



SAMMY AND SAMUEL!



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SAMMY AND SAMUEL!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Samuel Benson the First!

"HALLO, Wib! You're back jolly early!"

It was Dick Rake of the Greyfriars Remove who spoke. Breakfast was over at Greyfriars, but it was not yet quite time for classes.

Dick Rake and Micky Desmond, who shared Study No. 6 on the Remove passage with Wibley, and were his closest chums, had been standing by the gates together talking about Wib. But they had not in the least expected to see that young gentleman, and when he dropped in front of them from a passing farmer's dogcart they could hardly believe their eyes.

"Sure, an' ye must have been after gettin' up in time to travel by the milk train!" remarked the Irish junior.

"No harm in coming with the milk, as long as it was good, sound milk, is there?" demanded Wibley cheerily.

"Faith, then, no harm at all! But 'tisn't what I'd have been for doin' myself, Wib, darlint. After classes would have been time enough for me."

"Ah, you never were so keen on the pursuit of knowledge as I am, Micky!" answered Wibley.

"I've never noticed much difference that way," said Rake. "And I don't fancy Quelchy has, either."

"Ye haven't seen Sammy, have ye, Wib?" inquired Desmond.

"Who? Sammy Bunter? Has he gone missing? If it was his major I'd say 'Hurrah!' But as it's only Sammy—"

"Not Sammy Bunter, ye omadhaun—Sammy Benson!"

"And who the merry dickens is Sammy Benson?"

There was no doubt—no possible, probable shadow of doubt—as to William Wibley's being a real actor. No one who heard him then could have guessed anything of his secret from his manner. His query was put in exactly the right tone of half-impatient surprise.

"Wib doesn't know Sammy, look you," said Morgan, who had joined the little group at the gates in time to hear Desmond's question.

"Why, no," said Rake. "Seems almost impossible, for Wib's been gone only about a minute and a half, and we do seem to have had Sammy with us for a dog's age; but it's a fact that Wib had gone off for his week-end holiday before Sammy blew in."

"But he couldn't have been off knowin' Sammy if he'd seen him," said Desmond argumentatively. "Nobody could. There was never the like of Sammy since this old worruld began, an' it's missin' the spalpeen I am already, bedad!"

"I seem to have missed something," Wibley said. "But why don't you chaps stop talking in riddles and tell me about Sammy?"

"Oh, Sammy was great, whatever!"

Morgan replied, with real enthusiasm. "If you'd seen him coming along here hand-in-hand with Wharton, Wib!"

"'Twas the sight of a lifetime," said Desmond. "I was after cryin' till I laughed at it."

"Hand-in-hand with Wharton?" said Wibley, in a bewildered way. "Oh, come off it! You aren't going to stuff me that Wharton—"

"He did!" broke in Rake, grinning broadly. "Sammy told him he had fits unless someone held his hand—"

"Couldn't Wharton have let Bunter do it, or taken the duffer to Quelchy?" asked Wibley. "I don't say it was Bunter's job; but it was more Quelchy's than—"

"You don't catch on, chump! The Head was sending Wharton to the station to meet Sammy, look you—that was the way of it. And—"

"Well, if the poor silly fathead really was liable to fits, I don't see—"

"You didn't see—that's what's the matter," Rake said impatiently. "No one who didn't see could half understand the gorgeousness of it. Poor old Wharton! I was half sorry for him at the time; and I've been quite sorry since, but—oh, my hat! Oh, crumbs! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Desmond and Morgan together.

"Well, did this chap you call Sammy have fits?" asked Wib.

"He didn't have one here. He may have them—he's ass enough for anything," replied Rake.

"If he has fits, it's a jolly serious thing," Wib said. "No sense in calling a chap an ass for that, not that I see. And I don't see where Wharton was wrong, either."

"Who said he was wrong, you silly chump?" hooted Morgan.

"Bedad, then, who ever said that at all, at all, Wib?" asked Desmond.

"Well, you seem to have made fun of him about it."

"Didn't need making," said Rake. "It was funnier than all the funny things ever seen on the stage! There was Sammy, with a silly little bowler hat perched on top of his silly head—"

"And a long parasol in his silly hand, look you!"

"Faith, an' short trousers, an' a jacket three sizes too small!"

"And socks like—"

"And the face of him! Oh, holy St. Patrick, the face of him!"

"Not that it was properly speaking so much of a face as—"

"Oh, rats!" snorted Wibley. "I dare say his face wasn't any worse than yours, Dick, or mine; and I'm jolly sure it wasn't worse than Desmond's or Morgan's!"

Dick Rake was rather a good-looking fellow. William Wibley was not. But it was with Rake, not with Desmond or Morgan—both rather plain than otherwise—that Wib classed himself, it will be observed.

"I'd not be so sure about yours, Wib, my son, but it would give any of the rest of us a lap in the mile an' a bating," answered Desmond.

"There's the bell!" said Wibley, with relief which he took care not to show.

For William Wibley knew all about Sammy Benson.

William Wibley had been Sammy Benson!

Wib had never gone for that week-end holiday at all. His people would have been greatly surprised if he had turned up, for the Head was under a misapprehension—to put it mildly—in believing that Wib's father had called upon him and asked for the week-end for his hopeful son.

It was Wib himself, made up as a middle-aged man, who, greatly daring, had visited Dr. Locke, and wangled that holiday.

It was Wib who had come to Greyfriars as Sammy Benson—Wib who had taken in Harry Wharton so completely—Wib who had done all the other things that he was to hear of presently—gassed about ornithology, fought Snoop, invited Bunter to tea in Study No. 1!

And Wib would love to hear about them. He was full of pride in his achievements—at least, as full of pride as the fact that he had also to find room for a lot of misgiving would allow.

"Do you say that this chap's disappeared?" he asked of Dick Rake, as the four trotted towards the School House and the Form-room.

"Yes. He slept in his bed last night—your bed, really. He was shoved in there, as you were away, and there wasn't another ready—"

"Jolly good cheek, I call that!" growled Wib.

"Can't see that it mattered. Sammy was a rum 'un, but quite clean. Well, his bed was empty when rising-bell sounded this morning, and he didn't show up at breakfast, and it seems no one's seen him since last night."

"You bounders japed the poor duffer till he couldn't stand it any longer, and did a bunk. That's about the size of it, Dick!"

"I don't think so—I'm sure that wasn't it. He wasn't japed anything to hurt, come to that. He wasn't touched last night at all, because he had a headache. And he could stand japing—I'll say that for him."

"I don't suppose he had a very gay time."

"He did, then! And he took to us all right. He would have got quite fond of Wharton, I think—gratitude, you know, though he had rummy ways of showing it. Wonder what Quelchy will say?"

"Sure, we'll soon be after hearin' that," said Micky Desmond, from just behind.

"I hope Sammy hasn't gone for good, whatever," remarked Morgan. "I liked the bounder."

"Why, that must have been the chap

who was to have come along on Monday!" said Wibley, as if the thought had just struck him. "Don't you remember me telling you I'd met him, Dick?"

Desmond and Morgan had passed into the Form-room now. But, at the risk of a rebuke for being late, Rake stopped at the door to answer this.

"Of course I do!" he said. "You told me and Micky the same day. But you didn't say he was a bit like—"

"How could I, ass? He wasn't like the chap you describe—not a bit! He was—"

"Rake—Wibley—what are you doing loitering outside here?"

It was the sharp voice of Mr. Quelch that addressed the pair thus.

"Sorry, sir!" replied Dick Rake. "But Wibley's only just come back from town."

"Ah, yes! Well you are back in excellent time, Wibley. Do not spoil your punctuality by losing minutes now."

The two stood aside for the Form-master to pass, and then followed him meekly in.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Samuel Benson the Second!

MR. QUELCH looked keenly around him upon entering the Form-room.

It was easy for all those assembled there to guess for whom he was looking.

Sammy Benson had never been inside the Form-room, as it chanced. At least, he had not been there as Sammy Benson.

He had come along on the Saturday, after morning classes; and, of course, Saturday was a half-holiday.

But for his absence from the breakfast-table Mr. Quelch might have supposed that he had failed to find his way. But it was evident that that absence had already been noted by the master, and that he had been making inquiries.

"Does any boy among you know anything as to the whereabouts of the new boy, Benson?" he rapped out.

"No one seems to, sir," replied Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove.

Mr. Quelch had looked straight at Wharton, but that was nothing unusual. He was rather given to asking any such questions of Harry, in whom he had a well-justified confidence.

"Has any search been made for him?"

"Some of us have looked round, sir," Harry answered.

"Systematic search should have been made. The unfortunate boy is understood to be subject to fits. You, at least, should not have forgotten that, Wharton!"

Harry flushed to the roots of his hair.

He had not forgotten that Sammy had said he suffered from fits, though he was not at all clear that it was true. He was not likely to have forgotten it, after what he had gone through on the Saturday.

"We did look everywhere we could think of, sir!" said Herbert Vernon-Smith, whom Greyfriars still called by his old name of "the Bounder," though that name did not fit the Smithy of to-day.

"I hardly know what to do," said Mr. Quelch. "The boy may be lying somewhere in one of these seizures; and an epileptic fit is a very serious matter. I do not know that the fits of which he spoke were of that kind; but one naturally thinks first of epilepsy."

"It wasn't his clothes, anyway!" whispered Skinner to Stott. "There was no giddy fit about them!"



Declined, without thanks! (See Chapter 2.)

"He must have gone before any of us were up," Wharton said. "I'm afraid that it looks as if he had run away, sir."

"Do you know of any reason he had for doing that, Wharton?"

"No, sir."

"He had not been badly treated by anyone?"

"Not to my knowledge, sir. In fact, I'm pretty sure he had not."

"I think that a search must be made for him outside the precincts of the school," said Mr. Quelch in a worried tone.

There was a general hum of assent.

It was a fine morning, and the prospect of spending it out of doors in a search for Sammy appealed to nearly everyone.

"I'm sure I'm quite willing to go, sir!" said Billy Bunter importantly.

"You will not be required, Bunter! I have no intention of sending the whole Form."

"Beastly favouritism will rule this!" whispered Skinner to Stott.

"You bet!" whispered Stott back.

"About a dozen will be enough—fifteen or so at the outside. Wharton, Cherry—"

"Told you so!" hissed Skinner.

"Vernon-Smith, Field, Bull, Nugent, Brown—"

There were smiling faces and anxious frowns before Mr. Quelch's eyes.

"Ogilvy, Delarey—" he went on, and then paused again.

Two more faces smiled, and one dark countenance took on a look of disappointment.

"Hurree Singh, Rake—"

The dark face grinned very cheerfully, and Dick Rake had all he knew how to do to keep back a cheer.

"Bulstrode—that is twelve. Oh, yes, you may go, Russell, and Redwing, and Linley, and Todd."

The face of Peter Todd, always long, had seemed nearly twice its usual length as name after name was called and still he remained unmentioned. Now it shortened at once.

"Oh, sir, can't I? Oh, really, sir, I—"

"No, Bunter! Most decidedly not!"

"Tain't fair!"

"What did you mutter, Bunter?"

"I—I said 'Oh, dear!' sir. I should like to—"

"That is enough, Bunter! I cannot send the whole Form, and you would be one of the last I should choose."

There were others who wanted to go, of course. Penfold and Newland, Morgan and Desmond, Kipps and Hazeldene, and others felt that it was too bad of Quelch to leave them out. But they did not whisper about favouritism.

And Wibley did not want to go. Samuel the second might come along at any moment, for one thing. And Wibley felt that looking for Samuel the first would really be a particularly profitless game for him.

"Sixteen! I should suggest your breaking up into four or five parties, Wharton, and going different ways."

"Yes, sir," replied Harry.

The lucky sixteen marched out. At the gates they split up. Harry and Inky and Frank Nugent; Squiff and Tom Brown and Delarey; Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Mark Linley; Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing and Rake; Peter Todd, Ogilvy, Russell, and Bulstrode.

The last four went towards Courtfield. They had not gone a mile before they met a boy in Etons and a nondescript sort of chap, who lounged up to them in a self-assured and rather cheeky manner.

"Greyfriars chaps, aren't you?" he said.

"We are!" was Peter's curt reply.

It was Samuel the second, and Peter had taken an acute dislike to him on sight.

He had a cheap cigarette between his lips, and there was a yellow stain above the upper one. The stain on the thumb and forefinger of his right hand was a deep brown, fading away to yellow on the middle and third finger.

His face was somewhat hard and cunning, and his eyes were too closely set together either for beauty or honesty.

"Ah!" he said familiarly. "I twigged."

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the caps. But what are you doing out here. Thought it was time for all good little boys to be at their lessons. That's why I toddled over on my tootsies. Might as well miss an hour or two of Latin and maths and stuff—what?"

"You are, then, not a good little boy?" inquired Peter, with the solemn look he could so easily assume.

"Not much, I'm not!" replied the stranger, puffing smoke through his nose.

"A smoky rotter, I should say!" remarked Russell.

"Are you a new fellow?" asked Bulstrode bluntly.

"Got it in once!"

"And what might be your name?" inquired Ogilvy.

"It might be Julius Cæsar or William Hohenzollern."

"Well, one of those is a rotter's name!" snapped Bulstrode, who shared Toddy's instinctive dislike for this fellow.

"But it doesn't happen to be!" went on the stranger, quite unabashed. "It's Benson."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Not Samuel Benson?"

"Seems to surprise you. Not such a very remarkable name, is it? Quite a good one, but nothing to get excited about."

"Are you the Samuel Benson—"

"Who's booked for a spell of quod—beg pardon—for a few weeks at your show, you mean? I am the identical!"

"Then who on earth was silly Sammy?" gasped Russell.

"Whoever silly Sammy may have been," said the new boy, "he certainly was not me. Nothing silly about your humble servant!"

"Not so blessed sure about that!" growled Bulstrode.

"Look here," said Peter Todd gravely, "there's something confounded mysterious in this."

"There may be. But there isn't anything at all mysterious about me," the new fellow said. "I'm all square and aboveboard."

Somehow, Peter had doubted that. A touch of uneasiness had crept into Benson's tones, it seemed to him.

"I think you ought to know," said Peter, "that on Saturday a fellow, calling himself Samuel Benson, came to Greyfriars."

"Then he was a giddy impostor, and I'll jolly soon show him up, you bet!"

"He isn't there now. He disappeared this morning, and we're out looking for him."

"Oh, he disappeared, did he? Had he heard that the real Samuel Benson—which the same is me—was coming along, by any chance?"

"Nobody doubted that he was the real Samuel Benson," Russell said.

"Come to that, we don't know now that he wasn't," added Bulstrode. "If one of the two is an impostor—"

He paused. But it was fairly obvious that George Bulstrode thought sly Samuel more likely to be a wrong 'un than silly Sammy. And Peter Todd shared his suspicion, while Ogilvy and Russell were not at all favourably impressed by the new boy.

