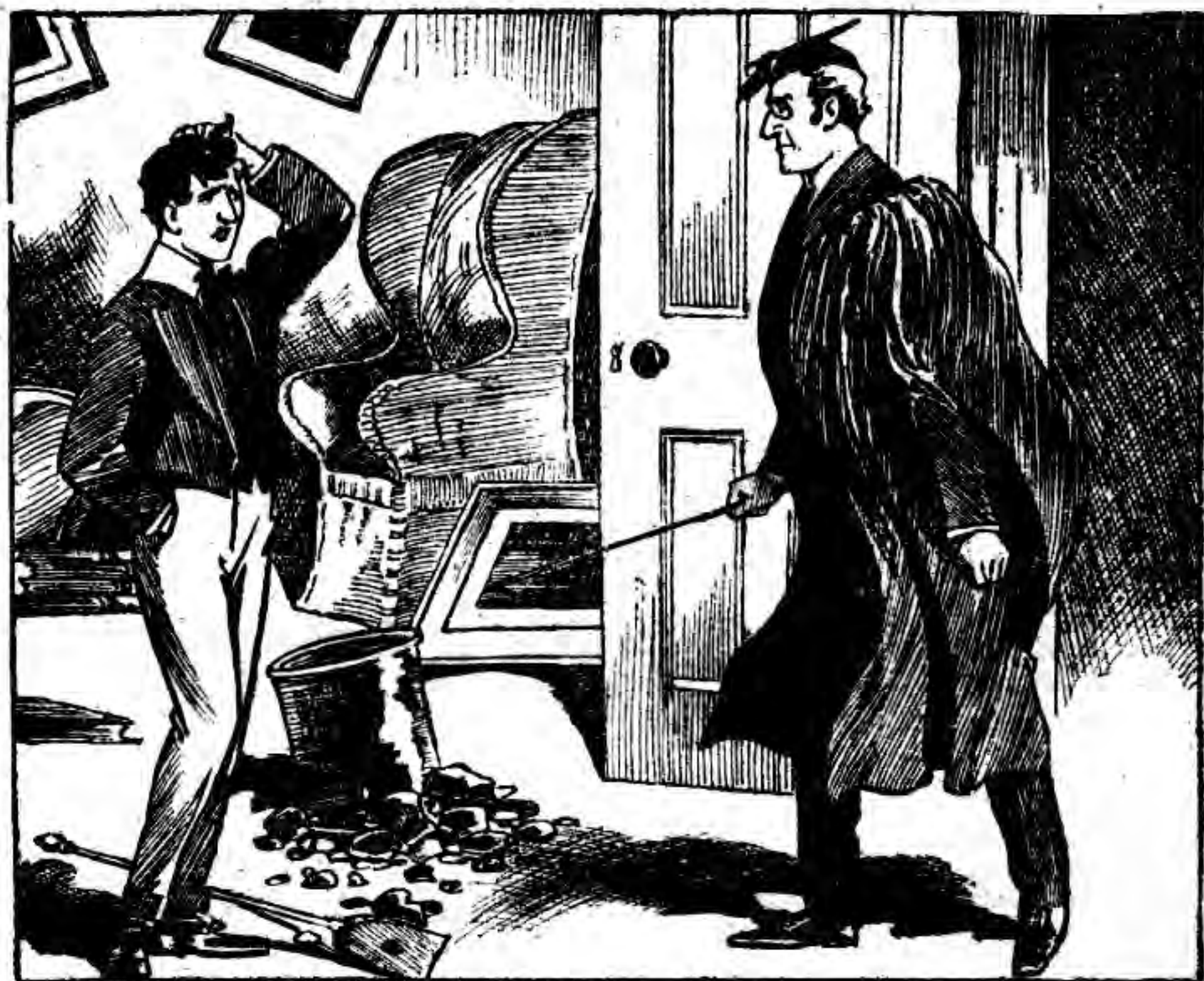
"He's potty enough!" granted Johnny Bull.

"The pottiffulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "It would be a boonful blessing to the esteemed Hoskins to find his respectable and idiotic march for him."

Harry Wharton nodded assent.

"I was thinking about that," he said. "Suppose we join up and help look for it?"

"We helped yesterday," said Nugent.



Rounding up the absentee! (See Chapter 4.)

"It's been hidden away pretty safely, I should think."

"I mean, let us investigate the case," said Harry, with a smile. "We're rather clever chaps——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Passed nem. con!"

"Well, then, let's set our wits to work. Hoskins will go into a decline if he doesn't find his rubbish; he looks like it."

"He's talking about going into the police-station," grinned Bob. "The Head will be waxy if he does."

"Hobson won't let him go," remarked Wharton. "Hobby's doing his best to prevent him playing the goat. I'll tell you what. We'll take up the case, same as a detective if Hosky called one in, and find the missing bosh."

"Good! The Case of the Purloined Tripe!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Quite worthy of Sherlock Holmes—or Herlock Sholmes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five chuckled at the idea; but Wharton's suggestion was adopted all the more readily because rain had come on, and footer practice was off. The chums of the Remove really wanted to help the unfortunate musician, if they could, and playing detective was an amusement for a rainy day. If they found the missing music, Hoskins would be in the seventh heaven; though, as Johnny Bull remarked, his delight was not likely to be shared by his study-mate. Hobson was very sympathetic towards his chum, but he could hardly fail to feel the relief natural to a fellow who was doomed to listen to the march in F twice a day if it hadn't been bagged.

The five juniors discussed the matter over an early tea, and then repaired to Hoskins' study in the Shell passage. They found James Hobson finishing a solitary tea there.

"Where's Hoskins?" asked Bob.

"Wandering around like a dashed spook!" said Hobson hopelessly. "He won't come in to tea. Looks like a chap going to be hanged!"

"It's hard cheese, to lose his piffle like that."

"Ye-es."

"Well, we're going to find it for him," said Harry.

Hobson jumped.

"You don't know where it is?" he exclaimed.

"Nunno!"

"Then what are you talking out of your hat for?" demanded Hobson gruffly. "If you don't know where it is, you can't find it."

"We're going to investigate."

"Oh, rot!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Hosky!"

Hoskins drifted into the study like an unquiet spirit. He gave the chums of the Remove a lack-lustre glance.

"Heard anything of the march yet?" inquired Nugent.

"No. I sha'n't hear anything more of it till it's in print and the thief has bagged my fame," said Hoskins dispiritedly. "I'm pretty certain it's no longer in the school. When it comes out, I shall make a fight for it, though. I shall call witnesses to prove that it's mine. It will come before a judge and jury."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Well, then you'll be all right!" observed Johnny Bull, with a deep sarcasm that was wasted on Hoskins.

The Shell fellow shook his head.

"What do judges and juries know about music?" he said. "Why, I'll bet you that half the judges in the country don't know the difference between the minor ninth and a perfect fifth."

"More than half, I should say," grinned Bob Cherry. "Is there any difference?"

"Idiot!"

That was the only reply that Hoskins felt to be adequate; but Bob Cherry only chuckled. Allowances had to be made for a fellow who was so unfortunate as to possess the artistic temperament.

"Well, were going to pile in and find it for you, if we can," said Harry Wharton.

"I'm afraid it's too late," said Hoskins dejectedly. "I've asked Skinner, and he won't own up to touching it. I

pitched him down the Remove staircase, too; but he remained just as obstinate."

"Perhaps that wasn't the best way to make him reasonable."

"I've been kicking Bunter, too," said Hoskins, unheeding. "But the more I kicked him the more he wouldn't own up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've been thinking about Hacker," resumed Hoskins, knitting his brows.

"Looks a bit suspicious—"

"Hacker!" repeated Wharton. "Mr. Hacker?"

"Yes; my Form-master. I don't like to suggest it; but I can't help seeing that it looks suspicious. Hacker goes in a bit for music, you know; and he certainly seemed to want to brush the whole matter aside—pretending that he thought it wasn't of any importance—"

"Oh, dear!" moaned Hobson.

Harry Wharton & Co. simply blinked at Claude Hoskins.

"You—you think Mr. Hacker may have bagged your march?" murmured Wharton dazedly.

"I say it looks suspicious. If he doesn't know anything about it, why does he pretend it's a trifling matter not worth attending to?"

That argument was a clincher to Hoskins. The other fellows understood well enough why Mr. Hacker regarded the matter as being of no importance.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "It's about time that merry march was found, or poor old Hoskins will have to be taken away to a lunatic asylum. He'll be suspecting the Head next!"