"Oh, don't you get worrying yourselves about me," said Benson, lightly. "I'm all right, I am! And I can prove it, too. There's a chap at Greyfriars named Willet—no, Wibley—isn't there?"

"Yes. Chap in our Form," answered Donald Ogilvy.

"He knows me. We met last week, and took shelter from a storm together. I told him then that I was coming on Monday."

"Well, this chap came along on Satur-

day," said Bulstrode. "He said he was Samuel Benson. Silly sort of ass, but nothing against him but being a bit potty."

"And now he's gone?" asked the new fellow.

"Yes. Seems to have done a bunk this morning."

"Gone back to his madhouse, I should say—what?"

"That's all very well," replied Russell irritably. "But we've got to find him."

"Wish you joy of your job!"

"As a job, it isn't so bad," remarked Ogilvy cheerily. "Heaps better than stewing in a Form-room, anyway."

"Keep it up, then! Don't find him too soon; or, if you do, tie his hands and feet, and leave him in a ditch somewhere, while you trot around looking some more."

"Thanks, but that isn't just exactly our line," said Toddy.

Benson shrugged his shoulders.

"As you like. Any of you fellows have a cig?"

He was just taking another cigarette himself, and he offered his case to the four.

"Put that thing away!" snapped Bulstrode. "We don't smoke."

"Oh, some more of the holy boy-ees!" Benson said coolly. "Never mind—I dare say I shall want them myself before the day's out."

Samuel the second was evidently a hard case. But the Remove had dealt with hard cases before; and it was possible that Samuel might find his views altered before he left Greyfriars—or, at least, might find it pay him better to conform to the views of the Remove generally during the time he stayed there.

"Any more of you out Sammy-hunting?" asked Benson, after he had lighted his cigarette.

"Yes," answered Peter.

"Wibley among them?"

"No."

"Right-ho! If he had been, I think I should have given you fellows the benefit of my company."

"Your mistake," said Bulstrode deliberately. "We're not taking any, thank you!"

"Oh, all serene! Don't trouble about being polite if you find it hurts you inside. Wibley can identify me—that's all I mean. If he had been out on the hunt I should have stayed out until there was a chance of his being back, that's all. As it is, I'll toddle along. Au reservoir!"

He lounged on his way.

"I don't cotton to that chap," remarked Ogilvy.

"Nor yet me," said Russell, with doubtful grammar, but with unmistakable earnestness.

"Hard case, I should say," was Peter Todd's verdict.

"Loathsome young pup!" growled Bulstrode.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The New Boy!

TAP, tap!

"Come in!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Samuel Benson opened the door of the Remove Form-room and walked coolly in.

If Peter Todd had been correct in thinking that he had been rather taken aback by hearing about Sammy, his uneasiness had only been temporary.

Probably the memory of Wibley had driven it to flight. Wibley could prove that he was the original Samuel Benson; and whosoever the rival claimant to that name might have been, it hardly seemed possible that his appearance should have

had any connection with a knowledge of the nefarious mission upon which Benson had come to Greyfriars. Detectives do not forestall crimes; they hunt criminals. And a detective would not have come before him and left just as he was coming.

"I think I am right," said Benson.

"This is the Remove Form-room, and you are Mr. Quelch?"

"That is so. Who are you?"

Mr. Quelch spoke with some snap. He was worried in mind about the missing Sammy.

"My name is Benson, sir. I—"

"Are you a relative of the unfortunate boy who is missing?"

"Missing? No, sir, I know nothing about any missing boy."

To lie came as naturally to Samuel the second as to breathe.

"Then what are you doing here?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"I've come, sir—that's all."

"Good gracious—bless my soul—cannot I see that? What have you come for? That is the question."

"Same as these fellows, I suppose," replied Benson, with a nonchalant wave of the hand towards the desks.

"You mean—but you cannot mean that you are—"

"Samuel Benson, sir, at your service."

Benson bowed slightly as he spoke. He did not know Mr. Quelch yet.

"But—Samuel Benson came on Saturday! He was to have come to-day—"

"And he has. I am Samuel Benson—the one, only, and original! Any other is an inferior imitation!"

There had been titters before that, drawing frowns of disapproval from Mr. Quelch. Now Skinner sniggered, and Billy Bunter cackled;

"He, he, he!"

"If you are really a new boy—"

"I am, I assure you, sir!"

"You are a most impudent and ill-mannered one!"

"I really cannot see that I deserve that, sir! I am naturally surprised to hear that someone else has been here making himself out to be me—"

"That remains to be proved!" snapped the irate master. "It is equally possible that you—though for what reason I cannot imagine—are taking a name which is not rightfully yours!"

"Not much, it isn't," replied Benson, with cool assurance. "I can prove my identity."

"Yes, yes, no doubt! There seems no motive for—"

"I don't mean that I can prove it with any amount of trouble and delay, as I suppose you think. I mean that I can prove it this minute!"

Benson leered triumphantly as he spoke. His tone was thoroughly impertinent, and Mr. Quelch's grasp tightened on the cane in his hand.

"How?" he snapped.

"Anyone here of the name of Wibley?" drawled Benson, without troubling to look around for Wib.

That wayward youth was not feeling any too comfortable. Benson's calling upon him in this manner did by no means lessen his discomfort.

He had grave suspicions about Samuel Benson. Now, it seemed, he was to be called upon to stand sponsor for him, as it were, at Greyfriars.

And he could not refuse to do it, either. He could not blurt out his suspicions to Mr. Quelch.

Wib knew something about melodrama, and everybody knew him to be addicted to the dramatic. It would not really have been sheer melodrama for him to stand up and denounce Samuel; but it would have looked like it to everyone. And the chances were a hundred to one

that he would fail in proving anything. He had no proofs.

So he stood up when Mr. Quelch looked towards him. Wib had as much coolness as most fellows, but the part he had to play was not in his line, and he felt his mouth go dry and realised that his nerves were not up to concert pitch.

"Wibley!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Can you explain why this boy should make appeal to you? Have you any prior knowledge of him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Speak out! What do you know about him?"

Wib licked his dry lips and spoke in a voice much lower than usual.

"I met him the other day, sir—"

"Do speak out, Wibley! I cannot imagine what has come over you. The one strong point I know you to possess is elocution. Where that is concerned you are easily first in the Form, though in other respects you have to be ranked far lower."

Wibley was encouraged by that. It tickled his vanity. Even Mr. Quelch had noted his elocutionary powers.

He spoke out now in quite a different style, each word clear and distinct.

"I really do not know much about him, sir, but the little I do know is important, I suppose. I met him on the Courtfield road one day last week—Friday, I think. A storm came on, and we sheltered together in a barn. He told me his name was Samuel Benson, and that he was coming here on Monday."

"You saw my father, too," put in Benson.

"Yes, I saw him," said Wibley.

But he said that in rather a different tone. For he knew now that the white-whiskered old gentleman was a fraud.

Samuel Benson was Samuel Benson, no doubt; and he was a boy, though he was no genuine schoolboy.

But Samuel's alleged father was not his father, but his brother made up as an elderly man, and so well made-up that he had taken in even the experienced William Wibley.

"Ha! H'm! This puts rather a different aspect upon the case," said Mr. Quelch.

"I don't see it, sir. There never was any good reason for anyone to think that I wasn't myself!" said Benson, cheekily.

"Wibley, you must have seen the other—er—the other Samuel Benson—the remarkably eccentric boy who—"

"Beg pardon, sir, but I was away the week-end."

Wib was not by any means as accomplished a liar as Samuel Benson. He was not in the habit of lying. But he felt it necessary to tell that one, and tried to make himself believe that it was really not a lie at all.

As William Wibley he had been absent for the week-end. And as Samuel Benson the first—well, there was no Samuel Benson the first at all!

He had vanished into thin air—never to return, as Wib then supposed.

"Oh, yes! I recall that fact now, Wibley. You may sit down."

Wibley sat down. Mr. Quelch turned to Benson, and the look he cast upon the self-possessed youth was by no means a benign one.

"You know nothing of the boy who claimed your name, Benson?" he asked sharply.

"Of course I don't! How should I? You needn't run your head against the notion that it was a put-up job between him and me, so now, then!" returned Benson, with sulky defiance.

"Do not take that tone with me, my

boy, or you will be made to repent of it!" rasped out the master. "You had better come with me to Dr. Locke. Bolsover, I shall look to you to maintain order till I return."

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bolsover Keeps Order!

IT was very like setting a thief to catch a thief, this putting of Percy Bolsover into such a position of trust.

But Harry Wharton and nearly every other fellow of weight and influence in the Form being absent, perhaps Mr. Quelch could have done no better.

Hardly had the door closed behind the master and the new boy before the room was in a buzz of excitement.

"My hat! This is a giddy mystery!"

"Lucky for that chap you could speak up for him, Wib!"

"I didn't! I know nothing about him except what—"

"Well, that served his turn jolly well, anyhow."

"Shut up, all of you!" roared Bolsover major. "Silence!"

No one took the slightest notice of Bolsover major.

"I don't like the look of the chap," remarked Hazeldene, standing up within reach of Bolsover.

"Sit down, Hazeldene!" hooted Bolsover.

"Oh, keep your silly wool on!" said Hazel irritably. "You don't suppose anyone's going to take any notice of you, do you?"

"I'll jolly well— Sit down, Skinner! Desmond, if you throw that wad—"

"Faith, an' 'twould be waste in peacetime not to be after throwin' it now that it's inked I have it," replied Micky coolly.

And he hurled the soaked wad of blotting-paper at Hazel.

Or at Bolsover! Micky declared afterwards that it was at Hazel he had aimed.

But it was Bolsover he hit—full upon the nose.

The ink streamed down Bolsover's heavy face, and that face flushed redly.

The bully of the Remove gave a sweep of the arm that sent Hazel staggering against Smith minor. Then he rushed at Micky.

Micky promptly scuttled. Over the desks he leaped. One of his feet caught Kipps, and Kipps let out a wild howl. A foot under the chin, even when it gets there accidentally, is not conducive to calm and comfort. Moreover, Kipps was practising a conjuring trick of the balancing type with three rulers; and one of them, a heavy ebony one, which had been balanced upon the tip of his nose, gave that organ quite a nasty smack as it came down.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Kipps.

"Tare an' 'ouns! Don't be such a silly ijjit, Bolsover, now don't ye! 'Twasn't ye I was after aiming at, at all, at all—'twas Hazel! Ouch! You rotter, Skinner!"

Skinner had caught Micky's leg as he bounded from one desk to another, and Micky came down with a thwack right on top of Stott.

"Ow! You clumsy Irish fool!" howled Stott.

"Irish, am I, ye base an' brutal Saxon? An' a fool in the bargain, ye spalpeen! Take that!"

And Micky dealt Stott a lusty blow.

But it was Snoop who received the blow, and he promptly hit back.

The days when Sidney James Snoop would not hit back unless he felt quite safe were over, it seemed.

Micky struggled up, and he and Snoop

clinked. Stott got to his feet, and assailed the Irish junior from the rear—not so much from any desire to help Snoop as from the wish to get his own back.

"Stop him!" yelled Morgan.

"Micky's got his hands full, whatever!"

Penfold and Newland rallied to Morgan.

But it took all three of them to hold Bolsover. He was in a tearing rage, and he fought desperately.

"Leave go, you idiots!" he yelled.

"Didn't you hear Quelch tell me to keep order?"

"And indeed we did," replied Morgan.

"But it seems you're no hand at doing it without help, so we're helping you! Hurrah, Micky! Give him another like that!"

But Snoop had no use for another like that.

Snoop staggered back, with a hand to his bleeding nose.

The Irish blood of Michael Desmond from Tipperary was fairly up now, and he turned upon Stott like a young lion.

"Ow!" howled Snoop.

"Yow!" howled Stott, as the fist of Michael took him hard under the chin.

"Stoppit!" roared Bolsover.

Then Kipps came to the aid of the three, and Bolsover was forced down on to a form. He could howl no more, for Kipps sat upon his face; and he could hardly struggle, for Morgan sat upon his legs, Newland upon his stomach, and Penfold upon his chest.

Bolsover major was quite a burly fellow, bigger than anyone else in the Remove. Certainly no other Removite could have afforded adequate sitting accommodation for four juniors.

"Now for you, Skinner, ye cad!" cried Micky Desmond.

Stott had been piled on top of Snoop, and Micky turned at once upon Skinner.

Harold Skinner was not keen. But he could hardly run away.

He faced Micky, and took a blow on the right ear that made it begin to swell at once.

In return he got home one on Micky's nose. Desmond was a better boxer than Skinner, but he had holes in his defence.

"Go it, Skinner!"

"Go it, Micky!"

"What does this pandemonium mean?" thundered Mr. Quelch from the door.

Skinner and Desmond fell apart, panting. Snoop and Stott were already on their feet, Snoop mopping his nose with a handkerchief fast becoming scarlet.

No one answered the master.

"Bolsover!"

Kipps obligingly got off the face of Bolsover, and an unusually humble voice replied:

"I'm here, sir."

"Where are you?" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

Newland and Penfold and Morgan also got up. Bolsover was then able to assume a sitting posture.

"Well, upon my soul, Bolsover! I set you to maintain order in the Form, and I find you—"

"How could I help it, sir?" broke in Bolsover, his resentment rising. "I didn't ask these rotters to sit on me! I—"

"That's true, sir. He didn't ask us," said Kipps.

Penfold and Newland were looking rather shamefaced. They were among the quietest and best-behaved fellows in the Remove. Morgan could hardly be ranked with them on that score; but Morgan looked uneasy. Kipps, however, was unembarrassed. The schoolboy conjurer, like Wibley, was too used to the limelight to be taken aback readily.

"I think that you may be said to have

invited what befell you, Bolsover, if you did not request it," the Form-master said drily. "You are obviously, in spite of your size and strength, an unfit person to keep order. You will take five hundred lines. Kipps, Desmond, Newland, Skinner, Morgan, Penfold, Stott, Snoop—three hundred each. The rest of the Form present, one hundred each!"

"Oh, really, sir! If you please, sir!"

"What have you to say, Bunter?"

"I wasn't in it, sir. I—I never made a sound!"

One moment Mr. Quelch hesitated. He was loth to accept the word of Bunter. Then he said:

"Let any boy whose conscience tells him that he is guiltless of participation in these unseemly proceedings stand forward!"

There were several who might have complied. Mauly had not stirred or shouted. Tom Dutton was still in some doubt as to what it was all about. Tom's deafness left him lagging behind the rest at times. Wun Lung had preserved his Oriental impassivity through the riot. Jimmy Vivian had chanced to be out of it. Hazeldene, Hilary, Trevor, Treluce, Dupont, Smith minor—all of these might have stood out.

But only one fellow followed the smirking and self-satisfied Bunter into the open. That one was Fisher Tarleton Fish. Trevor and Treluce did rise in their places; but when they saw that those near them were not minded to play the Pharisee in order to escape a hundred lines, they sat down again.