"I'd thought of that," said Hoskins.

"You—you—you'd thought of that?" stuttered Wharton.

"Or course, when the Head refused to let me go to the police. I thought that was suspicious. But I don't see how the Head could have dodged into the study and bagged the music without being seen," said Hoskins, after consideration.

The idea of the Head dodging into Hoskins' study and bagging his music was so extraordinary that the juniors simply gasped. Bob Cherry tapped his forehead significantly. Hobson stared at his study-mate as if mesmerised.

"You see, you fellows don't know the value of the thing—and I do," said Hoskins. "If you understood my arrangement of minor ninths—"

"Help!"

"Look here—" said Hoskins.

"Shush! We're going to take the case in hand," said Wharton pacifically. "If the dashed thing's in Greyfriars at all we'll find it!"

"I'm afraid it's gone before this. Still, I'm much obliged," said Hoskins. "Pile in. And good luck to you!"

"Utter rot!" said Hobson gruffly.

The captain of the Shell went to the door.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Wharton. "We want you for a bit, Hobby!"

"Oh, rot!" said Hobson. "I'm going out!"

"Dash it all! Stay here a bit and help the chaps if you can, Hobby!" exclaimed Claude Hoskins warmly.

Hobson hesitated a moment.

"Oh, all right!" he grunted. "It's all rot, though! Some dashed joker has hidden your music, and I dare say he'll let it turn up at the end of the term. Still, go ahead and play the goat if you like! I don't mind."

And the amateur detectives went ahead, though they refused to regard it as playing the goat.

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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Amateur Detectives!

HARRY WHARTON knitted his brows and rubbed his nose as aid to thought, and began the investigation. His chums stood round to help him with advice and suggestions as required. Hoskins was interested, though not hopeful; and James Hobson seemed worried and surly.

"Now, we want some details, in the first place," said Wharton. "That's how Sherlock Holmes begins. The piece of music was in this study?"

"Yes."

"What was it in?"

"Key of F."

"Ahem! I mean, what was it kept in?"

"Oh! In the table drawer," said Hoskins.

Wharton opened the table drawer. There were papers and books, and pens and nibs and pencils there; but the music was not there. The first important point in a detective investigation was established. The article was missing!

"You are sure it was there?" questioned Wharton.

"I put it there myself."

"When?"

"Yesterday, after dinner. Hobby was with me."

Wharton glanced at Hobson, who nodded.

"Well, it's settled that the music was there," said the captain of the Remove. "Hosky put it there, and Hobby saw him do it. What time was that, Hoskins?"

Hoskins reflected.

"A few minutes before two," he answered.

"How long after that did you miss the music?"

"Not long afterwards, because it was just before afternoon classes. I got into a row with Hacker for not coming in to class."

"The study was left empty?"

"Yes, I suppose so—unless Hobby stayed in. You see, that was the time I went for Skinner. He'd been messing up the music, and I put it back in its place, and went to look for him to wallop him. Hobby came to the study with me, and— You left with me, didn't you, Hobby?"

"Don't you remember I came down the passage with you?" grunted Hobson.

"You weren't with me when I found Skinner."

"You were in such a dashed hurry."

"Well, it's settled that the study was left empty, then," said Harry judicially.

"You went to look for Skinner, and Hobson went down the passage with you. You came back in, say, ten minutes—"

"About that."

"So it was during that ten minutes that the music was bagged?"

"That's clear enough."

"That narrows it down," said Wharton, in quite the manner of a detective. "In the interval of ten minutes someone nipped into the study and pinched the music."

"Right on the wicket!" said Bob Cherry.

"You weren't anywhere near the study all that time, Hoskins?"

"No."

"Were you, Hobson?"

"I went down the passage with Hosky as far as the stairs, as I've said!" grunted Hobson.

"Yes, I know that. But did you come near the study again before Hoskins found that the music was missing?"

Hobson hesitated a moment.

"I came back for something," he said.

"Oh! That narrows it down still further," said the captain of the Remove.

"You came back for something at once?"

"Yes—I think it was at once."

"How long did you stay in the study?"

"Less than a minute, I think."

"And then left again?"

"Yes."

"Did you see anybody hanging about the place?"

"Nobody."

"Well, it's narrowed down," said the captain of the Remove. "We'd allowed ten minutes—but if Hobson came back, and stayed in the study a minute, and went again, that cuts it down further. The study couldn't have been left unoccupied for more than seven minutes."

"Blessed if I see what all this is leading to!" said Hobson impatiently. "Stewart's waiting for me, too!"

"Never mind Stewart just now. It's the march in F we're thinking about."

"Yes. I'm surprised at you, Hobson!" said Claude Hoskins severely.

Hobson grunted.

"I'll tell you what it's leading to," resumed Wharton. "From a few minutes before two to a few minutes after the study was visited by the person who bagged the music. If we find who dodged into the study about two o'clock we find the bagger."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry admiringly. "That's working it out just like a detective johnny!"

"The next step," said Wharton, with dignity, "is to inquire of any Shell fellows who happened to be in their studies whether they saw anybody in the passage about two o'clock yesterday. If a stranger dropped in, most likely somebody saw him, and—and there you are!"

"Well, you can wander up and down the passage asking questions without my help, I suppose?" asked Hobson.

"Certainly! You are finished with."

"Then I'll out."

James Hobson cut, Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh looking after him with a curiously keen expression in his dusky eyes. The Nabob of Bhanipur had been watching Hobson very closely during that questioning.

"Come on!" said Wharton.

Hoskins had sat down and taken up a pen and music-paper. But the amateur detectives did not need his assistance, and they left him making an attempt to reproduce the missing march.

As most of the Shell fellows had come in to tea at that time, and as it was raining, the Co. found it easy to question the Shell. Their inquiries were greeted humorously in most cases, but replies were cheerfully made. It turned out that very few of the Shell had been in their studies at two o'clock the previous afternoon, as was natural—in fact, Carr and Chowne were the only two.

The Famous Five had made the round of the Shell, when they came to Carr and Chowne, having elicited nothing so far. But Carr and Chowne admitted having been indoors right up to the time the bell rang for classes, and the hopes of the amateur detectives rose.

"Let's see, this is the next study to Hobson's," said Wharton. "If you were here, I dare say you heard Hoskins and Hobson come in."

"You bet!" answered Chowne. "We heard them! Can't mistake Hobby's hoofs!"

"Good! You heard them go again?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Did you happen to look out of the study, either of you?"

"Sorry, no," said Carr, with a grin, and Chowne shook his head.

"It seems that Hobson came back after they left. Did you hear him?"

"We heard somebody moving in the

study," said Carr. "I suppose that was Hobson."

"And after that you heard nothing?"

"Not till Hoskins came in and started howling out that his precious march had been stolen."

"You didn't hear somebody creeping on tiptoe, Prinstance?"

"No," grinned Carr.

"You didn't hear the table-drawer open?"

"Couldn't hear it through the wall if it did."

"Then you don't know anything about it?" said Wharton, in disgust.

"Nothing at all, old sport," said Carr affably. "Sorry! You see, we didn't know that Sherlock Holmes minor was going to tackle the case, or we'd have looked around for finger-prints, blood-stains, and things. In fact, if I'd known, I'd have made some finger-prints to give you a clue. Sorry!"

"Oh, rats!"

And the amateur detectives departed, leaving Carr and Chowne of the Shell chortling.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

On the Track!

CLAUDE Hoskins looked up as the amateur detectives came back to the study. He had a rather far-away expression on his face, and his curl was rumpled.

"Silly asses!" he said, in tones of utter disdain.

"Eh?"

"Chumps!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Wharton warmly. "We haven't found the tosh, but we're doing our best, and you may as well be civil!"

"Eh?" Hoskins seemed to wake up. "Who's not civil? What are you talking about, Wharton?"

"Do you call 'Silly asses' and 'Chumps' civil, then?" asked Harry.

"I wasn't speaking to you, old man. I was thinking of the people who say that you can't put in consecutive fifths," said Hoskins. "Look here. I've just written a few bars, and it's full of consecutive fifths, and the effect is simply stunning. Come along to the music-room and I'll play it over to you, and you'll see."

"Ahem!"

"Simply stunning!" said Hoskins. "Chumps! Fatheads! Ignoramuses! Yah!"

Hoskins wasn't addressing the Famous Five. He was addressing the unknown persons who prohibited the use of consecutive fifths, apparently. For the moment even his missing march was gone from his mind.