"You had no share in this, Bunter?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"No, sir. I would scorn to take advantage of your——"

"That is enough, Bunter! Fish?"

"Waal, sir, I calculate that I didn't let out a single whoop!"

"Ah, you two need not do the lines given! I am pleased to see that you are developing consciences!"

Perhaps the sarcasm was not quite fair. But Mr. Quelch was ruffled in temper, and he knew both the Owl and Fishy too well to believe that their consciences had anything to do with their claim.

Bunter went back smiling fatly and fatuously. But Fish's hatchet face was scarlet, and he did not look pleased with himself. Fishy was not exactly thin-skinned, but he did not care greatly for being in a minority of two with Bunter as his partner.

Benson returned a minute or two later. He had had to stay with the Head while Mr. Quelch returned in haste to the Form-room.

Lessons went on. Bolsover major sat and scowled. Mr. Quelch was very thoughtful, and failed to note many things that his gimlet eyes would never have overlooked at an ordinary time.

Samuel Benson sat at a desk by himself, apparently studying diligently. But Benson's attention was not really given to the book which lay in front of him.

His mind was busy with what he had noted in the Head's study.

He was understood to be booked for a stay of some weeks at Greyfriars. But he rather fancied that no more than a few days would be necessary, and he felt glad of that.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

On the Right Track!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" Across the bare winter fields the stentorian tones of Bob Cherry came to Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Inky.

"Hallo!" Harry shouted back.

"Any sign of Sammy?" yelled Bob.

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"Never a sign!" shouted Harry.

A few moments later the two parties met at the junction of two roads.

Bob and Johnny and Mark Linley had been to Friardale Station, and along the road which ran past it. Wharton and his companions had taken Cliff House, Pegg, and the seashore.

"This is a knock-out!" said Bob.

"I think it's pretty certain he hasn't been near Pegg," said Harry. "We saw Dick Trumper's father. He's been on the beach mending nets ever since early morning, and hasn't seen any stranger at all."

"Well, he hasn't been to Friardale Station," Johnny Bull said. "They hadn't forgotten him there. The station-master says he'd have known him if he'd met him at the other end of the earth."

"And the porter remembered how he tumbled you over that truck, Harry," said Bob, not too tactfully.

"There's Squiff & Co.," Harry said.

He did not want to talk about that.

Squiff, Tom Brown, and Delarey, like the other two parties, had nothing to report. But they seemed very thoughtful; and after a bit, as they walked briskly towards Greyfriars, Squiff said:

"Browney's struck rather a rummy notion, you fellows."

The six looked at Tom Brown. The New Zealand junior was not much given to striking "rummy notions." His brains were the sort that belong to a level-headed fellow.

"I don't say I'm right, mind you," he said now. "I don't say there's anything in it. I only say there may be."

"But what is it?" asked Bob impatiently.

"Don't be in a hurry! Did Sammy remind you of anyone?"

"Nobody on earth!" answered Bob promptly.

But the rest took time to think.

"Now you mention it," Mark Linley said, "there was a kind of familiar look about the chap."

"Rats! Sammy was one all by himself—wasn't he, Harry?" said Bob.

"I'm not so sure," Harry replied. "I was trying to think what he would have looked like if he hadn't been such a goat."

"What's the use of that? He was a goat, and——"

"His features," said Johnny Bull deliberately, "were a bit like that bounder Wibley's."

"Got it!" cried Piet Delarey.

"Good lad, Johnny! Go up one," said Squiff. "There's brains in our study, you fellows."

"But he couldn't——"

"Do you mean that Wib has been sending a brother or a cousin along to do us all down?" Frank Nugent inquired.

"If he has, we'll jolly give him jip!" said Bob.

"I don't see that there would have been any need for that," said Tom Brown.

"Why not?" asked Bob, puzzled.

"I see," said Harry. "Wib was away all the time Sammy was here!"

"But he got the week-end off through his father's calling to ask for it from the Head," Mary Linley objected. "His people would have expected him at home, and he couldn't be in two places at once."

"We haven't any proof that he went home, Marky," said Johnny Bull. "He turned up jolly early this morning for a chap who had had to come from town, I know that."

"And Sammy was like Wib," Frank said. "The more I think of it the clearer I see it. Wib looks sharp as a rule, but he can look silly enough for anything when he likes."

"It was Wib!" cried Harry. "Now

I remember something else—two things. Didn't the bounder chortle in advance over some trick he was going to play us in revenge for that bumping? And think of the sardines!"

"Gone a little bit—er—queer here, Wharton?" inquired Delarey, tapping his forehead.

"No, ass; of course I haven't! You chaps may not know, but we do."

Bob and Frank, Johnny and Inky all grinned.

"The sardineful trickfulness was very like the ludicrous and esteemed Wib," said Inky.

"We offered him one rather ancient sardine when he came to tea with us after annoying us a bit more than enough about the props he had hired from old Lazarus," explained Harry, "and——"

"When Sammy had had Bunter in to help him wolf all our grub he saved five sardines—one each, you know—and offered them to us," went on Frank.

"Oh, you duffers! You ought to have spotted him at once," said Squiff.

"No, old chap," objected Tom Brown.

"They couldn't have done that. It isn't a dead cert even now."

"It jolly well is!" said Bob.

"I don't think so," Mark Linley said. "It's suspicious, that's all. I think Sammy was Wibley, but I'm not sure."

"I'm sure enough to bump him as soon as we get back!" growled Johnny.

"Not good enough—not half good enough!" said Delarey. "That would be clumsy, Bull. We ought to watch Wib, and make sure. Then we could score off him some way for the spoof he played on us. Bumping doesn't pay the bill."

"You're right, Rebel!" said Squiff. "Bumping's all very well for a fat fool like Bunter, or a cad like Skinner. Wib's no fool, and he's no cad. The game with Wib is to pay the bounder out in his own coin."

"If we can!" Wharton said doubtfully. "Wib's got back without a breath of suspicion, and he isn't going to give himself away now."

"Wib's fly," said Bob. "But however fly a chap may be, you can bump him. My vote's for bumping!"

But Johnny Bull had reconsidered the matter.

"No, Bob," he said in his deliberate way. "We can bump Wib any old time. That will keep. But if there's half a chance of bowling the beggar out before we bump him, I vote for trying that."

"As long as he doesn't get off the bumping I don't mind much," answered Bob. "But those sardines! My hat! How could we have been off smelling a rat?"

"The ratful smellfulness would have been the correct caper, my honourable chum!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The cheekfulness of the disgusting Wibley was terrific. But the bumpfulness at the proper timefulness shall be likewise terrific!"

"Hallo! There's Smithy and his lot!" said Bob. "And here come Toddy & Co.!"

They were very near the gates by this time. Bob had turned to look down the road behind them after sighting the Bounder, Tom Redwing, and Dick Rake ahead, and had seen the four who had taken the Courtfield direction.

The Bounder's party was the first to reach the nine.

"Any luck?" asked Squiff, in rather an indifferent tone.

"None at all," said Vernon-Smith.

"We met Pon & Co. just now," remarked Rake, with a grin. "They hadn't seen anything of Sammy, but

they made it jolly clear that they rather hoped he was drowned or run over."

"They don't seem to like Sammy for some reason," Redwing said. "At least, Ponsonby doesn't. The others didn't seem so bitter."

"It was Pon Sammy scored off," said Wharton.

"You spoke as if you didn't expect us to have had any luck, Squiff," remarked the Bounder, who was not the fellow to fail in observing small signs. "You chaps found him?"

"We have—or think we have—and we haven't," said Piet Delarey cryptically.

"If that's a riddle, I give it up!" Rake said.

"It's not a riddle, and it's hardly a secret, since nine of us are in it," said Squiff. "Better tell 'em, Wharton, eh?"

Peter Todd and his party came up at this moment.

"What's the giddy news?" asked Russell.

"Have you any?" returned the Bounder.

"We have. We've discovered that, whoever Sammy may have been, he was some sort of a fraud," said Peter Todd.

"Sounds interesting," remarked the Rebel. "That's something like what we fancy we've found out."

"Go ahead with your yarn," Ogilvy said.

"No, you first," rejoined Wharton.

"Well, we've run against the real Samuel Benson, on his way to Greyfriars, and on the day when he arranged to be there—or when his parents, guardians, godfathers and godmothers arranged for him," Peter said, in his most solemn tones.

"It's straight, too. He knows Wibley," said Bulstrode.

"Yes, he seems to be telling the truth about that, though I rather fancy he's the kind of bounder who would prefer lying as a general thing," Russell added.

"Oh, Wib knows him, does he?" said Squiff, with a comprehensive wink at those in the secret.

"And Wib knew all about when he was coming here, did he?" growled Johnny Bull.

"Yes, that's the yarn. They met under shelter from that storm last Friday. That's what we've discovered—no Herlock Sholmes about it, though we did have Toddy with us," Ogilvy said.

"There's a bit of Sherlock Holmes—the real thing; not Peter's spurious imitation—about our discovery," said Squiff.

"Out with it!" snapped Smithy.

"We've waited long enough."

"Well, we've discovered that Sammy was—"

Squiff paused expressively. Those in the secret grinned. Those who had yet to hear it fidgeted.

"Was—don't faint when you hear it—no—"

"Get on, duffer, do!" roared Bulstrode.

"Was no other than—do you think you fellows can stand a shock? Hold Russell up, Ogilvy. He's looking faint!"

"If you don't—"

"Oh, Toddy, Toddy, am I not trying to tell you? You bounders do interrupt so rudely! Sammy was—at least, we think he was—it's got to be proved yet, of course—that's where you come in, Toddy, and Smithy, too—Sammy was, who—"

"Wib!"

It was Bob Cherry who hooted that monosyllable. Bob had lost patience with Squiff.

"Robert, you grieve me! I was just about to tell them," said Sampson Field sadly.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Watching the Watcher!

"ROT! It couldn't have been Wib!" said Bulstrode.

"I don't see how," Tom Redwing agreed. "Wibley was away."

"Was he? That's just the point," said the Bounder. "Wib was away while Sammy was here, and no sooner had Sammy apparently done a bunk than Wib turned up again—a good deal earlier than anyone expected him. Rake, you rascal, you're grinning! Are you in Wib's confidence?"

"I'm not, Smithy—honour bright! If I was I shouldn't give the old bounder away, you bet. But whatever genius hit upon the solution of the mystery—"

Tom Brown bowed.

"You, Browney? My hat, I'm surprised! You're the only chap who hasn't gassed—"

"I'm modest," said the New Zealander.

"And I haven't said a word since you fellows came up, so you can't say I've been gassing, Rake," protested Frank Nugent.

"Never mind that! Upon the sainted memory of my only Aunt Jemima Jane, I do believe Browney's right! It's just the kind of thing that sly old dog Wib would do. Won't there be a row if it comes out, though!"

"I've been talking of that," said Harry Wharton seriously. "It mustn't come out, that's all about it. Wib's done us brown, and we can take it out of him for it. We will, too!"

"Just won't we!" said Bob.

"Oh, rather!" growled Johnny Bull.

"But the Head and Quelchy must never know. If they knew, Wib would get the boot!"

"And where would the Amateur Dramatic Society be then?" asked Delarey.

"Where it was before he came," said Wharton, with just a suspicion of snap.

"You came after Wib, Rebel, but the Amateur Dramatic Society was here before him, and it would get along without him!"

"Of course, the beaks mustn't know," said Vernon-Smith. "That goes without saying. Why should they ever find out anything?"

"Well, what's going to prevent them from going on searching for Sammy, then?"

Fifteen pairs of eyes were turned upon Harry. For the moment no one saw his drift.

"They won't find him if they search ever so hard," said Tom Redwing.

"That's not it—"

"I see, Harry," said Mark Linley. "You're thinking of the Head's anxiety about him, and Quelchy's, too. Keeping it dark—"

"If they worry their blessed heads off it's got to be kept dark!" snapped Rake. "I'm not going to have old Wib sacked, I can tell you! Wib's a chum of mine."

"Ass!" replied Wharton politely.

"Wib's a chum of all of us, come to that. Anyway, we all like him, though he's a conceited bounder. We can't give him away. The fact that it would be sneaking settles that point. But what are we to do? It's rough on the Head, Quelchy's not such a beggar to worry; he's tougher. And, of course, he isn't responsible in the same way as the Head is."

"Just as much," said Peter Todd.

"Which is to say, not at all."

"I don't see—"

"You wouldn't, Cherry! But perhaps you will get your great mind on to the truth if I make it plain in very simple language."

"Go on!" snapped Bob. "If you can understand it, I fancy I can. I haven't got a nose as long as from here to the middle of next week, anyway!"

"Great noses generally signify big brains, whereas big feet do not imply extensive understanding, son Robert," replied Peter. "It's like this. If all of you will listen with such brains as you possess, as well as with the ears which I cannot doubt, most of them being prominent enough for—"

"Get on with the washing!" growled Bulstrode.

"The Head isn't responsible at all, my dear kids. He has his Benson now. I don't cotton to his Benson; but beyond all peradventure—"

"All what?"

"I forgot the kindergarten, Bob! Beyond all doubt the second Benson is the Benson who ought to be at Greyfriars. Well, then, the other Benson blew in from somewhere—"

"The other Benson was Wib. We've settled that," said Bob doggedly.

"Not to the Head! Never to the Head! The other Benson blew in from somewhere—probably from some foolish house—"

"Eh?"

"Amurrican for lunatic asylum, Robert dear, as you'll probably discover if ever you go to the great U.S.! He vamooses—more Amurrican—for translation, apply to Fishy. But what does it matter? The Head has a Benson—pretty poor specimen, but still, a Benson—one might say the Benson—to produce at need. What more does he want? What is Sammy to him, or he to Sammy?—as Shakespeare didn't exactly say."

"Won't Toddy knock 'em when he's a barrister!" murmured the Bounder.

"I can't quite see it your way, Peter," said Harry. "The Head isn't that sort. He'll worry till he knows that Sammy's all right."

"And we know that it's no use looking for him," Mark Linley remarked. "I haven't had a bad morning. I never believed but that Sammy was all right somewhere, so I didn't worry about him. But I can't see myself taking an afternoon off to search for him, not now that I know—"

"Nor I," said Tom Redwing.

"These chaps want to get on with the Greek and Latin," said the Bounder, with a hand on Linley's shoulder and another on Redwing's.

Smithy's face wore a smile that robbed his words of any trace of a sneer.

"It isn't exactly that," said Tom, flushing. "But it wouldn't be the dead straight thing."

"I agree," Harry Wharton said.

"Well, I was rather reckoning on two or three days more of it," said Bob, his face lengthening. "But if you fellows think—"

"Think for yourself for once, Cherry!" said the Bounder. "I don't mind owning that my conscience would stand it all serene."

"Same here," remarked Delarey.

"No harm in getting as many holidays as we can wangle," said Bulstrode.

But no one else spoke, though three or four looked as though they were of Smithy's mind.