"Dummies!" said Hoskins. "Wait till I get at the public with my music! I'll show 'em something in harmony! Consecutive fifths! Why, I'll jam consecutive fifths at them, and consecutive octaves, too! You'll see!"

"Mad as a hatter!" murmured Bob Cherry sympathetically. Hoskins' remarks were Greek to Bob.

"Fancy!" said Hoskins. "They even say that you can't proceed by similar motion to a—"

"Give us a rest, old chap!" said Wharton, ruthlessly interrupting, and preventing his chums ever learning what it was they couldn't proceed to by similar motion. "Ease off, Hosky! Now, about the march in F—"

"Any clue?" exclaimed Hoskins eagerly, switched off at once from consecutive fifths and octaves by the mention of his missing masterpiece.

"Well, no. It seems clear, from what we've found out, that nobody was seen dodging into the study at that time yesterday," admitted Wharton.

"Only the esteemed Hobson," remarked Hurree Jameet Ram Singh.

"Yes, Hobson came back after he left you, and after that nobody's known to have stepped into the room at all. Carr and Chowne were in the next study all the time, and it's queer they didn't hear anybody; but they didn't. Still, somebody must have come in."

"A skilful cracksman, perhaps," said Hoskins thoughtfully.

"A—a what?"

"You see, if some rival composer had heard of my march, and wanted to bag it—"

"If!" murmured Nugent.

"What did you say, Nugent?"

"N-n-nothing, old scout! Run on!"

"If he wanted to bag it, as I believe," continued Hoskins, with a suspicious look at Frank Nugent, "naturally, he would employ some person to commit the theft who could do it successfully. Some skilful cracksman, very likely—some Bill Sikes, you know."

"Oh dear!"

"That's what makes it so hard to think of tracking him down, and getting back

"Let's try Skinner! It's just one of Skinner's rotten tricks, when you come to think of it!"

The chums of the Remove left Hoskins at his valuable work of piling up consecutive fifths and octaves in defiance of the opinion of less advanced composers. They proceeded to the Remove passage, where they found Skinner, Stott, and Snoop in No. 11. The three young rascals were playing banker after tea, and they stared at their unexpected visitors.

"We're after Hoskins' tosh," explained Harry Wharton.

"Do you think we've got it?" growled Snoop. "Might have taken it if we were allowed fires in the study yet; but we ain't."

"What about you, Skinner?"

"Not guilty, my lord!" said Harold Skinner. "I haven't seen the rubbish since I improved it for Hoskins. He wasn't grateful, as you know, and I haven't tried to help him in composition since."

"Somebody's taken it and hidden it," said Bob, looking suspiciously at Skinner.

"Dear me! I understand from Hoskins that it's been bagged by a rival composer, who's out for honour and glory!" remarked Skinner, and his study-mates chortled. "Better call in a man from Scotland Yard! I can suggest a clue."

"You can?" asked Wharton.

"Yes, rather! Tell your detective to go round listening for a row like an air-raid and a thunderstorm mixed. Then he'll know he's near a chap playing Hoskins' march in F. If his ear-drums will stand it, he'll bag his man."

"Look here, Skinner. Do you know where the blessed bosh is?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Haven't the least idea!"

"Suppose we bump him?" suggested Johnny Ball, after considering the matter.

"Suppose you go and eat coke!" suggested Skinner.

"Oh, come on!" said Wharton.

"We'll try Bunter."

William George Bunter was found in No. 7, warmly explaining to Peter Todd that he really must have some more tea if Peter did not want to see him waste away to a shadow. Peter Todd did not seem to be alarmed, however.

Bunter blinked at the Famous Five through his big spectacles as they presented themselves.

"I say, you fellows, had tea?" he asked. "If you haven't, I don't mind coming. I've been disappointed about a postal-order, you know."

"Never mind your postal-order now," said Wharton. "We've called about Hoskins' march in F."

"Bother his march, and him, too! What do you think the cheeky villain did yesterday?" spluttered Bunter. "Got me into the music-room, and played that noisy piffle to me, and then refused to lend me half-a-crown."

"Oh!" said Harry, eyeing Bunter keenly. "And then you went to his study and took the march away, did you?"

This was really a detective masterpiece, to surprise the guilty party into admitting his guilt.

But it did not have that effect on the Owl of the Remove. He shook his head.

"Never thought of it," he answered. "Might have if I'd thought of it, but I didn't. Jolly glad he's lost it, though. Serve him right. I offered to look for it if he'd put up a reward, and he actually pitched into me—when I was being friendly and helpful, you know. I know what I shall jolly well do with the bosh!"

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the lost music," said Hoskins distressfully.

Bob Cherry tapped his forehead, as he had tapped it before. Hoskins' idea that a professional cracksman had been employed to lift his march was really too much for Bob, and he began to fear that the unfortunate musician's brain was unhinged.

"Well," said Wharton, trying not to laugh, "I don't think there was a cracksman on the job. We'll try Skinner next. He may have pinched the music and hidden it because you walloped him. You did rather lay it on, you know."

"Not so much as he deserved. A fellow who would mess up a chap's music, putting in sharps and flats—"

"Ought to be boiled in oil!" said Bob gravely. "In fact, boiling in oil would be too easy! Hanging would be too good! He ought to be shut up in the House of Commons and made to listen to the speeches for hours on end till he perished in anguish!"

"Well, come on!" said Wharton.

if I come across it. I'll jolly well stick it in a fire!"

Peter Todd grinned.

"I think Bunter's not guilty, you chaps," he said.

"I—I suppose so," admitted Wharton. Billy Bunter jumped.

"Why, you rotters," he exclaimed indignantly, "so you've been pumping me, have you? I call that low-down, Wharton!"

"What?"

"Low-down!" repeated Bunter firmly. "Just like a real detective. I really thought you were a gentleman, Wharton!"

"Why, you cheeky Owl!" roared the captain of the Remove, in great wrath.

Bunter backed round the table.

"I'm sorry I was mistaken in you!" he said. "I suppose you'll be a detective when you grow up, Wharton. I must say I despise you!"

"Why, you—you—" stuttered Wharton.

The expression on the face of the captain of the Remove was so extraordinary that his chums chuckled, and Peter Todd yelled. Harry glared at Billy Bunter as if he could eat him.

"You were trying to dodge me into an admission," said Bunter, pursuing his advantage. "That was low-down, Wharton. Just what real detectives do. That doesn't make it right to do it. Low-down, I call it!"

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath. Billy Bunter was very near at that moment to being bumped hard on the floor of his own study, but the captain of the Remove controlled his wrath.

"The least you can do after that," added Bunter loftily, "is to lend me a half-crown till my postal-order comes."

"I've a jolly good mind to lend you a thick ear!" growled Wharton. "Come on, you chaps! I don't think that fat slug is the guilty party."

The Famous Five left Study No. 7, Billy Bunter grinning after them victoriously. Harry Wharton had rather a thoughtful look in the passage.

"Blessed if I quite like this detective bizney!" he said. "Bother Hoskins and his bothersome march! After all, it's a mercy to his study-mates at least if it disappears for good."

"Ha, ha! No doubt about that."

"But we've told Hoskins we'll do our best," said Harry ruefully. "If we're going on with it we want a clue. Where are we going to dig one up?"

"My esteemed chums—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Inky's got something in his esteemed and fat-headed noddle!" said Bob.

The Nabob of Bhanipur smiled a dusky smile.

"I have been thoughtfully reflecting," he observed.

"Any result?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The resultfulness is terrible, my esteemed and growling Bull!" said the nabob mildly. "I fancy that I have hitfully dropped upon the esteemed cluefulness."

"Oh!" said Harry. "Go ahead!"

"The excellent Hobson may be able to help us," said Hurree Singh. "Perhaps you will call him to our study."

"But we've got out of Hobson all he knows about it, and it's not much," said Harry Wharton, perplexed.

"I thoughtfully opine that I may be able to extract a little more from the worthy Hobson by the astute and leading questionfulness."

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at, Inky!" said Wharton, quite puzzled. "But I'll fetch Hobson up if you like."

"The thankfulness is great."

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Harry Wharton went to look for James Hobson of the Shell, and Hurree Singh and the rest awaited his return in Study No. 1, three of them considerably puzzled.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Own Up!

"HOBBY, old man!"

Hobson was in his study when Harry Wharton found him, listening to Claude Hoskins, who had grown eloquent again on the subject of his missing march. It was clear that that was going to be an inexhaustible topic with Claude Hoskins.

If the captain of the Shell had hoped to hear more of that great work when it disappeared from human ken, he was disappointed. He seemed likely to hear more of it than ever; and he really liked Hoskins too well to cut him short on the painful subject.