"The sense of the meeting is with Wharton and the rest," said the Bounder.

"I'm not against any chap having a conscience, if he can afford such a luxury. We're tired, all of us. We can't go out again this afternoon. Might crock up, and not be able to play footer—what? And where's the use of being at Greyfriars if you can't play footer?"

"There are Hazel and Bolsover and Penfold, and all the rest of them," Squiff said. "They don't know a thing. It would be a shame to do them out of a

halfer if Quelchy's minded to let them take one."

"It would be more likely to fall on the Sixth," said Wharton.

"That's all right, then," replied the Rebel cynically. "Most of the Sixth haven't consciences."

"Well, they won't know anything. And, after all, it's more probable the Head will put it into the hands of the police," said Harry. "What are we going to do? We'd better settle that now."

"We're going to bump Wibley!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Not yet," said Ogilvy. "Let's watch the boulder till we're dead sure first."

"We may never find out," objected Bob.

"But we shall," said Rake. "You leave that to me. I'll watch the old fox! Fancy his leaving me out of a frabjous wheeze like this!"

"There are sixteen of us," remarked the Boulder, with a sardonic grin. "I won't say we can't keep a secret, because that's an individual matter; and I don't see anyone here whom I should consider a particularly leaky vessel—as long as Wharton and the rest can keep Cherry from whispering."

"Isn't it best to whisper when you've got a secret?" asked Bob innocently.

"Yes, dear boy, no doubt. But just as your ordinary tone equals another chap's shout, so—"

"Rats, Smithy! I don't talk so loudly as all that—do I, Harry—do I, Marky?"

But not even Bob's dearest chums could deny that Bob's voice was really a trifle noticeable.

"But if sixteen of us start in watching Wib all at once, Wib, who is no fool, is very likely to tumble to it pretty soon," Smithy said.

"We needn't let on," said Tom Brown.

"It doesn't mean that three or four of us will be always at his elbow."

"Oh, I never thought of so few as that! I was afraid he might find thirteen or fourteen there!" the Boulder said caustically.

"In fact, all but your extremely wide-away self!" Peter Todd snapped.

"An' Tom, here—an' Linley," replied the unruffled Boulder. "They've their Greek an' Latin to attend to."

"Oh, it won't be quite so bad as all that, Smithy!" said Wharton, laughing. "We shall only be on the look-out for Wib to give himself away."

"Wib doesn't give himself away with a pound of tea—not quite!" Dick Rake said. "But I'm the man to nobble the rascal sooner or later. No harm in the rest of you keeping your eyes open and your potato-traps shut—especially Cherry!"

"Why especially me?" demanded Bob.

"Because of that soft, sweet whisper of yours, old bean!"

"There's the bell for dinner," said Squiff.

All made a bolt at once. It was not so much that there was any compulsion upon them to be punctual at the dinner-table, in the circumstances. But all were decidedly peckish after their long morning in the open air.

At dinner they saw Samuel Benson the second.

He had been assigned a seat next to Skinner, and he seemed to find Harold Skinner's company congenial, as Skinner did his. They were very much of the same type, though Samuel Benson had had advantages in the way of becoming an all-round scoundrel that had been denied to Skinner.

Harry Wharton and the rest were very much of the same opinion about Samuel Benson as Peter Todd and the rest.

The eccentric Sammy, with his weird

ornithological theories, would have suited them far better than this fellow.

But Sammy had never really existed. They were all sure of that, and some of them more than half sorry for it. Sammy was William Wibley; but William Wibley was not Sammy, and therefore Sammy was no more.

As Squiff observed to Delarey, it would have been a comfort to have dropped a tear or two on Sammy's grave, only for the drawback that, in the nature of things, Sammy couldn't have a grave. To which the Rebel answered that, in Wharton's place, he would greatly have preferred to drop a bottle or two of ink down Wibley's neck.

Wibley knew nothing of all this. At present he had certainly not awoke to the fact that he was being watched.

This was, no doubt, largely due to the fact that Wibley's mind was concentrated on watching Benson.

Wib was now thinking far more of the plot in which he was sure this crafty-



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He faced fellow was mixed up than of his own possible danger.

He was longing for the time when Samuel Benson should give such definite cause for suspicion as would enable him to call upon the aid of others without giving away his own secret. He felt that once he had put the astute Boulder and long-headed Peter Todd, with perhaps the Famous Five and one or two more, on the qui vive against Benson, he would be willing to retire gracefully himself.

After all, he was an actor, not a detective.

And the watcher did not guess that he was being watched!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Samuel is Not Popular!

"I'M going to make it jolly hot for the rotter!"

It was Percy Bolsover who spoke these words, and he spoke them as if he meant them. But Bolsover

generally did mean what he said, especially when it was something unpleasant.

Samuel Benson, like Sammy before him, had been assigned to Study No. 10, with Bolsover and Dupont, the French junior. Bolsover had not minded Sammy so much. Sammy had readily undertaken to fag for him. He had not actually done any fagging. Wib would have shied at fagging for Bolsover. But Bolsover fancied that he would have done had he lived on, so to say, instead of vanishing into nothingness.

Samuel might be made to fag, perhaps; but Bolsover hardly thought of that. He had a grudge against Samuel.

"What's he done to you?" asked Wharton. "The chap's new here, and I think he ought to have fair play, Bolsover."

"What's he done?" howled Bolsover. "Why, he got me into the very dickens of a row with Quelchy this morning!"

"Was he one of the seven or eight who were sitting on you in order to help you maintain discipline, Bolsy, old top?" inquired Squiff kindly.

"No, he wasn't, then! He wasn't in the room at all! And there weren't seven or eight, only four—Kipps and Penfold and Morgan and Newland. I'm going to skin the rotters alive when I catch them!"

"I'd wait till then, if I were you," remarked Tom Brown. "But how was Benson responsible?"

"Why, Quelchy would never have gone out of the room if the silly ass hadn't come, you chump!"

"There never was such a chap as Bolsover for sheer logic!" said Rake.

"No good your arguing with him, Brownie," said Bulstrode.

Bolsover scowled at them all. Bolsover was a dull fellow, and he hated being chipped.

"There's another thing," he said slowly, his brain working with a difficulty that was made plainly evident by the contortion of his heavy face. "If this sweep hadn't turned up, some of the rest of us would have got a holiday this afternoon, as you boulders did this morning. But now he's come the old bird and Quelchy—silly asses!—think poor old Sammy doesn't matter so much, and they've turned him over to the police."

"Have they?" asked Frank Nugent quickly. "How do you know, Bolsover?"

"Bunter had the yarn," replied Bolsover indifferently. "That's no odds that I can see."

"Listening again, tubby!" said Peter Todd reproachfully.

"Oh, really, Toddy, I should scorn to be guilty of such an action! I hope my principles are higher than that. I merely happened to be passing Mr. Quelch's study when—"

"You saw a pound of butter lying on the floor, and stooped to pick it up, intending to fasten your bootlaces with it," put in Delarey. "You're an eavesdropping pig, Bunter; but all that matters just now is whether you're telling the truth about this."

"I always tell the truth!" said Bunter virtuously. "It's a habit in our family."

"After which," said Peter Todd, "there is no more to be said. Poor old George Washington! Beaten to a frazzle by a lard-tub!"

It seemed that Bunter's story was true. Anyway, no further search-parties had been despatched—from the Remove, the Sixth, or any other Form. Wingate, appealed to by Wharton for information, told him that he believed the police had been notified.

"It's a queer bizney altogether," said the skipper of Greyfriars; "but you can see, Wharton, that this does make

difference. The Head's got the right Benson now. He would like to know what's become of the wrong one—in fact, he won't feel easy till he does know. But he isn't in the position of having to answer to anyone for him, as far as I can see."

Wharton reported that expression of opinion in the junior Common-room when he returned from seeing Wingate. It obviously eased the minds of some of those present, but it failed to make Harry Wharton feel quite easy. And Wharton was not the only one who thought enough of the Head to worry a bit because he was worried.

Samuel Benson was not in the Common-room. He was not in the study to which he had been assigned.

He was in Study No. 11, playing banker with Skinner and Stott and Snoop. Incidentally, he was winning the money of those sporting young gentlemen, who all chanced to be more or less in funds.

Skinner was something of a sharper, and Snoop and Stott must at some time have heard of such a thing as cheating at cards; but Skinner was not up to the mark of Samuel, and he left Stott and Snoop gasping in the rear.

As for Samuel, he felt quite happy. There was a home for him at Greyfriars after all! The fellows were not all so strait-laced as Wibley and the four he had met on the road, or as Wharton, to whom Skinner frequently referred with sneers.

These three suited Samuel. He smoked cigarette after cigarette, deepening the stains upon his lip and his right hand; and he cheated all three of his new pals with a combination of business and good fellowship that was quite admirable in its way—for anyone who admired that sort of thing.

He went next door with reluctance when the hour for prep came. The only thing that reconciled him to going was that he had practically cleaned out the trio by that time.

"Hallo, you young cad!" said Bolsover. "Here you are at last, then!"

"Doucement, doucement, mon ami!" said Napoleon Dupont. "You are not of ze vairy polite, Bolsovaire!"

"Oh, you dry up, Nap!" said Bolsover, in quite a different tone. Bolsover's growl was always softer when he spoke to little Dupont.

Samuel scowled at them both. He wished that he had been pitched into No. 11. It did not look as though No. 10 would be exactly home for him.

"Where have you been?" demanded Bolsover.

"Find out!" snapped Samuel.

"Oh, if you're going to take that tone with me—"

"Well, what sort of a tone are you taking with me?" snarled the new boy, backing towards the door. "I don't know you, and I don't want to. I was told to come to this study, and I'm not fairly inside it before I'm called a cad!"

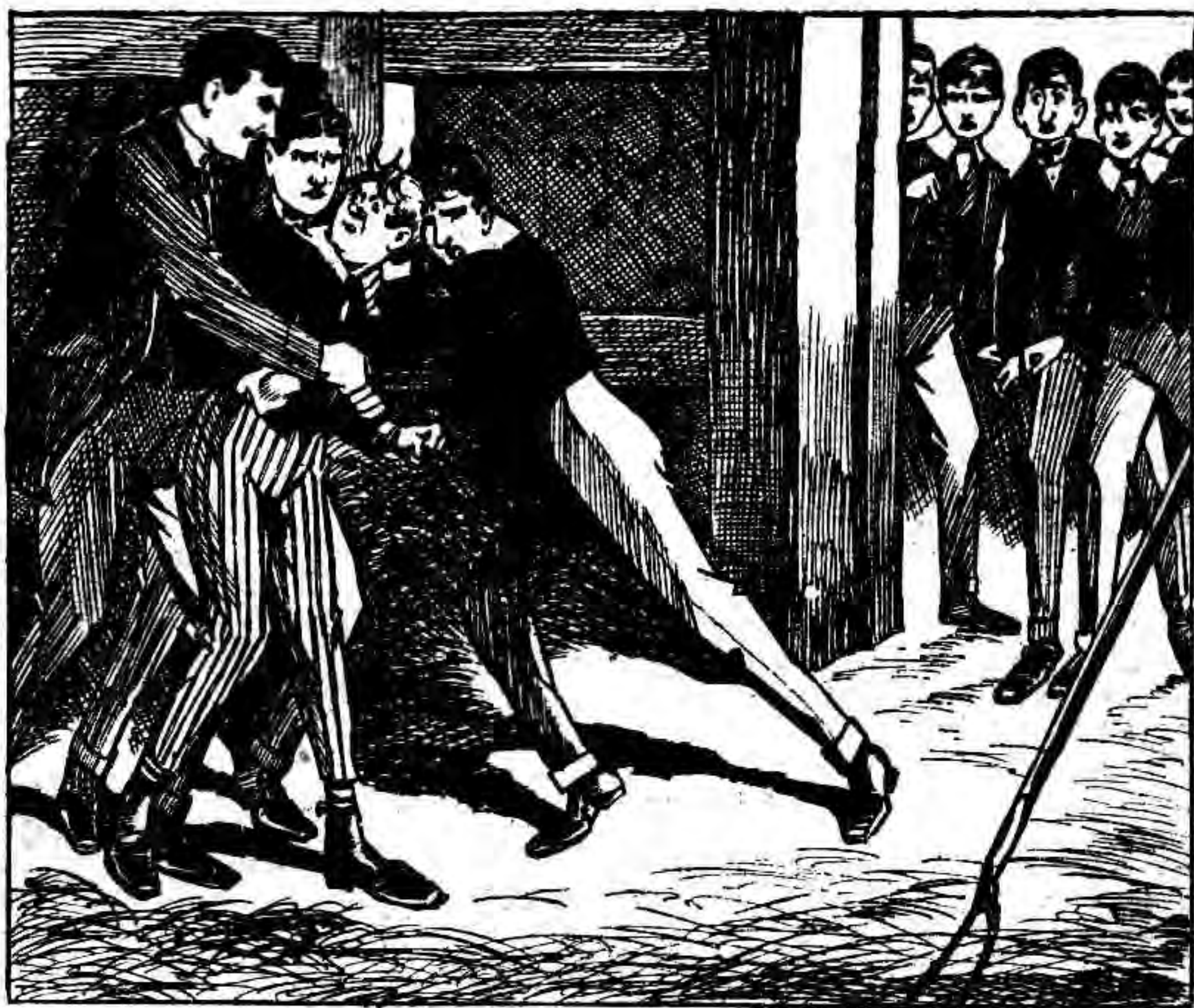
"You are a young cad!" replied Bolsover deliberately. "You look it, and you talk like it. But I dare say you can't help it. We'll improve him—eh, Nap?"

"Bettaire leave him alone, ees eet not, Bolsovaire?"

"Leave him alone be hanged for a tale! Sammy was going to fag for me. Nice chap, Sammy, though a bit barmy on the crumpet. This chap will have to fill his place, that's all."

"I'm not barmy on the crumpet, thanks!" sniffed Samuel.

"Not you! You're as cunning as a waggon-load of monkeys! Have you rooked Skinner and those other worms?"



Remove to the rescue! (See Chapter 12.)

"I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Don't you suppose I know what little games you've been playing? Bah, you smoky rotter! Your mouth's filthy with the stuff! I'll make you wash after prep!"

"You'll make me do nothing!" snarled Benson. "Don't you touch me, or you will be sorry for it!"

"Take of heem no notice, Bolsovaire!" said Dupont.

"Oh, shut your jaw, you blooming Froggy!" snapped Benson.

Napoleon looked hurt. So did Benson next moment, for Bolsover's heavy hand descended upon his head with a mighty thwack.

"You do that again!"

Bolsover promptly did it again. The invitation exactly suited his mood.

"Now!" he said, breathing hard.

"You're a bully!" whined Benson, evidently thinking better of his outburst of defiance.

"I've been told that before," said Bolsover, standing within a foot of him with folded arms, and glowering down at him.

"Yes, I should think you couldn't have been off that," answered the new boy.