He was enduring his martyrdom with as good a grace as was possible when Wharton looked in. Hobson greeted him as if he were a long-lost brother. His arrival interrupted the flow of the exasperated musician's eloquence.

"Will you step up to my study for a few minutes, Hobby?" asked Wharton.

Hobson jumped up.

"Certainly, old fellow!" he said, with alacrity.

Probably at that moment James Hobson would have stepped into Potsdam to see the Kaiser in order to get away from his chum's lamentations.

He hurried out with Wharton in great relief, which he did not display, however, till he was in the passage. Hobson was a real chum, and he bore with his pal nobly.

"Anything on?" he asked, as they came up the little staircase into the Remove passage.

"Inky wants to speak to you," said Harry. "He thinks you may be able to tell us something more about that dashed march."

"I'm getting fed up with it!" groaned Hobson. "I wouldn't say so to Claude, of course, but there are limits, ain't there? I don't see why Inky wants to ask me about it for again."

"Same here; but he does. You've told us all you know about it, I suppose?" said Harry.

Hobson flushed a little, and did not answer the question, a circumstance that Wharton recalled afterwards.

They entered Study No. 1, where the nabob was waiting with Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Johnny Bull.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled a little as James Hobson came in, and his dark eyes rested very keenly on the Shell fellow.

"Well, you wanted to jaw to me, Wharton says," said Hobson. "Go ahead, Inky, and if it's about the march in F, cut it short, for goodness' sake! I hear enough about that in my own study—too much, in fact."

"The understandfulness is terrific!" purred the nabob. "The esteemed Hobson is aware that we have undertaken to discover the missing bosh."

"Found it yet?" asked Hobson carelessly.

"Not yetfully."

"Good! I—I mean, sorry, of course," said Hobson hastily. "I'd chuck it if I were you. You're not really likely to find it."

"The likefulness is terrific, my esteemed and ridiculous friend!"

Hobson started.

"You think you'll bag it?" he exclaimed.

"The answer is in the affirmative, as

the esteemed and jawful duffers say in the House of Commons."

"Well, I don't agree with you," said Hobson. "I don't think you'll find it. I'd like to know where you think of looking. Got any clue?"

"Again the esteemed answer is in the affirmative."

"And what's the clue?" demanded Hobson, rather uneasily, as it seemed to the Removites. "Got any idea who the chap was who took it?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" said Hobson.

"Blessed if I catch on!" said Bob Cherry. "I don't see how Inky can have any more knowledge of it than we have, and I haven't any."

The nabob smiled.

"I have been doing the terrific thinkfulness," he remarked. "I will explicate explainfully. The esteemed and worthless music was bagfully collared about two o'clock yesterday afternoon."

"We've gone into that."

"Quitefully so. The excellent Hoskins placed it in the table drawer, and left the study with Hobson. Hobson returned to the study for something a few minutes laterfully."

"What about that?" asked Hobson gruffly.

"Will the esteemed Hobson tell us what was the something he returned to the study for after the excellent and potty Hoskins was gone?"

There was a long pause.

"What does that matter?" asked Hobson at last, his face growing red. "That's nothing to do with the bizney, has it?"

"I think it has, my esteemed Hobby!"

"Well, I don't see it!" grunted the captain of the Shell, his face growing still redder.

The eyes of the juniors were all fixed upon Hobson's flushed face now, and they were looking rather suspicious. It was dawning upon them now what the quick-witted nabob was driving at.

"The excellent Carr and Chowne were in the next study," resumed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, his eyes still on Hobson's face. "They heard the worthy Hobson return to the study, and leave it again. They did not hear anyone else come. Is not that peculiar?"

"P'raps the chap tiptoed," said Hobson desperately.

"Perhapsfully," agreed the nabob; "and perhapsfully there was no chap at all."

"Oh!" murmured Wharton.

"Look here, what are you driving at, you blessed black image?" exclaimed Hobson restively.

"I have thoughtfully reflected that the esteemed and unmerciful Hoskins was going to play the march to you twice every day, my worthy Hobson. I have considered the fact that you hurried back into the study after the esteemed Hoskins had left, though he was expecting you to go with him and look for the jokeful Skinner. You were heard to do so—and nobody else was heard. And you have neglected to explain what was the something for which you returned to the study. Moreover, it is not forgotten that when Hoskins desires to play you his terrific compositions you have been known to withdraw hidefully under a study table, like the modest flower that is born to blush unseen, as Poet Gray observes—"

"Look here—"

"In shortfulness," said Hurree Singh, with a grin, "it was the esteemed Hobson who bagfully took the march in F from the table drawer and hid it so that the enthusiastic and relentless Hoskins could not play it to him any more!"

"My bat!" murmured Bob Cherry. James Hobson's face was a study.

He was so red that it seemed impossible for him to get any redder. His colour rivalled that of a newly-boiled beet.

He blinked at Harree Jameet Ram Singh, and he blinked at the other Removites.

There was accusation in every face now.

It was pretty clear that the keen-witted nabob had hit on the truth; and the Co. wondered that they had not guessed it before. They had never thought of suspecting Hobson, or certainly they would have seen that suspicion pointed in his direction.

There was an awful pause.

Hobson found his voice at last.

And what he said, in gasping tones, was:

"Don't tell Hoskins!"

"You admit it, you awful spoofing bounder?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Hobson mumbled.

"Well, I'm not going to tell any dashed lies about it, you know. It's a clean bowl-out. I—I— What was a fellow to do?" exclaimed Hobson defensively. "Of course, Claude is a first-rate chap, and I like him no end—admire him, too. But to have that dashed march played to me over and over—it was bad enough once or twice, but—well, it was more than flesh and blood could stand! I wouldn't hurt Hosky's feelings for the world. I'd rather hear the dashed thing played every day than do that. But it seemed such a jolly simple way out, you know."

"The Only Way!" murmured Nugent, and there was a chuckle.

"You see, I thought if it was gone he'd set to work composing something else, and give a chap a rest," said Hobson forlornly. "I never foresaw that he'd take it to heart like this. My conscience has been feeling pretty bad when I've seen him looking like a ghost about it. But—but—"

"The sympathise is terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The terrific sufferfulness of the unhappy Hobson is the full excuse."

"Only it hasn't turned out as I hoped," said Hobson dismally. "I was going to keep it locked up till the end of the term, and then let it be found. No harm in that, was there? But—but I can tell you fellows Hoskins on the subject of his lost march is worse than the march itself. I didn't think it was possible there was anything worse than that, but there is—and it's Hoskins jawing about it!"

"What a life!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Fact is, I'd already thought of letting it be found," confessed Hobson. "Blest if I expected you fellows to bowl me out, though! For goodness' sake, don't breathe a word to Hoskins! He'd never forgive me. He'd think I wasn't a true pal; and I am, you know, only there's a limit to what a chap can stand."

"We understand," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "But now—"

"Oh, now I'll let the dashed thing turn up," said Hobson resignedly. "You'll keep it dark?"

"The silentfulness will be terrific, my esteemed Hobson!"

James Hobson seemed to breathe more freely.

"Thank you!" he said. "I wouldn't hurt Hosky's feelings for anything. Besides, he's an awfully clever chap, you know, and I admire him no end. And it's a fact that I'd rather hear him playing his march than lamenting over it. And—and I've had no end of a job to keep him from going to the police-station about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's funny," said Hobson. "But it ain't very funny for me! Look here, you fellows, keep it dark, and I'll let the

march turn up this evening. That satisfy you?"

"Of course!"

"As a matter of fact," said Johnny Bull, in his slow and thoughtful way, "it would be a good thing all round to bury the blessed thing somewhere."

"I wouldn't damage it for worlds," said Hobson simply. "It's a tremendously clever thing, you know—simply tremendous! Only—only—but—Ahem! Well, it's going to turn up this evening. So-long!"

Hobson departed, leaving the Famous Five grinning. He put his head back into the doorway a moment later.

"Keep it dark, you know!" he said.

"Right you are, old chap!"

Hobson went along the passage. But a minute later there were footsteps outside, and Hobson's face looked in again.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Mind, not a word to Hoskins!" breathed the captain of the Shell.

"Ha, ha! All right!"

And Hobson departed once more; and this time he was gone for good.

About an hour later Claude Hoskins looked into the Remove passage, where the Famous Five were chatting before doing their prep. Hoskins' face was very bright.

He looked, in fact, in very high feather.