"Do you want any more?" hooted Bolsover.

"I'll dashed well kick your shins if you try it on!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Bolsover could hardly believe his ears. Percy Bolsover saw nothing out of the way in knocking about a fellow below his fighting weight, though that was not a common practice at Greyfriars. But a threat of shin-kicking—that was right off the rails—the sort of thing that wasn't done; little better than indecent!

"You needn't howl at me. I mean what I say!" snarled Benson.

"If I hit you again you'll kick my shins?"

"Haven't I said so?"

"Well, take that, then!"

For a third time the heavy hand of Bolsover descended upon the devoted head of Samuel Benson.

And at once the right foot of Samuel

shot out, with all the force and spito Samuel had in him behind it.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bolsover, hopping on his right leg and clapping his left with both hands. "Yooop! Yow!"

"Told you I should!" said Benson, half nervously, half defiantly. "Now p'raps you've had enough?"

"I have! You haven't!" howled Bolsover. "I'll slay you for this! I'll cut you into mincemeat! I'll—"

"Ow! Oh! Ah! Yow!" wailed Benson, as he went down before the bull-like rush of the irate bully.

"What's all this?" asked a voice at the door. And Bolsover, with one hand gripping Benson's throat and the other pommelling his head, as they lay on the floor, looked up to see Piet Delarey, from Study No. 12.

"This cad's hacked me!" yelled Bolsover.

"Well, you can't kill him for it," said Delarey coolly. And he tried to drag Bolsover off.

The Rebel was stronger than he looked; but he had not strength enough for that. The most he could manage was to loosen the savage grip that was making Benson's cunning face go strange colours.

"Lend a hand, Squiff!" he gasped.

Squiff, second on the scene, willingly lent a hand; and behind him came Johnny Bull and Fish, Mauleverer and Vivian, Skinner and Snoop and Stott, Bob Cherry and Mark Linley and Inky and Wun Lung, from the studies nearest No. 10.

But the alarm had spread along the passage now, and others came hurrying up. Way was made for Wharton, though Skinner refused to shift an inch till Tom Brown shifted him.

At times like this the Remove looked to Wharton for a lead.

Delarey and Squiff and Johnny Bull dragged Bolsover up, and Fishy gave Benson a hand.

Bolsover stood breathing hard, full of fury. He did not turn upon Delarey; he might have turned upon Harry or Bob, but he had a curious liking and respect for the Rebel.

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Benson gasped and groaned. The fellow was really hurt, no doubt; but he was certainly making the most of it.

"I say, Bolsover—"

"Just you look at this before you say anything, Wharton!"

Bolsover turned up his trousers and pants from his left leg.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry.

"Whew!"

"Crumbs!"

"I don't wonder, Bolsy—"

"He slogged me first!" whined Benson. "I warned him, too!"

It was a hack. It had cut through skin and flesh right down to the shin-bone. No one there had ever seen a more savage hack.

"Nothing could excuse that!" snapped Wharton. "It's dead off! If you can't learn better than that, Benson, you will have a pretty warm time of it here, I can tell you!"

Bolsover clutched at the Rebel's shoulder. The sight of his wound had done what the pain of it—though it was painful enough—could not do. He felt faint and sick.

"I clouted him—that was all," he said.

"I dare say I clouted him hard—"

"I wouldn't doubt you!" murmured the Bounder.

"But he cheeked me!"

"Come along with me and get that dressed, Bolsover!" said Delarey.

Bolsover went, and Napoleon followed the two. No one else stirred.

Benson, with his eyes cast down, knew that ever so many pairs of eyes were upon him. He felt no shame. Fair play was no part of his code. But he did feel that it was rather a pity a thing like this should have occurred so early in his stay at Greyfriars.

Everyone was waiting for something—for Wharton to speak, though perhaps they did not all realise that it was for that they waited.

Not all there loved Harry Wharton; but for all—even for those who sneered at him—he did represent as high a standard of honour as they knew.

But Harry had already spoken. He had no more to say. Useless to rub it in! Useless if the fellow was sorry—doubly useless if he were not, for in that case there was nothing in him to which one could appeal with any hope.

Straight in the eyes Harry looked him as he lifted his sullen gaze. Then the captain of the Remove swung round and walked out.

Bob and Frank and Johnny and Inky followed him, Squiff and Tom Brown, Vernon-Smith and Peter Todd, Rake and Bulstrode and Ogilvy and Russell, Kipps and Morgan and Desmond and Newland and Penfold, Mauleverer and Vivian and Hilary, Redwing and Linley and Tom Dutton.

Only a few stayed. Wibley was one of the few, though he hardly knew why he lingered.

"This pal of yours seems a beauty, Wib!" sneered Trevor.

"He's no pal of mine!" snorted Wibley, as he turned away.

"Nor of anyone's, after this, I should fancy!" said Treluce.

It was plain that Samuel was not going to be popular!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

On the Watch!

"DID any of you ever rag the Head's study?" asked Benson.

Nearly twenty-four hours had passed since the scene in Bolsover's study, and Skinner and Stott had allowed their indignation against Benson to cool down. Perhaps it had

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never been quite at white heat; fair play was not a thing those two sweet youths cared greatly about.

But Snoop had shown unusual independence. The moment Benson had shown himself at the door of No. 11 Snoop had got up and walked out, brushing past him without a word, but with a look full of contempt.

Sidney James Snoop had a long way to go yet; but somehow there had come to him what Mr. Kipling's soldier described as "the makin's of a bloomin' soul," and he felt very differently about some things already.

Benson had suggested banker again. But Skinner and Stott had not been on; they had had enough of that the day before. Then Benson had fetched in quite a whack of delicacies, and the three had eaten until they could eat no more.

After that the conversation had got on to the subject of things done at Greyfriars which should not be done—study-ragging amongst them.

It was the vicious, spiteful kind of study-ragging Skinner held in memory and told of now. A mere jape, done by one fellow to others with whom his quarrel was more than half fun, was nothing to Skinner. It would not have amused Benson, either. But some of the things of which Skinner told him now amused him highly.

His query made both Skinner and Stott start.

"My hat, no!" replied Skinner. "That would be a trifle too thick!"

"I don't see it," said Benson. "He's about the softest stuff I ever struck! What does he worry for about that chap who turned up here in my name? Suppose the silly ass has had a fit, and kicked the bucket, what's the odds to him? I shouldn't worry in his place."

"Nor yet me," Skinner said. "Sammy wasn't his bizney."

"He's not ours, I suppose," said Stott. "But I should like to know what became of the potty ass."

"If you ask me," remarked Skinner. "Sammy wasn't near so potty as he seemed. You don't really know anything about him, do you, Benson?"

"Not a dashed thing!" answered the new fellow. "Even the name might have been just a what-d'ye-call-it—coincidence, ain't it? Plenty of Samuels about, and Bensons ain't so specially rare."

"How do you mean about his not being potty, Skinney?" asked Stott.

"He might have been up to some deep game," said Skinner.

"Not he! Too jolly soft for that!"

"You might as well say that I'm up to some deep game, old top," said Benson, watching Skinner's lean, crafty face out of the corner of one eye.

"Well, you might," replied Skinner. "You're as deep as they make them, I fancy. But, after all, you're the right Benson, and Sammy wasn't."

"If I'd any deep game on here I should keep out of your way, old pal," said Benson. "You're too fly. You'd bowl me out."

"I don't exactly go about with my eyes shut," chuckled Skinner.

He had no suspicion that the wool was being drawn over his eyes most effectively at that moment.

"What's your down on the Head, Benson?" inquired Stott.

"Can't stand him! He's worse than Quelch, and that's saying a heap."

"Rats! Quelch's ten times as big a nuisance as the Head," Skinner said. "The old boy keeps himself pretty much to himself. Quelch's too nosy."

"You don't see much of old Locke, then?"

"No. The Sixth do, of course. He takes the Sixth, though there's no real

need. Holmes, at St. Jim's, doesn't take a Form—more do most headmasters."

But Benson was not interested in the Sixth or in St. Jim's.

"What's he do with himself all the evenings?" he asked. "Sit in that blessed study of his, full of books that no chap could ever read, and write more books of the same sort?"

"Quelch's writing a book—History of Greyfriars," said Stott.

"Oh, is he?" returned Benson, with complete indifference.

Had Wibley heard he would have guessed at once why Benson was not interested in what Mr. Quelch was doing, or in the Head's day-time pursuits, or, in short, in anything but the time when it was most likely Dr. Locke's study would be empty.

For there was a big safe in that study, and in the safe so many things of value were kept that it alone would provide a burglar with a rich haul.

"I don't think the old bird's much in the scribbling way," Skinner said. "Rather a family man. There's Mrs. Locke, you know, and the kid, Molly. He's no end gone on her. The elder daughter's away; but she and the old bird are very chummy when she's here. I fancy they read foreign books together, and all such rot as that."

"Soft old ass!" sneered Benson.

"So you may take it that the Head isn't much in his study after about half-past six," said Skinner, never guessing how the new boy was drinking in his carelessly-given information. "But if you're going to rag him I guess you will have to do it alone. I tell you straight, I'm not on."

"Same here," said Stott.

"Oh, it was only a notion," Benson said. "I want to have some fun while I'm here."

"Going?" asked Stott, as he rose.

"Yes. I've one or two things to do."

"Thanks for the feed," said Skinner. "A ditto repeato to-morrow is quite agreeable to us if you're on. Never mind Snoop—we don't."

"I'd forgotten all about the slack-twisted rotter," Benson replied.

"Righto, Skinner! There's more where that lot came from, and tea next door ain't quite my line. That lout Bolsover and that Froggy don't go out of their way to be pleasant, I can tell you."

He went out. In the passage he saw Wibley, who, without betraying any special interest in him, went downstairs in his wake.

Behind Wib, as little observed by him as he was by Benson, came Squiff.

The sixteen had agreed that they had better take it by turns to keep an eye on the tricky Wib, and Sampson Field was on duty at that time.

Benson made his way to the letter-rack in the hall. There was a letter addressed to him, and he seized it eagerly.

Wibley stopped at the notice-board. His elaborate pretence of being totally uninterested in Benson seemed to Squiff badly overdone—just the kind of thing to give him away.

Squiff was sure Wib had followed the new boy downstairs with a purpose, though he was puzzled to know why Benson's movements should interest Wibley.

Benson's cunning face changed as he read his letter.

It puzzled him. What did the man whom he knew of as "Westy" mean about an appointment?

There had been no appointment; but here was Westy blowing him up because he had not been at the place named last night, and telling him to be there without fail at six to-night.

And it was already past six!

Benson had never met Westy. It was

his brother, who had posed as his father in making the arrangements for his stay at Greyfriars, who was in close touch with the mysterious chief of the gang. Samuel, though he had played minor parts in more than one burglary, was being trusted with a big thing for the first time; and he knew that he owed that promotion to the fact that he was the only person available who could play the part of a schoolboy with success.

But Westy believed that he had met Samuel. It was Sammy—otherwise William Wibley—whom he had seen when he had visited Greyfriars on the Sunday.

He had not doubted that Sammy was Samuel. Wib, though nearly bowled out in his first shock of surprise, had rallied then, had played his difficult part very creditably, and had got on to at least the outlines of the plot against the school.

Mr. Simeon West had not been very pleased with Sammy. That youth's failure to keep the appointment had angered him, too. But he did not refer in his brief letter to his visit, and Samuel could only think that the appointment had been made in some prior letter which had not reached him.

He glanced at his watch.

"Five past six—oh, hang it!" he muttered. "Wonder whether he'll wait? I shall have to go, anyway."

Wibley did not hear that; but when Benson darted off to get his cap and coat Wibley followed, feeling sure that the letter which has made Benson look so troubled was from Mr. West.

Wib felt now that he would have done better to have kept yesterday's appointment. He might have found out enough then to settle Benson once for all.

But there had been obvious difficulties in the way of keeping it.

He would have had to go as Sammy, and all that was mortal of Sammy, so to speak—the clothes which he had worn—lay beneath the floor of the barn, not easy to get at.

If Wib had tried to keep that appointment he would never have managed it.

But, of course, he did not know of the sixteen watchers. They—or some of them—would have followed him out, and have pounced upon him as soon as he had metamorphosed himself into Sammy.

He had made up his mind now that Samuel must be dogged.

It was not only Wib who was on the watch!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Wibley, the Detective!

SAMUEL BENSON, screened by the darkness of the quad, mounted the wall and dropped on the other side.

William Wibley, equally well-screened, from Samuel as from others, as he fancied, also mounted the wall and dropped. He had goloshes on over his boots, and he kept quite close to his quarry.

Sampson Field, Piet Delarey, and Harry Wharton mounted the wall in Wibley's wake, and also took the road. They had no goloshes; but they kept to the grassy edge, and Wibley, intent on Samuel, never heard or suspected them.

All five were guilty of the offence of being absent during the time of prep, as well as that of breaking bounds. But Greyfriars "crimes" were as little to Benson as military "crimes" of the technical sort seem to a civilian. Wibley never even thought of the double offence in his keenness; Squiff worried little about it, and the Rebel, who had a distinct strain of lawlessness in his nature, not at all; and if it troubled the law-abiding and conscientious Wharton he kept his trouble to himself.

It was a black night. The three could not really see one another; and they could not see Wibley at all. It could hardly be said that they kept on his track by hearing him, either. But somehow they knew that he was ahead, and somehow Wibley felt equally sure that Sammy was in front of him.

Thus they made their way to Friardale and the neighbourhood of the Cross Keys Inn.

Lighting restrictions had not made so very much difference to Friardale at any time; it had not meant much more than keeping blinds drawn. But now that the need for this was at an end there was a little more light; and Mr. Cobb's hostelry looked quite gay with the glow from its uncurtained windows.

Wibley saw the figure of Samuel Benson cross that glow, and knew that if he crossed it he might himself be seen. He did not want that, so he cast about for a way of being present unseen at the interview between Mr. West and his juvenile fellow-scoundrel without showing himself.

The three behind him halted. They knew that Wib was following Benson, though they had no notion why. They did not want Wib to spot them, of course. But to them the whole business, as yet, was scarcely serious.

To William Wibley it was of the most deadly seriousness. His heart beat faster as he made, in the darkness, a circum-bendibus which he hoped would take him within earshot of the two plotters.

But he had lost Benson, and he had thought to find him again without giving two people, who would naturally be cautious, any suspicion of his approach.

For the first time in his life since the craze for acting had seized him—and he could hardly remember the time when he had not been obsessed by it—Wibley had a dim notion that there were other things in the world more important than that of being able to sustain a part.

Acting was no use here. When a stage detective made the silliest blunders he was never dropped on to because of them, unless the action of the play demanded that he should be tripped up.

Here a blunder might be disastrous. Wib had to be a detective, not to act as a detective, and he found that the two things were very different.

He did not fail wholly, but his success was limited.

He only got within hearing just as the interview was nearing its end.