"You fellows needn't trouble about looking for that march in F any more," he announced.

"Found it?" asked Wharton innocently.

Hoskins nodded.

"Yes. It was queer, too," he said.

"Hobson asked me to get a book for him from the library, and when I came back, he said quite suddenly that he shouldn't wonder if the joking chap who'd taken my march was to put it back where he found it, you know. And he opened the table drawer, and there it was."

"There it was, was it?" said Bob Cherry, with an expression of great surprise, worthy of the best traditions of the Junior Dramatic Society.

"Yes, there it was," said Hoskins, with great satisfaction. "My march—my march in F, you know. It seems that it was only some practical joker had taken it for a lark, after all, as you fellows supposed. It couldn't have been a cracksman who bagged it for some unscrupulous composer—"

"Nunno, is—it couldn't, could it?" murmured Wharton.

"Unless, of course, the man got scared, and got it back to my study somehow," said Hoskins thoughtfully.

"Oh!"

"Whatever it was, it's back, and I've got it, and I'm jolly well going to keep it under lock and key in future," said Hoskins. "I'm running no more risks with it, I can tell you. I'm much obliged to you fellows, though you weren't able to find it."

"Oh, don't mencht!"

"And I'll tell you what," said Hoskins brightly. "I've bagged the music-room for an hour, and I'm going to play it to Hobson now. If you fellows care to come along and hear it I'll be glad. I'm willing to hear your opinion on my arrangement of minor ninths—"

"Oh! Ah! Ahem!"

"Come along, then! I'll play it through from end to end, and—Hallo! I say, where are you fellows buzzing off to in such a hurry?"

Hoskins stared after the Co. in amazement as they vanished along the Remove passage. He went downstairs looking very much puzzled.

A little later there was a sound as of a succession of determined air-raids going on in the music-room. Hoskins was at it! And Hobson was there, to listen!

Fellows who came near the music-room put their fingers to their ears and fled. But Hobson could not fly, and it is barely possible that just then he wished that the missing masterpiece was still missing.

(DON'T MISS "A CASE OF CONSCIENCE!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by Frank Richards.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday :

"A CASE OF CONSCIENCE!"

By Frank Richards.

Hilary, the new boy, of whose coming to Greyfriars next week's story tells, could not not fairly be called a Conscientious Objector—either of the sort who really have consciences, or of the more numerous sort whose real complaint is cold feet. But he is the son of a Conscientious Objector, and loyalty to his father makes him try to face the rough-and-tumble of a public school on lines of something like passive resistance.

I like Hilary, though I don't like Conscientious Objectors. I think you will like him, too. Anyway, you will be interested to see how he comes through his difficult ordeal.

CRITICISM!

Criticism and abuse are not quite the same things, you know. And everyone is not a competent critic. I have told you before that the fact of your not liking anything does not prove that what you dislike is worthless. It may only show that your taste is bad.

I am moved to make these remarks by the letter of a reader who has not given his name and address, but who begs quite pathetically for a reply. He signs himself "Justice." He objects very strongly—and rather rudely—to a little story which appeared in No. 553 of this paper. It was called "A Railway Tragedy," and it was an absurd little story—it was meant to be. The humour of it was in the absurdity, just as the humour of a farce or a pantomime is. I didn't regard it as exactly a work of genius; but it amused me, and I knew that it would amuse many of my readers.

It did not amuse "Justice," who has not much sense of humour, I fear. He says that I must have put the story in by a mistake, and also that putting it in shows favouritism on my part. Trying to have things both ways does not show much sense of justice, does it? Or any logic? One or the other theory must be wrong. "Justice" condemns—that is the way he spells it—such trash. He considers it "ridiculously absurd, idiot, talentless, and stupid." He thinks that it emanated from a "prize idiot at Colney Hatch." He knows that there are many readers who could write stories fifty times as good; and I fancy he thinks he is one of them.

He is mistaken.

I don't want to be rough on "Justice," and I should not have given him a public answer at all but that he asked for it so particularly; but he has no qualification as a critic, and obviously no sense of humour.

I should not be surprised if others failed to like the story in question. I have had a good many letters from readers who don't like the Herlock Sholmes stories, and who say that they could write better detective stories themselves. Well, I don't believe in their ability to write anything of the sort. If they had any talent of the detective-kind they might have made the deduction that the Herlock Sholmes yarns are not detective stories at all! Surprising—eh? They are nonsense stories—meant to be absurd—owing any merit they may have to their consistent absurdity. Personally, I regard them as very clever, and I know that many of my readers agree with me.

You don't like nonsense? My dear fellow, I cannot help that! So much the worse for you. Other people do, you know; and they have as good a right to their taste as you have to yours. See?

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 558.

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

FURTHER EXTRACTS FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM THE GORGEOUS BUNTER.

With Unkind Notes by PETER TODD.

[EDITORIAL NOTE.—Did Bunter really write this stuff himself? The spelling is like Bunter, and the thoughts are the thoughts of Bunter; but—Toddy won't let me see the original MS. Says it's too precious for profane eyes to gaze upon, and I might wear it out, which would be rough on the British Museum. I have asked Bunter about it; but he neither affirms nor denies. If he did either I should feel sure that the opposite was the truth, of course—H. W.]

I AM now going to relait sum moor abowt my famerly. The De Bunters are a verry old famerly indeed.

(Pity they are not old enough to be extinct!—P. T.)

Wyë wee do not wright our naim with a De now is a sekret. If I toled you you wood knoe, and then it wood no longer be a sekret. It has sumthing to do with demokrazy, or soshierism, or sum disese like that, witch seazed upon one of my auntsisters when not in his rite mined.

(Should it not be in her right mind? Not that it is likely any Bunter ever was that, or had a mind to be right in. But perhaps Bunty meant "ancestors," not "aunt's sisters."—P. T.)

But never mined that. Sir Walter Rally was in our famerly, and til a verry rescent dait we had the cloke witch Queen Elizerbeth wiped her boots on in yuse as a tabel-kover.

(I could never understand why snuffy King Jimmy had poor old Wally's head chopped off; but if there is any truth in his yarn I don't blame him. It's the proper way to treat a Bunter—all the time!—P. T.)

My kusin Walter was naimed after Rally. Butt Walter reelly belongs to an inferyor branch of the famerly, beeing a meer loe clurk in an offis, to witch no trew Bunter ever desended.

In the time of the French Refformashun, when they killed awl the aristokrats off, their was a simply fritefull slawter of De Bunters. They mobed our house in Parris—at that time the De Bunters had houses awl over the plais—and put the inhabertants to fier and sord withoutt distinchun of age, secks, sighs, or anything worth menshuning. It was indeed a masaker. Butt out of it awl came good.

(I should think so! What but good could come out of a massacre of Bunters? I have often felt like starting one myself. By the way, I fancy Bunty means the French Revolution.—P. T.)

Fore there was an auntsister of mine with grate skil and dareing. He bekame the Yelloe Primroes, and did no end of nobel dedes, reskewing peeple who the Revolushnary tribbunels wear goeing to have killed. Sum day I shal rite a histry of his galant life. Til then I wil refrane.

(Tom Dutton is partly to blame for this. He was ever so gone on a book called "The Scarlet Pimpernel," a yarn of the French Revolution, and I suppose Bunter got hold of it while it was lying about the study. I remember hearing Tom complain of finding smears of jam and grease on the pages. But I don't think Bunty will ever write the life of the "Yelloe Primroes," for the book has gone now, and he won't have anything to crib from.—P. T.)

I may say, in pasing, however, that Primroes Day is so kalled after him. Wen I am maid Prime Minister I shal have it chainged to De Bunter Day.

Enuff of my famerly! Lett me procede to relait abowt myself.

It is not genererly knon that I have plaid kownty kriket. At Greyfriars biter jelloso kepes me out of even the Remove Eleven,

witch I konsider verry smawl bere, I kan tel you. What wood they say if they knoo that the De Bunter they afekt to despighs once maid his centerry in a kownty match?

(That's an easy one. Same as we always say to Bunty's yarns, of course!—P. T.)

It hapend like this. I was on holerday down at Hastings wen Kent wear plaing Yawksheer their. The evening befoar the mach I took a strole to the grownd, and was beged to join in the practise. Their my form came under the speshul notiss of the kaptain of one of the teems, who for the purposes of this narrertive may be kalled Duke Falcon, though that is not his reel naim.

(Do you wonder that Lord Hawke was surprised at Bunter's form? He has a form calculated to knock anyone off his legs with surprise. By the way, Lord Hawke—Duke Falcon, I mean—has not captained Yorkshire for some years now, so all this must have happened—when it happened—at a quite early stage in Bunter's variegated career.—P. T.)

The duke spoke to me in a most afflerble way, reckernising me at once as beeing of a nobel famerly, like himself, no dowt.

"Bunter, my dear chap," he said, "I wish you were Yawksheer!"

I replide that, as a mater of fact, I had the plesure of beeing borne their. I do not knoe wether this was true; but my rekolections of beeing borne do not exestend to the exakt plaiçe, and I did not want to discowrage the duke.

You shoold have sene his face gleem! He puled his long black beerd and mewed.

"Bunter," he said, "I kannot leeve Roads out for you."

"Duke," I replide, giveing him a digg in the ribbs, "I shoold not ask it, thow that mite be one of the rodes to sucksess open to you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" said the duke. "You are a wright wity chap, Bunter, by my hallidum!"

A hallidum is a kind of septer witch dukes were in ful dress, I beleeve. It was in our famerly, annyway.

"Their is Tom Hayward, however," per-sewsed the duke. "Tom used to be kwite a youseful man; but he does not tuch your form now."

(What should he want to for? Better scratch a pig's back, if he cares for anything in that line, I should say.—P. T.)

"I wil not have Tom Hayward left owt for me," I said. "I respekt him two mutch. I have given him menny a rinkle abowt bating."

"Ah, that akownts for it!" the duke ansered. "Well, we wil not leeve owt old Tom, as he is a frend of yours."

(And yet Tom Hayward has consistently been left out of the Yorkshire team! I said the Duke Falcon was Lord Hawke; but he may have been W. G. The long black beard sounds like the Old Man, anyway. But he didn't captain Yorkshire! What's a little thing like that matter to Bunter? Did you ever hear of Kent and Yorkshire playing each other at Hastings, for that matter? It's all one to Bunter.—P. T.)

George Hirst was neckst sugested; but he maiks toffee, I beleve, witch nacherally end-deers him to my hart. Their was sum further talk; but after awl it was left inkonklusive. I beleve the duke was afrade that Surrey might rase objectshuns.

(It's Surrey now, instead of Kent. I know one thing. Surrey would have objected strongly to having Tom Hayward play against them, whatever they might have said about Bunter.—P. T.)

In the morning loe and beholed! no fewre than three members of the Yawksheer team wear konfined to there beds throw a surfeit of tined lobster. I wil not menshun there

naims, as they mite icle hurt abowl suled publisherty.

(At a guess, they would probably be James Seymour, John Sharp, and George Thompson. Don't play for Yorkshire, any of them? My dear, good asses, what's that matter to Bunty?—P. T.)

There was a reserv man, and that maid nine. Then the duke maid a starteling proposhision to the Summerset kaptain. He said:

"Let me have my deer old pal De Bunter in my teem, and we wil agre to play a man short."

(Besides a bladder of lard over!—P. T.)

(Two men short, and one short porpoise over!—P. T.)

(But, of course, it's all fiction, like Bunty's statements in ordinary conversation.—P. T.)

(Several of Toddy's notes are cut out about here. He gets too wordy. Besides, we want to hear about the match when Yorkshire and Bunter played Kent and Surrey and Somerset. Peter can't tell us about that.—H. W.)

(I could if my principles would allow me to lie like George Washington Bunter!—P. T.)

The Lestersheer kaptain, beeing un-ackwainted with my form, redily agreed, and the mach began. At furst we kiked with the wind—no, that is part of another storey—abowt how I played for England against Scotland. Never mined that now. The duke won the toss, and sent me in first with Denton. I said to him as we went to the wikets:

"Keep yore stumps up, David, my lad, and leeve the run-geting to me!"

To witch he replide verry respektfully:

"Rito, Sir William!"

I may say that I have always fownd Denton a verry respektful man.

I took the furst over from Jon Gun, and drove seven bawls owt of the feeld, thus making forty-to off it.

(Bunter had help here. He could not make six times seven forty-two all out of his own head. You will observe that Notts has somehow come into the story now.—P. T.)

Then Denton verry cawshusly plaied a madden from Hitch, thow the alocs seemd to tempt him at times. But he heded my warning shakes of the hed, and stuk it owt akording to instruktshuns.

Jon Gun went off the feeld after that over, and it is sed that he never smiled again. But this storey is alsoe relaited abowt another histroycal personaig—I forgit his naim.

So the neckst boler was Bakenham, who sent down sum wiley lobbs. But alas for Bakenham! I carted evry bawl over the bowndary, and this time the over gave me forty-seven, which maid my total skowr to dalt ninety-nine. The duke kaim owt into the feeld at this junksure and enkwire wether I objekted to haveing the inings deklared klosed. I replide:

"Do so if you will, Falcon, butt if you do never moar be familier with me! What is a centerry moar or less to a kriketer of my debility? Nothing, if not less! But I regarded you as a pal, and—"

At that the duke berst into teers, witch droped down his long blak beard and maid him look no end fury. He said in a loe, hart-stricken voice:

"Go on, De Bunter, go on—and if for ever, stil go on! Say not that I stood between you and your ambishun!"

So I went on, butt not for ever. After ading abowt fourty to my skore in the neckst over, raseing it to one hundred and fifty-four, or theirabowts, I kleyerly put my legg in front of a strate wun from Jessop, and relierd stumped, with one hundred and fifty-seven to my kredit.

Over the subsekwent proceedings I wil draw a vale, lest the felings of the Hampshire team

be hurt. We deklared at 200 for wun wicket—mine; and I got owt on purpus, you know—and then I was put on to hole.

The duke was herd to say afterwords that if De Bunter had onley bene sufered to hole at both ends Warricksheer wood have been owt without a run! They cood not look at my holeing, witch was grate. Butt they made seventene off the inferyor trundeling of Roads and others. They folowed on in despare, and wear dismissed for ninetene. This time a run was maid off me, due to the acksident of Tildesley's tutching a bawl reely mutch two good for him, and the duke growsly misfeelding, for witch I kawled him to sharp akownt, I can tell you. In awl I took twenty wickets for that wun run.

(Who took the rest? There would seem to have been a lot more to account for. Kent, Surrey, Somerset, Leicestershire, Hampshire,

and Warwickshire all there, with John Gunn, Buckenham, and Jessop thrown in, you know. But no one else could have taken any wickets—Bunter would not have allowed it.—P. T.)

I have never giffen an akownt of this grate mach to annywun befoar, but if you look up the daley papers of a curtain dait you wil no dowt find it—unles they left it owt throw jellosoy. Awl my life I have had to contend with the most unakowntable jellosoy.

With referens to Wharton, who I have men-shuned befoar, alwais with the skorn he merrits, I hoap. Wy shoold Wharton be kap-tain of the Remove? Ekko ansers wy!

(No, I won't—so there! That old joke about Echo has long grey whiskers!—P. T.)

Sum day a chainge wil kum, and tirants wil tremble no end! I shal aries in my mite, and they wil have to pick up the litel peaces of Wharton wen I have finished.

Theirafter I shal ruel the Remove with a rod of iron. Peter Todd shal trembul at my frown. Squiff shal serve me on bended nec. Delarey shal be my fagg—he is a most snearing beest, I konsider. As for Bull, Cherry, Nugent, and the rest of the rotters, words fale me to tel what they shal sufer if they do not to the line and be humbel.

(This is prophecy, not autobiography, seems to me. Never mind! It's as true as the rest.—P. T.)

In those days postal orders will flo upon me by evry poast, if not moar often. But I shal reserlutely refuse to wack owt. My constishun nedes frekwent and reglar meals—abowt nine a day, with snaks betwene, wood do me.

But I must leeve my constishun to another ockashun.

(My hat!—P. T.)

THE END.

THE SUPREME SACRIFICE OF A PAVEMENT ARTIST!

By MONTY LOWTHER.

GOOD Little Henry and Kind Little James kissed their teacher as they left the school for the day and strolled along the High Street of their village hand-in-hand.

Bad Boy Horace, a pavement artist, was seated at the corner of the street, and on each side of him the pavement was adorned with coloured portraiture.

Blinded, probably, with affection for each other, Good Henry and Kind James had stepped upon his legs before they noticed him. Instantly they raised their hats.

"I am so sorry, Bad Horace—so sorry!" said Henry.

"I, too, am sorry, Bad Horace!" said James.

But Bad Horace had ever ignored the goodness in his nature, and he now said things which were loud and strong and earnest, but very wicked.