It had not been a long one. Westy did not like being kept waiting, and he was distinctly out of temper.

"Young Benson?" he said irritably, as Samuel approached him.

"Mr. West?" mumbled Samuel in return.

Neither could really see the other, or the keen eyes of Westy would have noted at once that this was not the "young Benson" he had seen at Greyfriars on Sunday.

"Why didn't you come yesterday, you whelp?"

"I couldn't help it. I—"

Samuel was still mumbling, and the man failed to notice the different voice because of that.

"Oh, stow excuses!" he broke in, with an oath. "They're no use. Done anything yet?"

"Found out a thing or two. Can't do it all in five minutes."

Westy peered at him through the gloom. The sulky tones struck him as not quite familiar. But perhaps that was only because they were sulky, he thought.

"What?" he snapped.

"Seen the safe, but not to get at the lock. Know when to go there so as to get at it, though."

"Ah! Well, that's something, as you say. If you work the riddle as you ought to there will be no need for anyone but myself to come inside. Here's the wax. Let me have the impressions by tomorrow, if possible. Leave 'em at the pub here, carefully packed up, and directed to Mr. Brownjohn. That's my name for the present. Don't put a note inside—at least, no more than a word or two making an appointment."

"Right-ho!" said Samuel.

Wibley heard the last few words of Westy's longish speech. He was now within three or four yards of the two, behind a tree, and feeling that, as a matter of choice, he would rather have been three or four miles away.

"Be careful with that wax!" said Westy impressively. "You have been taught all about using it. A good impression may save us no end of trouble in the long run."

"Oh, I know all about that!" mumbled Samuel.

"Cut back, then! I suppose you ain't allowed out at this hour, are you?"

"No. But that's all serene. I've got put up to the ropes a bit by a couple of fellows who think they're no end fly."

Mr. Simeon West had forgotten all about his momentary doubt as to the voice now. He had only heard Wibley speak a few sentences, and he could not possibly suspect that he had seen the wrong boy on the Sunday.

Had Benson said a word about the fellow who had apparently impersonated him at Greyfriars Westy would have been on the alert at once. If he had not been in such a hurry he would have heard something, for Samuel was still far from easy in mind about Sammy.

But, as it chanced, nothing was said to give Wib away as an impostor.

Samuel went. He passed so close to Wharton and Squiff and Delarey in the darkness than any one of them could have touched him by putting out a hand.

But, though they naturally wondered what had brought Benson to the village, they were not after Benson.

Wib was their quarry.

William Wibley, having taken on the role of detective, did not prove himself a duffer in it.

Nervous and curious as he was, he had prudence enough not to stir until Mr. West had moved away towards the Cross Keys. The three who were stalking Wib saw that burglarious gentleman pass into the inn, and a few seconds later watched Wib cross the glow of light.

"Shall we pounce on him?" whispered Delarey.

"No," replied Wharton. "We've found out nothing."

"In fact, it's all more muddled and mysterious than ever," said Squiff.

Certainly nothing they had seen or heard contributed anything to the identification of Wib with Sammy. They had seen little and heard practically nothing, indeed. Yet they had much to talk of as they made their way back to the school without any delay, but not in such a hurry as Samuel Benson and William Wibley.

Wib had for a moment or two a wild idea of catching up Benson and denouncing him as a scoundrel. But he quickly realised that this would be futile. He had a notion what the wax was for—to take an impression of some key of which the burglars wanted a duplicate—possibly that of the Head's study. It could hardly be that of the safe, for safes were not so easily opened, Wib fancied.

But all this was merely suspicion, not proof. Benson would have to go farther with his nefarious projects before it would be possible to trip him up. He

must still be watched. Already in Wib's mind there was the germ of a notion for the final denouement. And, as it was Wib's mind it was in, of course it included a star part for William Wibley.

"There's something fishy about Benson," said Squiff, as the three neared Greyfriars.

"Can't help thinking that he was in Wib's confidence about the Sammy bizney," returned Wharton.

"The worst of that theory is that it simply explains nothing at all, old top," said the Rebel. "To-night, doesn't look much like perfect trust between Sammy Wib and the Benson specimen, does it?"

And Wharton had to confess that it did not.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Upsetting Wib!

WHEN Benson got back to Greyfriars, and safely into the School House, he looked into Study No. 10.

"I suppose I can come in for a moment?" he said sulkily.

Bolsover glared at him.

"You've got to do your prep here. You're jolly late starting as it is, though that's no bizney of mine!" he growled. "Better get at it. But don't jabber. I bar your voice. And no more kicking of shins!"

"I'm not going to do it here at all," replied Benson. "I shall work in No. 11. I can't stand this study, or the chaps in it! But I want a book."

"Been adopted by Skinner & Co., have you?" Bolsover said, with a heavy sneer. "Well, you can't corrupt Skinner; he's past that. And you can't do much harm to Stott. Not so sure about Snoop; he's shown signs of decency lately. But he must look out for himself."

"Oh, as long as he doesn't get too near you I dare say he'll be all right!" answered Samuel, half in and half out of the door.

He pulled it to just in time to escape a Latin-English lexicon, which smote it with a heavy thud.

For a moment Benson grinned. Then his face changed. He slipped the slim volume of Virgil into his pocket, glanced round him, and then stole softly downstairs.

No use waiting. If Skinner had told him the truth about the Head's habits, there was quite a good chance of finding Dr. Locke's study dark and deserted now. He had a flashlight with him, and the wax was still in his pocket.

Wibley, who had come in while he was in No. 10, just missed him. Rake and Desmond hindered Wib by queries as to where he had been, to which they received answers evasive, if not actually untruthful.

Desmond was more curious than Rake, for Rake felt pretty sure that he would hear later where Wib had been, though not from Wib.

"Sure, an' ye're not cuttin' prep entirely, are ye, Wib?" asked Micky Desmond.

"No, ass! I'll be back in a minute," answered Wibley, at the door.

He looked into No. 10.

"Hallo!" said Bolsover. "What do you want?"

"Benson," Wib replied briefly.

"You've a queer taste!" said Bolsover, frowning. "You'll find him in No. 11. He has pals there, it seems. Better join the merry party!"

"Thanks! I only want him for a sec."

said Wib. "How's your leg, old sport?"

"Blow my leg!" growled Bolsover.

"Haven't time," returned Wibley.

"Blow it yourself, if it does any good!"

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You aren't half a bad hand at blowing, you know!"

"I'll give you——"

Wibley did not hear the rest. He had shut the door.

He looked into No. 11.

"I was told Benson was here," he said.

"Then you were told a dashed lie!" answered Snoop. "I won't have the cad here!"

"Snoopey's gettin' a big man—eh, Stott?" sneered Skinner.

It occurred to Wibley—too late—that it had been a mistake in tactics to say anything about Benson. To have pretended an errand to one of the three black sheep would have been more diplomatic.

"Oh, it's no odds!" he said. "I only wanted to ask him a question."

And he departed.

In the passage he hesitated.

Benson had represented to Bolsover that he was doing his prep with Skinner & Co., that was clear.

It was also clear that he had lied.

Where was he?

Wib remembered the wax. What was more likely than that the young scoundrel was acting at once upon Westy's instructions?

To follow him Wib must run a considerable risk. A junior found near the Head's study at this hour of the evening would have to give an account of himself.

"But it's a bigger risk for that cad than it is for me," Wib muttered to himself. "And if he can take it I can. Wish I'd the Bounder, or Wharton, or someone in this with me, though!"

Wharton—with Squiff and Delarey—was nearer than he imagined. The three were then just coming from the box-room.

Wibley stole cautiously through the gloomy passages, half believing that he was on a wild-goose chase.

But it was worth while. If only he could catch Benson with those wax impressions upon him, surely it would be enough to convict the fellow!

And, once he had been settled, Wib meant to put to rest the Head's anxiety about Sammy.

He had thought out a scheme for that. The back of his mind was busy with it even as he stole downstairs, thinking of Benson and his criminal mission.

It is a mistake for anyone to try to think of two things at once. It is a particularly big mistake for a detective, who, while thinking of his immediate task, must have his eyes open for all that goes on around him.

Wib, pursuing two trains of thought, failed to see the faces of Wharton, Squiff, and the Rebel peering over the balusters at him.

"What's he up to now?" whispered Wharton.

"Blessed if I know!" replied Squiff. "It's a mysterious old Wib, hanged if it isn't!"

"I rather fancy he must be on Benson's tracks again," Delarey said, "though if you ask me why, I can only say I give it up!"

"Shall we follow him?" asked Squiff.

"I don't know. It's getting a bit thick. We ought to be at prep," Harry answered uneasily.

They did not follow. They waited, in a dark corner.

Wib went on, and now the returned Sammy project, which had only come into his mind as he left Bolsover, was in the forefront of his thoughts, and it was almost mechanically that he bent his way towards the Head's study.

The passage in which it was showed no light. Wib began to wonder in a dazed sort of way what he was doing there.

Then he heard a sound in the darkness—the sound of stealthy feet!

He was on the alert now. He forgot about Sammy, and thought only of Samuel.

He held his breath. Somebody slipped past him in the gloom. He started at once in pursuit.

Then something happened. He pitched suddenly forward, restraining a wild yell by a great effort.

Benson had heard him behind, had stopped right in his path, gone down on hands and knees, and allowed Wib to fall over him!

He was on his feet again in an instant, had stridden over Wib, out of whom most of the wind had been knocked, and was round the corner of the passage and on the lowest flight of the broad staircase before Wib had scrambled up.

Wibley followed. He could hardly comprehend what had happened to him; but he knew that it must have been Benson who had thrown him, and he burned for vengeance.

Squiff gripped Harry Wharton by the arm.

"Don't move!" he hissed. "Pict, don't stir!"

They stood in their dark corner, and saw Benson pass. He was flushed, and apparently excited, they saw. But, of course, they had no clue as to the reason for his excitement.

A moment later Wibley appeared, also flushed, and also excited. Wib's face was fairly working with rage, indeed.

But just as he reached the top of the stairs, and the three were hesitating as to whether they should reveal themselves, Bolsover major's big voice spoke.

"Ah! Just the chap I wanted to see, Wib!" said Bolsover sharply.

Wharton and Squiff and Delarey stood still. There seemed nothing to be gained by revealing themselves to Wibley then; on the contrary, it might spoil their chances of catching him out.

They could not guess that they would have helped Wib in a matter of real importance had they stepped in to prevent Bolsover's delaying him.

Wibley wanted to catch Benson with those wax impressions still upon him. He could not be sure, of course, that he had any wax impressions; but in the heat of the moment he was prepared to take the risk.

There was something in the notion. It might have turned up trumps. But Bolsover, all unknowingly, spoiled any chance of that.

"Get out of the way!" panted Wib.

"I'm in a hurry!"

"Your hurry can wait! You cheeked me just now!"

Bolsover's shin was very painful indeed. He resented any inquiries about it; and he had particularly resented Wibley's, because he fancied that youth to be a friend of the fellow who had kicked him.

He had looked in upon Rake and Desmond, but had not found Wibley with his study-mates. Then he had visited No. 11, and had discovered that Benson was not there. For once his slow mind had leaped to a conclusion; he had felt sure that Wib and Benson were somewhere together.

So when Benson had come into No. 10 Bolsover had at once rushed out, and had met Wib.

Benson had the study to himself, for little Dupont had finished his prep, and gone to the Common-room. It might be only for a minute or two; but that was enough for Benson.

"Ass! I haven't seen you for——" began Wibley.

"You were chortling about that hack your pal gave me, you rotter!"

"Pal be hanged! The cad's no—
Ow-yow! Yaroooh!"

Bolsover had not really meant to do what he did. No doubt he had intended to hurt Wib, but not to send him flying down a flight of stairs, to land with a mighty bump below.

"Oh, you dashed idiot, Bolsover!" snapped Squiff.

Wharton and Delarey rushed down to pick up Wib.

Bolsover glared at them in stupid surprise. He had no idea anyone else was on hand.

But he was not the fellow to attempt a denial of what he had done.

"I'm sorry!" he mumbled. "It was a good deal the silly ass's own fault. But I say, Wharton, he isn't really hurt, is he?"

"Of course I'm hurt, you dangerous lunatic!" howled Wib.

Bolsover gave a gasp of relief. The worst had not happened, anyway.

But William Wibley really was hurt. His bruises were many, and he had given one of his ankles quite a nasty twist.

Harry and the Rebel helped him up to his study. Squiff and Bolsover following. First aid was given to the injured ankle, but it was plain that it would be two or three days before Wib would be able to get about otherwise than limpingly.

"Makes watching the old chump dead easy!" remarked the rebel, who usually sounded more unfeeling than he was.

"Keeps him off watching Benson, too," said Squiff. "Perhaps we'd better take a turn at that ourselves."

"I wonder why he's dogging Benson?" said Harry thoughtfully. "It's queer, too, that new rotter being downstairs after something."

He did not guess how near he was to hearing all about it. At that very moment Wib was considering whether the time had not come to call in others to his aid.

But he put away the thought. He would have to tell them all about his masquerade, and he was not willing to give away that secret until he had cleared up the matter of Sammy as far as the Head was concerned, and had some more definite evidence against Samuel.

"After all, they can't get a key made from a wax impression in five minutes," he told himself. "And I dare say I can get about enough to keep Mr. Burglar Benson more or less in sight."

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Wibley's Plans!

THE Head was still worried about Sammy. Not the slightest news concerning that eccentric specimen had been gathered by the police, which was really not surprising in the circumstances.

There was no doubt about the Head's trouble. He looked haggard. Doubtless he had visions of poor Sammy lying dead somewhere after one of his fits. No responsibility could fairly be thrown upon him; but Dr. Locke was a more than usually conscientious and sensitive man, and he felt his position acutely.

Everyone could see it, and Wib saw it with the rest.

Wib thought it rather foolish of the Head, but his conscience was not easy.

His mind was busy, however. While crouched by his injured ankle he thought out the plan which had been vaguely present in his mind when he had been shadowing Benson in the dark corridor.

"Sammy must reappear."

It was the only way to satisfy the Head, and, though there were difficulties, it was by no means impossible.

Sammy would not come back to stay,

of course. If he did, Wibley would be supposed to have disappeared, and there would be a new search and more trouble.

But before Sammy came back the Head must have a wire. The supposed sender would be Sammy's father. No address would be given. Wib could manage to get the wire sent from London all right.

The wire would say that the sender's son, who was mentally defective, had been traced to Greyfriars, and that Dr. Locke was earnestly desired to send him back.

Sammy must be represented as potty, Wib decided; it was the only way. Practically, Sammy had been potty.

Then, before the Head had time to think things over, Sammy would stroll in casually, as if unaware that he had been away for more than a few hours. Wib chuckled at the thought of the chance that would give him in the acting line. Why, it would be better than Hamlet! But he would have preferred some audience other than the Head.

Sammy would be sent back. He might be sent back under escort; if so, there would be more difficulties to circumvent. But Wibley made up his mind that poor potty Sammy should cling to Wharton, and plead for him as escort. Wharton might not be keen. Wharton could hardly be keen, indeed. He must have had quite enough of Sammy. But a few words to him would put it right, for Wharton was very generous, and would help Wib to escape the wrath of the Head.

There was the matter of the telephone call which had prepared the Head for Sammy's coming on the Saturday, when he had not expected Samuel until the Monday.

But poor potty Sammy could not be expected to explain that, and most likely the Head would forget till he had gone that he had no address to which to write for any explanation.

Wibley was quite satisfied with his plan. But he was bound to wait until his ankle was better before he could put it into execution.

Three days passed. Benson did not grow more popular. Snoop cut him—even Snoop! Bolsover major growled whenever he saw him. The decent fellows in the Remove gave him the cold shoulder. Even Skinner and Stott got rather fed up with him; while Angel and Kenney, of the Upper Fourth, after one brief trial, made up their minds that he was not their sort. Probably they found him too fly for them.

But Benson did not care. He knew how very brief his stay at Greyfriars was likely to be. He considered the place barely preferable to prison. But he had not been to prison yet; that experience waited for him in the future.

On Friday Wib found himself able to get about again without any trouble. So far as he could make out, Benson and his confederates outside had not made any progress with their plans. Wib was not a born detective, by long odds; and it had not occurred to him that the next step they would take might be the final one.

He had, indeed, begun to wonder whether he was wrong about the whole affair, after all—whether there was any other possible explanation of Samuel Benson and Westy other than that at which he had jumped. And that doubt, combined with his faith in his own ability to cope with the situation when it arose, kept him from telling anyone what he knew and what he suspected.

When Wib was known to be fit again the watch upon him renewed its vigilance. The watchers had in the meantime devoted some slight attention to the doings of Benson; but, lacking the clue which

Wib could have given them, they had failed to note anything suspicious.

Thus matters stood on the night which was to see the clearing-up of the whole mystery.

Wib's plan had now been slightly altered. He had come to the conclusion that he would have to take some of the fellows—one, at least—into his confidence. While Sammy was present William Wibley, in his own proper person, must of necessity be absent; and he might be missed—would be missed unless something could be done to conceal his absence.

So Wib had planned to turn up at Greyfriars quite early in the morning in the guise of Sammy. The friend in town to whom he had entrusted the sending of the wire would hand it in at such an hour on the Friday evening that it would be certain not to get through that night, but also tolerably certain to be sent along first thing on Saturday morning.

The Head would get the wire. Sammy would turn up before breakfast. His coming would cause no end of excitement, and Wib counted on that to keep anyone from missing him even at breakfast. Sammy would refuse to be escorted home by anyone but Wharton. As soon as they had fairly started Wib would reveal himself to Wharton, change into his own clothes at the barn, out back, and make some excuse for being late in the Form-room.

Wharton would have to keep out of the way for some hours, of course. It was asking a good deal of any fellow to play such a part; and Wibley knew that it was not the part to appeal to Harry Wharton, with his keen sense of honour. Nevertheless, he felt sure that he could talk Wharton into it.

Perhaps he was right, perhaps wrong. No one can say, for things did not work out at all as Wib had planned them. There would, indeed, be no need to explain his scheme in much detail, but that without a knowledge of it his proceedings would not be comprehensible.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Caught!

WILLIAM WIBLEY tried in vain to sleep that Friday night. His mind was too full of all that he had to do on the morrow to give him any chance of real slumber.

Once he did doze off, and when he awakened, within ten minutes or so of dropping off, he had a vague notion that the soft closing of a door had aroused him, though he did not believe he had really been to sleep.

It was hardly to be called a sleep; but it had sufficed for Benson to steal out of the dormitory, open a window, and get back again, and to arouse no more than that vague suspicion in Wib, who had not lost interest in his movements by any means.

"Hang it all! I might just as well go along to the barn and get changed now," he muttered to himself. "I can creep in and wrap myself up in the box-room for the rest of the night. Better for Sammy to appear in the midst of them all unexpectedly than to walk in at the gates before old Gossy's eyes."

He got out of bed just as the school clock was striking one. He dressed quietly, and left the dormitory unheard by anyone but Benson.

Hardly had he gone when Benson scrambled out of bed, trembling in every limb.

At that very moment Mr. Simeon West and George, Benson's brother, were busy below, rifling the Head's safe!

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Benson was to have stayed until the next day, and then to have mizzled quietly.

He dared not stay now. He was in a panic lest the fellow who had gone out should warn the school.

He did not know that it was Wibley, and he did not know—though he may have had some suspicion—that Wibley had any special interest in him. He would not have believed a few hours earlier that so slight a matter would so shake his nerve. For he knew that there might be a hundred reasons for anyone's getting up and going out thus; that it was absurd to suppose it meant discovery.

But Samuel Benson, though a distinctly hard case, was a comparative novice in serious crime, and he had not the nerve to stay in bed.

In his hurry now he was not nearly so silent as he had been when first getting out. Before he had finished dressing some sound made by him awoke Harry Wharton—always a light sleeper. "Who's that?" asked Harry.

There came no answer. Harry sat up in bed. In the gloom he distinguished ever so vaguely what seemed to him like a moving figure.

Next moment he was quite sure that he heard the door close.

"Bob! Johnny! Smithy! Toddy!" The Bounder awoke on the instant. "What is it, Wharton?" he asked sharply.

Next moment a flash-lamp showed the empty bed of William Wibley.

"Tain't rising-bell yet!" mumbled Bob Cherry.

"Hallo, Smithy! What's the illumination for?" asked the voice of Peter Todd.

Johnny Bull growled. Others were waking—Squiff and Delarey, Frank Nugent and Tom Brown and Inky.

"By Jove! Benson's gone, as well as Wib!" said the Bounder.

They hurried on their clothes. "Must have gone together," said Squiff.

"But what in the world for?" said Tom Brown.

It certainly was mysterious; but no one doubted that the two had gone together, and that the mystery of Sammy was somehow at the bottom of their going.

"Who? Gone where?" inquired Dick Rake drowsily.

But drowsiness fell from him at once when he heard, and he scrambled out of bed in hot haste.

Mark Linley, Tom Redwing, Ogilvy, Russell, and Bulstrode still slept. But eleven of the sixteen were awake and afoot, and Bolsover major and Micky Desmond, the only others who had been aroused, persisted in being of the party.

Wibley, meanwhile, was making tracks for the barn on the Courtfield Road, intent only on his own project.

Benson, getting out by the same way as Wib, had made his way round the School House to the windows of the Head's study.

He hesitated. It was not likely that Westy and the other rascal would allow much light to be seen from outside in any case. But an inspection of the windows revealed the fact that the blind of one was pulled up slightly, and that they had gone. They had probably made their exit by the window.

Still Benson did not know quite what to do. The fact that they had come and gone made him safer; but he funk'd a return to the dormitory.

At last he made up his mind. They

would go to the barn, he knew. He would follow them there.

And he went—just in time for Wharton and the rest to spot him clambering over the wall.

They fancied at first that one of the two must have been just ahead of the other. But when they found that they had only one fellow in front of them they naturally followed him, although wondering what had become of the other.

Benson hurried. He had no suspicion that he was being followed; but he felt in danger till he had reached his confederates.

"Where on earth is the chap making for?" growled Johnny Bull.

No one could tell him. But Squiff announced his conviction that the fellow ahead was Benson, not Wibley.

"We've lost Wib, then," remarked Smithy coolly. "The only thing to do is to follow Benson. He may lead us to him."

And that was just what Benson was doing, although he did not guess it.

Wibley had already reached the barn, and had changed into his Sammy Benson disguise. That change was just completed when he heard footsteps and voices outside.

His flash-lamp went out on the instant. Next moment the door was pushed open, and two figures showed up against the less dense gloom of the sky behind them.

Wib tried a bolt. But as he attempted to dodge out of the door he was seized and dragged back.

Then a light was flashed upon him.

"Young Sam!" cried Westy. "What's he doing here?"

"Rats! That's not Sam!" said the other fellow sharply. "It's a dashed stranger—a spy!"

"It's—"

"I tell you it's not, Westy! Oh, hold him!"

Mr. West seemed to realise that this was no time for argument. He lent his aid to deal with Wib.

"Help!" roared Wibley, though of help he had little hope.

Into the barn dashed someone. It was Samuel Benson. Wib groaned despairingly. Here was help—but it was for the enemy!

He struggled his hardest. And he yelled his hardest, too.

And on a sudden there was an answer. Out of the corner of his eye he saw in the light of the flash-lamp, which lay on the ground, the familiar face of Harry Wharton, and behind Wharton's other faces.

"Rescue! Greyfriars!" he roared exultantly as he went to earth.

What did it matter that he should go down? For upon his assailants the storm broke. Like a pack of hounds the Greyfriars juniors rushed the three rascals and swept them to earth.

No one held back. Wharton and Bob Cherry, Smithy and Peter Todd, Squiff and Delarey and Tom Brown, Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull and Inky, Rake and Desmond and Bolsover—they were all eager.

Within thirty seconds Mr. Simeon West and his two young partners in crime were down on their backs on the floor of the barn, each with two or three Removites sitting upon him.

"And now, what's it all about?" asked Vernon-Smith coolly.

"Well, there's one thing done," said Squiff, no less coolly. "We've caught that bounder Wib!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Find yourself pretty bobbish to-night, Sammy?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"You've caught more than me!" answered Wib, breathing hard. "Unless I'm dead off the wicket, these three rotters are burglars! What's that bag just outside the door?"

"You leave that bag alone!" protested Mr. Simeon West, with a last attempt at bluff. "We're no more burglars than you are! Why, you young idiots, this chap here is one of your own school-fellows!"

"My hat! Cad Benson a burglar!" booted Bolsover. "Hanged if I didn't think so all along!"

"Rather a pity not to mention it to anyone, wasn't it, Bolsover?" asked Peter Todd sarcastically.

Delarey and Desmond dragged in the bag. It was not locked.

"Faith, it's some weight!" said Micky.

They dragged it open. Inside was the Greyfriars plate, with many other valuables!

"What's to be done" asked Rake.

"Two of us must cut over to the Courtfield police-station," said Wharton at once. "This is above Tozer's weight. Two more to Greyfriars to fetch the Head—or Quelchy—someone's got to be fetched—"

"I say, Wharton, there's me, you know!" protested Wibley.

"Oh, that's all right," replied Harry rather grimly. "Nine of us will be enough to look after you and the other three rascals—Sammy!"

The Bounder and Rake went to Courtfield, Peter Todd and Squiff to the school.

Outside the barn, beyond hearing of the three prisoners, Harry, Johnny Bull, and Piet Delarey argued with Wibley the question of his extremely awkward position.

"The blessed thing can't be explained if you don't own up, Wib," said the Rebel.

"And if I do own up I shall get sacked!" groaned Wibley.

"I don't think so, old chap," Harry said. "You've done good service. If it hadn't been for you those scoundrels would have got off with their haul. It was only through our watching you—"

"And me watching Benson!" put in Wib eagerly.

"Well, yes. All to the good if the Head sees it that way, anyhow. I think he'll let you off with a flogging."

"You seem to think a flogging doesn't matter a scrap," grumbled Wibley.

"Well, I think you've jolly well deserved it," replied Harry frankly.

"And a heap more!" growled Johnny.

Wibley rather thought he deserved recognition of a very different kind from a flogging—at least, he pretended to think so. But it was the flogging he got, with a lecture from the Head, which made him look very serious indeed for an hour or two. The effects of the flogging lasted rather longer than that!

Mr. Simeon West and Mr. George Benson got terms of penal servitude. Master Samuel Benson went to a reformatory.

As for Sammy—well, William Wibley, despite all his pride in his acting capabilities, does not quite like being addressed as "Sammy!"

(DON'T MISS "BUNTER THE PUNTER!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

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

GRUNDY'S CHRISTMAS PUDDING.

By GEORGE WILKINS.

I.

BY Jove! That's jolly good!" We were sitting in our study, doing prep—at least, Gunny and I were doing prep, and Grundy was reading an evening paper—when George Alfred Grundy suddenly gave vent to that exclamation.

But Grundy is often taken like that, so Gunny and I didn't even look up.

"Look here, you chaps, we can make puddings now!" said George Alfred, rather excitedly.

Silence.

He looked up, and frowned. He likes to be taken notice of.

"Listen to me, you idiots! We can make Christmas-puddings now. It says so here."

"Oh!" I murmured uninterestedly.

"Yes, oh! And I don't want any of your cheek, young Wilkins!" said the great man fiercely, glowering upon me. "I'm going to make a Christmas-pudding!"

That, at least, interested us—or, rather, startled us.

"What?" I gasped.

"You're going to which?" stuttered Gunny.

"Make a pudding," repeated Grundy firmly. "Blessed if I can see anything funny in that! Can't I do anything I try to do?"

"Ahem!"

"Who's going to eat it, though?" I asked. "Do you mean you wouldn't eat a pudding I made, Wilkins?"

"Rather not! That is to say, I'd love to—"

"Oh, rats! Now, you're a sensible kid, young Gunny—though not up to my standard, of course. You'd like to eat some of my pudding, wouldn't you?"

"If I wanted to commit suicide, or poison anyone, it'd be the first thing I'd try," said Gunny meekly.

"If you're asking for a thick ear, young Gunny—"

"Not at all; but I don't think it fair of you to make a pudding now that the undertakers are so hard worked over the flu bizney. Look at what the Head would say! There'd be glaring headlines in the papers about—"

"You—you—you—" spluttered Grundy, making a bull-rush at poor Gunny.

Gunny, like Falstaff of old, deemed that discretion was the better part of valour, and scooted.

Gunny reached the door, and opened it. As he did so a fat form fell in.

"Yow! Owp!"

Gunny made good his escape, but Grundy forgot all about him in his wrath at discovering Baggy. Baggy had, of course, been listening at the door. That's Baggy's little way.

"You fat slug!" hooted Grundy. "Listening at the door were you, you worm?"

"I wasn't! I—I didn't hear a word! I don't know that you're going to make a pudding. I—I—"

"Don't tell lies! You ought to be lynched, you—"

"Give him some of the pudding, Grundy," I murmured.

Grundy snorted, then kicked Trimble out of the room. He turned on me with a terrible frown.

"Now, young Wilkins, I'm about fed up with your cheek, and I'm going to give you something to remember!"

I fell on my knees.

"Mercy!" I wailed. "Spare me! Think of my poor mother!"

Grundy drew himself up to his full height. "Don't play the fool, George Wilkins—"

At that moment there came an interruption.

"When are you going to make your pudding?" chortled a voice in the passage.

"We don't want to see you make it. It'll be cheaper than the pictures, and more amusing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Grundy forgot me, and made a rush for the door. Then I fled.

II.

LOOK here, Grundy, you don't seriously mean that you're going to make a pudding?" I asked.