Good Little Henry and Kind Little James shook their heads and sighed as this outburst was levelled at them, but resolved, if possible, to put Bad Horace upon the right path.

The first move, they reasoned properly, was to strengthen his interest in the work which brought him his daily bread.

Accordingly, when the invectives ceased, Good Little Henry spoke thus:

"Few things are more worthy of study, dear James, than the work of an artist."

"I agree, Henry."

Good Little Henry referred to a portrait, and then to Bad Horace.

"Here we have something very curious. Our misguided friend, you will perceive, has a very large head, a very large body, but very small legs."

"True!" concurred James.

Horace did not seem pleased by this candid criticism. He glared at them.

"Again," resumed Henry benignantly, "the jaws of all the figures appear somewhat disjointed, and that of our misguided friend is similarly afflicted. The complexions of the figures, too, are of a very high colour, and

that of our misguided friend is the same—as if, say, with rage."

Bad Horace was certainly red with rage. At that moment he bore a distinct resemblance to Apollyon, as illustrated in Henry's favourite book, "The Pilgrim's Progress."

But the worthy pair tried to look as if they were unaware that their appeal to the better nature of Bad Horace had failed. They smiled sweetly upon him, and then went on together.

Their boots were somewhat muddy, and as they stepped upon the portraits in passing the latter were diversified by several foot-prints.

Bad Horace was not satisfied with showing the evil side of his nature merely in expression.

The larger half of a brickbat was lying in the roadway, and Bad Horace seized it. His sole reason for doing so was not purely to remove it from the way of passing traffic, as the reader might imagine. His intention was to hurl it after his benefactors, which he did.

Henry intercepted it with the lobe of his ear, and gave a cry of pain.

"Dear me!"

Bad Horace's sinister work was not at an end. He seized another brickbat, and hurled that also.

Henry ducked.

A bald-headed gentleman had emerged from his shop, and stood with his back to them, gazing up at the town-hall clock, seemingly under the delusion that he could learn the time from it. As the clock had stopped, this was unlikely.

The second missile collided forcibly with the back of the bald head.

The gentleman made a loud observation, spun round four times, and fell to the ground, stone-dead.

"Police!" shrieked Henry shrilly.

"Police!" shrieked James shriekily.

Three stern policemen rounded the bend, followed by a small boy bearing handcuffs.

"Who is responsible for this murder?" demanded the three stern policemen in one voice.

Good Little Henry looked round. But Bad Horace had vanished.

Henry pointed desperately to James, and exclaimed:

"He did it!"

"I didn't!" cried James. "Henry did it!"

The suddenness of it all had made them forget the facts, evidently.

The three stern policemen turned to the small boy.

"Pass the handcuffs!" they ordered in unison.

But suddenly a cry rang out, and Bad Horace appeared, with tears of remorse running down his face.

"Stop!"

He placed one hand on his breast, and held up the other as if he were pushing something.

"Innocent and kind and good people shall never suffer for a crime that I have committed!" he declaimed.

"Then you did it!" said the voices of the three stern policemen. Again they turned to the small boy.

"Pass the handcuffs!"

The repentant culprit was manacled, and led away to trial and conviction.

There were only two present at the trial of Bad Horace, and they were Good Little Henry and Kind Little James.

"Good Little Henry," he implored from the scaffold, "say you forgive me!"

"I forgive you, Bad Horace!" sobbed Henry.

"Kind Little James, say you forgive me!"

"I forgive you, Bad Horace!"

A dirty face popped round the scaffold.

"Ready, there?"

But at that moment the reprieve arrived, and eventually Bad Horace's sentence was commuted to a fine of sevenpence, the bald-headed old gentleman, as it turned out, having only shammed dead out of awkwardness. Horace, no longer bad after his noble deed, has now reformed, and burgles for a living.

THE END.

GUSSY BREAKS THE NEWS!

By TOM MERRY.

JACK BLAKE, Herries, and Dig were in their study. They were not working. Not that that is anything unusual. I can't recollect ever having seen a Fourth-Former working. Of course, I was there, otherwise I shouldn't have been able to tell the tale, such as it is.

"I think we shall beat the Grammarians," remarked Blake thoughtfully.

"Rather, when I get properly set," said Herries.

"Not sure you'll play," I said thoughtfully. "You see—"

"I see a silly idiot!" growled Herries.

"Of course I'm in the team?" said Blake casually.

"Certainly!"

"And I?" asked Rober Arthur Digby.

"Well, you see—"

"I see a silly ass who calls himself a cricket captain!"

"And a jolly decent captain!" said Blake.

"Rot!" snapped Herries.

"Look here—" I began indignantly.

Just then the door opened, to admit the elegant form of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Hallo, Gussy!"

"Hallo, Tom Mewwy!"

"Have you seen the result yet, Gustavus?"

"Yaas; that is what I have come to tell you about, Blake."

The result that Blake spoke of was the exam result. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, had become suddenly suspicious of the working abilities of his Form, and he had set a test. There were no prizes offered, but punishments were threatened to those not coming up to "pass" standard. The Fourth had been rather taking advantage of Mr. Lathom, and had been slacking. The little gentleman had been giving a series of lectures on some outlandish subject, and all his Form were expected to attend. They attended, but he feared that they hadn't attended—see? Think it out if you can't see it at once!

There was always a crush for the back row, where the naughty kids could do as

they pleased, Mr. Lathom being too pre-occupied to notice his audience.

Hence the general anxiety as to the result.

Jack Blake & Co. and Figgins & Co. were always among the back rowites, and they were a bit nervous when the exam came. Every fellow who failed to qualify was to take two hundred lines!

"Of course, I'm not worrying about the result," said Blake.

"Why, you said the other—"

"Ahem! What I meant to say was—"

"Weally, deah boys, I wish you would listen to me—"

"A fellow with brains can always pass any exam, even if he was playing chess when the lecture was on—"

"Blake, you wottah—"

"Of course, I've passed!" said Digby.

"I suppose I've passed!" growled Herries doubtfully. It was a moot point whether Herries would have passed even if he had listened to the lecture.

"Weally, you wottahs, I have taken all the trouble to go and look at the list, an' you wotase to listen to me!"

"Oh, well, carry on!" granted Blake resignedly.

"Well, deah boys, I have failed, an' have to do two hundred lines."

Blake sighed with relief. He really did not mind about Gussy. Herries and Digby echoed the sigh.

"I wegard it as too beastly for words! Old Lathom ought to be slaughtered!"

"Well, you deserve it, you know."

"Weally—"

"If you had my brains you'd—"

"But—"

"And two hundred ain't much!"

"And you have the consolation of knowing that you deserved it."

"Yaas, but—"

"Of course, I know you aren't up to my mark," explained Herries.

"Weally, you uttah ass!"

"You're such an idiot, you know, and it's really nothing to make a filas about. I shouldn't grumble if I'd failed."

"But you have!" said Gussy, in surprise.

"What?" howled Herries.

"Yaas; and, of course, you've got to do two hundred lines."

"Why, what a swindle!" gasped Herries.

"Ha, ha, ha!" we roared.

"I thought you'd be jolly sure to fail," chuckled Digby. "You're as big an ass as Gussy!"

"Why, you fathead—"

"Yaas, Dig, you are an ass! You—"

"Well, anyway, I've passed," said Dig complacently.

"But you haven't!" yelled Gussy.

"Eh?" said Digby faintly. "I haven't passed? You're joking, Gustavus—you must be!"

"Bai Jove, I'm not! If a fellow like me, of exceptional bwaing-powah an' of gweat tact and judgment, fails to pass, snably a fellow with an addled bwaing like yours, Dig, must expect to!"

"You—you silly ass! Why didn't you say so at first, you blithering maniac?"

"You weally didn't give me a chance."

"And I'm the only one left to uphold the honour of the study, while you shakers let it down!" said Blake severely.

"Yaas, but—"

"I suppose I haven't got two hundred, too?" asked Blake rather anxiously.

"Oh, no, deah boy; but—"

"Good! I knew all along that I should pass!" said Blake loftily.

"But you haven't!" chuckled the Hon. Arthur Augustus.

"Look here, Gussy, if you're rotting—"

"But I'm not, deah boy! You have failed!"

"You said just now that I hadn't got two hundred lines!"

"You haven't, deah boy."

"Then I must have passed, ass!"

"Wats! You have got twee hundred!"

"What?" gasped Blake.

"Fact, deah boy!"

"You're rotting!"

"I'm not. Honour bwaight!"

Blake would not doubt D'Arcy's word.