It was the day after George Alfred had first stated his intention, and Gunny and I were trying to dissuade him. Trimble had carried the news far and wide, and soon it was public knowledge that the great George Alfred was going to make a Christmas-pudding.

"Of course, I am!" snorted Grundy. "Didn't I say I was? If you're going to give me any more of your cheek, young Wilkins, I'll—"

"Not at all!" I said hastily. "But you don't know how to make one!"

Grundy snorted.

"I can soon find out. Anyway, I dare say I could make my own recipe all right. These people don't know how to make things. I've tried Mrs. Mimms, but she chased me out of the kitchen with a broom—"

"Ha, ha, ha—"

"Nothing to cackle at in that, you chumps!"

Grundy glowered on us fiercely.

Suddenly, without warning, he brightened up as if struck by a fine idea.

"I've got it!" he yelled. "The very thing!"

"What is it?" I asked curiously.

"I'll get hold of a pudding, and analyse it—"

"What?" we yelled together.

"Analyse it—take it to pieces to see what they use."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear! You'll be the death of me, Grundy, old man!"

"Oh, rats!" grunted Grundy roughly. "I'm going over to Wayland to get a small pudding from Haywood's, and I'll analyse it when we get back. May as well ask him what they're made of, though. You chaps coming?"

"Oh, I'll come!" I grinned.

"May as well see the fun!" chuckled Gunny.

"What's that?" frowned Grundy.

"N-nothing, old chap! Cold day for December."

"You're a potty idiot, young Gunny!" And with that Grundy led the way out.

Some snow was falling, but we didn't mind that much. At the gate was a small crowd of Third-Formers, headed by Wally D'Arcy. Each of the imps had a snowball behind his back, but all wore cherubic grins.

Whiz!

An extra large missile caught the great George Alfred behind the ear. He gave a yelp, and sat down. Of course, the fags piled in then.

"Yaroooooh! Wow! Help me up, you grinning chumps!"

We helped him up, and he made a rush for young Wally.

In a few seconds Wally was rolled down through the gates and out into the road. The other fags came after us in a hooting mob. Wally became a huge snowball in no time, for there was plenty of snow on the ground. At last Grundy left him yelling for help, and we strolled on to the station.

We boarded a train, and soon reached Wayland.

"Now for it!" said Grundy.

We followed him along the High Street, and he stopped outside Haywood's, the big Stores.

"Come on, you two!" he said, rather shortly. "I'm going to try here."

And in he marched. He went straight up to the counter of the provisions department, and, picking up one of the jars containing Christmas-puddings on the counter, said to the assistant:

"I'll take this. I don't suppose it's much good, though. These shop puddings never are much good."

The assistant looked none too pleased, but Grundy didn't notice that. He went on:

"Of course, it's not that there's anything

bad in them, y'know; but you people really don't know how to make these things. I'm going to make a pudding this Christmas—"

Grundy expected this announcement to prompt the young man behind the counter to kind remarks, such as "Are you?" and "It's sure to be good!" And then the great one would say patronisingly: "Oh, yes, of course! Look who's doing it!" But somehow this went wrong. All the man behind the counter did was to put his hand up to his mouth and snigger.

Grundy glared, then coughed.

"As a matter of fact, y'know," he said condescendingly, "I've never made a pudding before in my life, but I can do anything, y'know, if I try. There's one—ahem!—difficulty, though. You see, I've got no recipe for a pudding. What stuff do they use in them?"

The shopman's grin broadened. He had measured Grundy up all right.

"You want a recipe, sir?" he said smoothly.

"Yes, that's it."

"Very well, sir. Take three boiled eggs, one mashed potato—"

"Mashed potato—" repeated Grundy, who was writing down the recipe.

The man nodded, and continued. He wondered how far he could go with Grundy, and looked at us. Gunny gave him a knowing wink that might have meant anything, and the man nodded again:

"One tomato, three onions, a large quantity of soot—"

"What?"

"Three large bottles of liquid glue to keep the pudding together—"

Grundy was taking this all down. At the last ingredient everyone in the shop yelled with laughter.

"He's pulling your leg," I whispered to the great one.

"Rot, George Wilkins! Do you think anyone can pull my leg?"

Before I could answer he resumed his scribbling. He had been writing down without noticing exactly what it was he had written. When he coned over the list his brow grew dark. He glared at the grinning man behind the counter.

"Look here, you toffee-nosed baa-lamb—you pie-faced earwig—you—you—you—"

But the man went off to serve someone else.

Grundy stamped out of the shop, and we perforce followed. Grundy was scowling like Hindenburg by the time we reached the school, and the crowd of fellows at the gates who wanted to know when he was going to make the famous pudding didn't improve matters. In fact, most fellows would have given up the idea there and then. But there's nothing like that about Grundy. It only made him more determined than ever.

Several fellows tried to give him recipes after they had heard the one he had received at Haywood's. But Grundy was no longer to be taken in with such impossible ingredients as liquid glue and onions.

III.

GRUNDY got hold of a cookery book and swotted at it. In fact, he had bought all the necessary ingredients when somebody purloined the book. And he couldn't get another. Then it was that he received a 'phone call.

We waited for him to return, because we knew the joke. Cardew had rung him up, and was going to give him over the 'phone the recipe that Grundy had once had, with a few additions. Cardew, of course, spoke on behalf of the Stores.

After a few minutes Grundy came back beaming.

"It's all right, you chaps! That chap from the Stores must have repented, because he's just sent me a recipe over the 'phone. There were only a few things I hadn't got, y'know. And—and I should have got those all right in the end. There should be plenty of suet and brandy—"

"What?"

"That's right. Our cook at home always used brandy."

"Oh!"

And Grundy set about making that celebrated pudding. We watched him. He got a huge basin. He put in the eggs, after just peeling the shells off; and, of course, he didn't stone the raisins. It would at least be very indigestible. He also put plenty of brandy into the thing. And Grundy was going to arrange a study feed to mop it up! Luckily, Gunny and I had bought another pudding, which we meant to bring out for the feed. Grundy would think it was his all right. And his swank, though had enough, could not be worse than his pudding.

We could see that by the time he had cooked it it would be like a cannon-ball. Gunny and I had arranged to drop it into the Rhyll, though it would probably spoil the fishing there for a year or two.

"Twelve hours it's got to steam," murmured Grundy. "If I give it twenty it will be better cooked than if I gave it twelve. Wonder Mrs. Beeton never thought of that!"

Gunny and I winked at one another. We had passed the word round that the pudding used at the feed wouldn't be Grundy's, and all the fellows invited agreed to come. Grundy felt awfully bucked. He thought they were eager to taste his pudding.

"There! I think that will do!"

Grundy was finished at last. He looked hot and tired, but he didn't say so. And when we went to bed he seemed quite jubilant.

The next night, the pudding being finished, he took it out and put it in the cupboard. Our pudding was in the cupboard, but it was out of sight, and Grundy did not know of its existence. He left it there, having warned Trimble of what he would do to him if he dared to steal it. Trimble said that he didn't want to commit suicide—if he did he'd eat Grundy's pudding. Which remark earned him a thick ear.

That night—Wally D'Arcy told me this bit—Wally and his chums crept down to our study and lifted Grundy's pudding. They put in its place another pudding. To the casual observer this would seem very queer. But

the pudding Wally brought with him was Selby's.

Old Selby is rather greedy, despite the fact that he suffers a good deal from indigestion, and he had bought himself a pudding. He had to have one made specially for him, and young D'Arcy knew it. He also knew what Mr. Selby would feel like after eating Grundy's pudding. It would be bad enough to anyone with a cast-iron digestion, but to Mr. Selby—But Selby deserves no sympathy. He had been walloping young Wally only that morning for something that Wally hadn't done, and said he hadn't done.

Then, when the puddings had been exchanged, Wally & Co., with many chuckles, crept back to bed.

The next evening the crowd collected for the feed.

"Gentlemen of St. Jim's—" began Grundy.

"Hear, hear!"

"This is a really great occasion. We are here foregathered—"

"What?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hear, hear!"

Grundy had to sit down. He couldn't make himself heard.

"Pass the bread-and-butter!"

"Cake here!"

And the great feed started. For some time there was no sound but that of munching. Then, as the famous pudding was served out, talk began. When the last crumb was finished Tom Merry got up to pass a vote of thanks. The pudding was really a corker, and Grundy was beaming and swanking.

Just then the door opened, and Wally D'Arcy walked in.

"Hallo! Having a bun-fight?" said Wally affably.

"Buzz off, young D'Arcy!"

"How was the pudding, Grundy?"

"Topping!" we all shouted.

"Good! That was old Selby's pudding!"

"What?"

"Yes, Selby's pudding." And Wally explained.

Then Gunny and I had to explain that what we had eaten was our pudding, and that Selby's pudding was in the cupboard.

Grundy was mad.

"Do you mean, young D'Arcy, that Mr. Selby's got my pudding?"

Wally nodded.

"The rotter! My pudding! I'll get it back! Where's that rotten thing of his?"

We handed him Selby's pudding. He rushed off to Selby's room to get his own pudding, and we followed to see the fun.

Grundy rushed up to Selby's room and thumped on the door:

Thump!

Silence!

Another thump, and a weak voice muttered:

"Come in!"

In rushed Grundy.

Poor old Selby was screwed up in a chair, looking the picture of woe. One hand covered his face, which was horribly contorted. The other hand was affectionately covering his lowest but one waistcoat button. His legs were tied in knots.

"Yow! Wow! Garoogh!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Grundy. "What is it, Mr. Selby—a fit?"

Mr. Selby sat up.

"Yow! Getter doctor! Ow!"

"Yes, sir! But my pudding! That pudding you were eating was mine. I made it. Can I—Why, what—what—Yow! Stop it!"

Mr. Selby seemed to have recovered. He picked up a cane from the table, and rushed at the criminal who was responsible for his awful agony.

"You young hound! You murderous fellow! You shall be expelled for this!"

"Yow! Ow! Stoppin! Draggimoff!"

Selby, tired at last, dropped into the nearest chair, and recommenced his groaning.

"Yow! Wow! Oh, dear! That pudding! I'm poisoned!"

There we left him.

Tom Merry told Mr. Railton, and the doctor from the village came to see Mr. Selby. Of course, he wasn't poisoned. And when he was quite better he reported Grundy to Railton.

Then Wally, of course, owned up. And he got it—hot, too!

And Grundy never talks about his pudding now. At first he swore that we had eaten his pudding, and Selby had eaten one he had bought. But it wouldn't wash.

THE END.

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"BUNTER THE PUNTER!"

By Frank Richards.

What can you want better than a real Bunter story?

We cannot have the egregious one as the central figure of every week's yarn, of course. That would be overdoing it. But some of the stories in which his part has been the chief one rank among the best we have ever had. I know you will all agree with me as to that.

Next week Bunter gets into trouble. Nothing new in that—Bunter in trouble is quite a stock situation.

The novelty comes in the manner in which he does it.

All through a brain-wave! Fancy Bunter with a brain-wave!

Well, let it be admitted that the notion he got hold of was not nearly as gift-edged as he fancied it. In fact, it was a pretty rotten notion. But—

(See next week for the rest.)

AMATEUR MAGAZINES.

Mr. John W. Hoare, ex-President of the British Amateur Press Association, writes me a letter, some of which, at least, I must quote. He says:

"I read with interest your remarks under the heading 'Amateur Magazines' in a recent issue of the MAGNET, especially the last sentences: 'There is no harm in this amateur magazine business; there may be good in it. But there is certainly no money in it.' You are right on the last point. But who wants to make money out of an amateur magazine, anyway? I am sure that such

people are very few, if there are any at all. Amateur magazines, that are not official organs of organisations or school products, are generally issued by literary aspirants as an aid to their ambitions. In them they have printed their own efforts, which they circulate amongst their friends and others similarly inclined as themselves. It is possible that you are not aware that there is such a thing as organised amateur journalism, and that amateur journalists have a little world of their own. At the present time it is the Amateur Press Club which stands for this, and it has, I believe, a three-figure membership.

"Many of the members of this body publish little journals—in fact, I think the one which provoked your remarks is published under A.P.C. auspices—some printed and some h photographed. But in every instance it is for the pleasure of exercising their literary ability, and not with the idea of making money. They regard amateur journalism as a hobby, and pursue it just as others do fret-work, spending their spare time and money on it. An old-time amateur journalist has said of it: 'It is not likely to make the fortunes—in an immediate sense, at any rate—of either its upholders or its followers. It is a pleasant, mentally profitable pursuit, pointing the way in a practical manner to the professional literary goal. It is the training school of the literary apprentice. It initiates him into the methods and customs of the literary world. It broadens his mind, and provides him with that amount of interest, criticism, and encouragement necessary to ensure and promote his progress in literary endeavour. In short, amateur journalism is the ladder by which the journalistic aspirant mounts to higher things.'"

I find that I have not room this week for the whole of Mr. Hoare's letter, and I don't think it fair to cut it. So I will return to the subject next week. Meanwhile, I can only say that most of the youngsters who write to me on the matter of amateur journals do appear to be on the money-making tack. And, knowing a bit more about the game than Mr. Hoare is inclined to give me credit for knowing, I try to choke them off for that very reason.

YOUR EDITOR.

OUR COMIC COLUMN.

By Ralph Reckness Cardew.

(For this occasion only.)

[EDITORIAL NOTE.—Monty Lowther was in sanny when this was written. He says it was a clear case of effect preceding cause, for it was enough to drive him there. Cardew, who wanted badly to do it, says it is heaps better than Lowther's stuff. But he will not do it every week, he tells me. I don't always agree with Cardew; but I agree with him about that! I shall not let him.—T. M.]

When "it" rains, what is "it"?

If the plural of mouse is mice, why is not the plural of house—Oh, rats!

Is the man in the moon necessarily a lunatic?

The Kaiser is the head Hun. What's the matter with making him the headless Hun? (Hun—commonly good notion—what?)

Was it the bigamist who tried keeping both of them under one roof who said that there was no place like home, and that was why he had left it?

If a herring and a half cost three-halfpence, what did the whale charge Jonah for apartments?

If B-----'s P----- are worth a guinea a box, what was William Wordsworth? (Levi-son says the answer is "Nowt!" But Levi-son does not like "We are Seven," and he appears to look upon "The Idiot Boy" as a personal attack upon him. I wonder why?)

So many cows' tails, averaging eighteen inches each, would reach from the earth to the moon, it is said. If they only averaged seventeen and a half inches, what would the difference be? Answer: Half an inch. (Clive worked this out—in his own head. Some brains in No. 9—what?)

G----- H----- is a person of considerable understanding. And yet—and yet—But it would be very rude to finish this, and I decline to do so.

FOOTBALL NOTICE.—URGENT.

CLAREDALE ATHLETIC—1st XI.—15-16—wants home match December 26th, morning.—State age.—A. Gordon, 15, Cambridge Road, Barking, E.