"Ha, ha, ha!" I shrieked. "You were all so jolly sure you'd passed, and you've all jolly well failed!"

"I suppose you consider it funny, Tom Merry?" asked Blake darkly.

"Yes, rather!"

"Oh, bump him and chuck him out!" roared Blake. "Bump Gussy, too, the silly ass!"

And I regret to say that they did it. Three to one, you know; that idiot Gussy didn't back me up, or the two of us might have stood them off. Never mind!

THE END.

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 93.—MERTON and TUNSTALL.

JOHN ARTHUR MERTON—whom his friends call Algy—and Frederick Guest Tunstall used to be numbered among the nuts of the Highcliffe Fourth.

That they are no longer so must be set down as due to the healthy influence of their chum, Philip Derwent. But that influence could hardly have had the effect it had if Merton and Tunstall had ever been of the real Ponsonby type.

There was a time when practically every fellow who counted for anything in the Form was a member of the nut brigade. Such fellows as Smithson, Yates, and Benson were mere inconspicuous nobodies, despised for lack of aristocratic connections and ready cash, and putting up with it for lack of anyone with backbone enough to show them that it needed not to be put up with. They and their like were always decent, and it was not exactly pluck that was wanting in their make-ups, for they showed pluck enough when they found a leader in Frank Courtenay.

But before he came they would probably have been willing to be nuts in a mild way if they had been allowed to be; and it was not wonderful that other fellows, differently circumstanced, should have gone with the tide and let themselves accept the lordly Pon as their leader.

Merton was the nuttier of the pair, with a greater tendency to slacking and to fine clothes than Tunstall, and with less real go in him. Now and then he let Pon lead him pretty far; less often Tunstall did likewise. Though they hung together more or less, and shared a study, they were never inseparables till Derwent came along.

One cannot recall them as bearing a hand in any of the worst of Pon's plots, or as sharing in any of the worst of his escapades. Roulette in a Courtfield night-club was not exactly in their line; and they had some conscience about lying and treachery and unfair odds. But they followed Pon's lead—and they did not cease to be nuts when Frank Courtenay rallied the better half of the Form against his cousin.

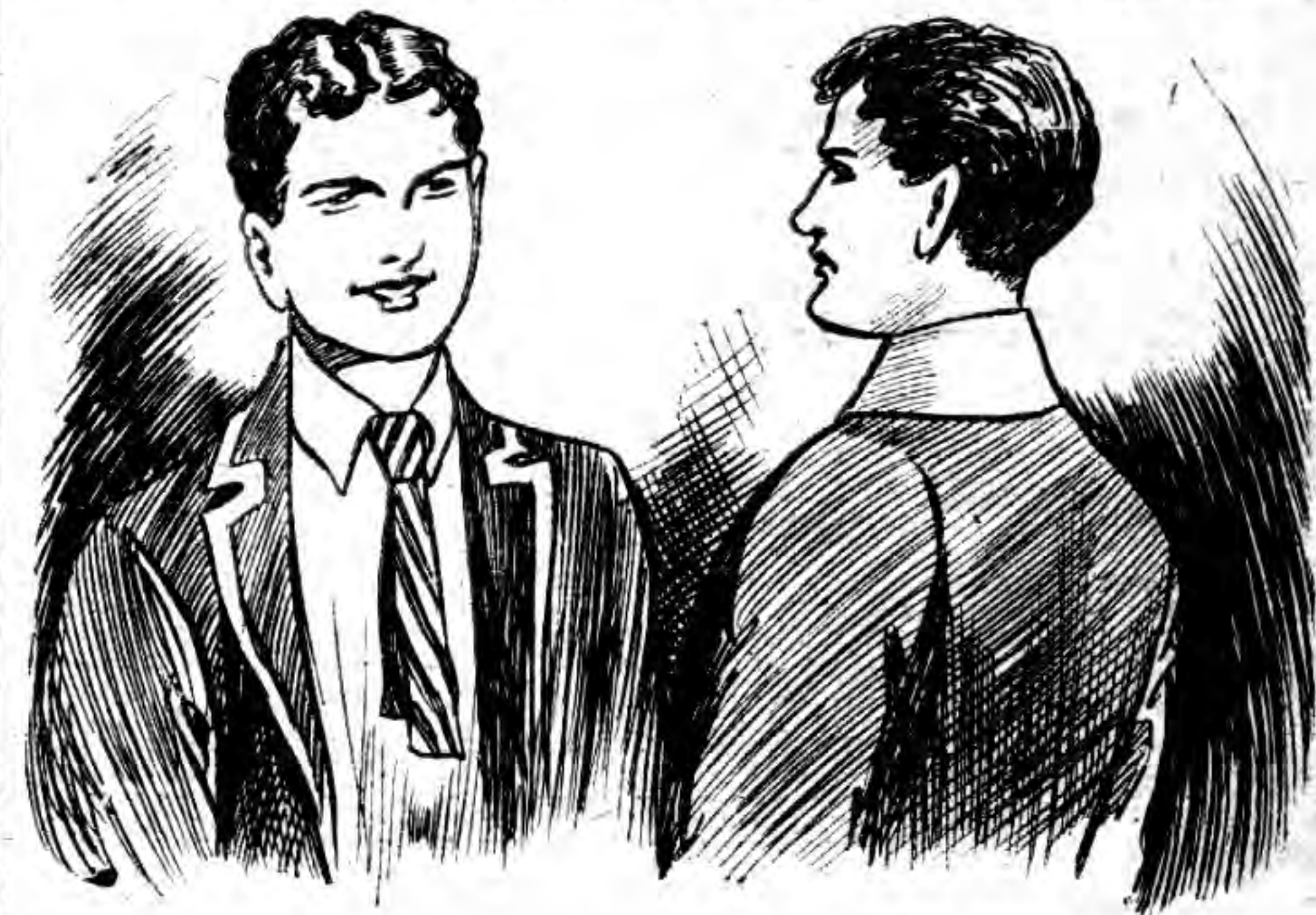
They would have been happier in the ranks of those who followed Frank Courtenay, no doubt, for Tunstall, at least, had been keen on games, and neither was really desperately keen on banker or nap or betting. But a kind of mistaken loyalty held them to Pon, and they were drifting into a foolish backwater of indifference to anything really worth while.

Then Derwent came. There was no immediate change, except that they found his fresh breeziness putting life into them, and that, in getting chummy with him, they also got chummier with one another. Study No. 6, with Cocky as an honoured guest, became rather a different place; and, though Flip Derwent was a friend of Pon's, Merton and Tunstall found themselves seeing less of their former leader, and doing less in the way of the gay dog.

They found out Ponsonby before Flip did.

Perhaps it was hardly necessary that they should find him out, for they knew a good deal about his ways that the new boy from far Tasmania did not. They came to see that Pon was not likely to do Flip any good, and before that they must have realised that he had done them none.

There was a real waking-up. Most of you have read "The Twins from Tasmania." I know. Those who have not will know little



of Merton and Tunstall; but those who have will remember how they surprised everyone—including the Greyfriars fellows—by the way they stuck to it in the Highcliffe v. Greyfriars battle on the seashore. A drawn battle, that was, thanks largely to the prowess of Flip Derwent; but it would not have been drawn but that Merton and Tunstall fought as no one had ever expected to see them fight.

Their friendship with the Cliff House girls—Flip's sister, Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara Trevelyn, and Phyllis Howell—was the immediate cause of their final break with Ponsonby. The leader of the nuts had forced himself into the number of those invited to tea at Cliff House; and on the way back Merton fired up at some sneering remark of his, and blows followed between them.

Then there came the fight. Flip Derwent, still regarding Pon as a friend, unable to make up his mind to take either side, stayed away from that, wandering miserably about while it went on. Merton and Tunstall both

opened anyway. But when the dread of complete blindness came upon Merton it was not to be wondered at that their bitterness against both Pon and Flip should be great. Merton had to go home, and Tunstall went with him, realising at last how much "Algy" meant to him. Out of their old careless comradeship had grown a real friendship; but both knew it incomplete without Flip.

How Merton's eye recovered after all; how the two came back, and how they and Flip were reunited—all this has been told so recently that there is no need to say much about it here. Merton's return, and the knowledge that the bitterness was past, meant much to Derwent; it drew him back from the very gates of death.

Merton and Tunstall will always be chums, you may be sure of that; and you may be sure also that Derwent will be one of the brotherhood. If anything is more certain than either of those things it is that no one of the three will ever look upon Cecil Ponsonby as a friend again!