

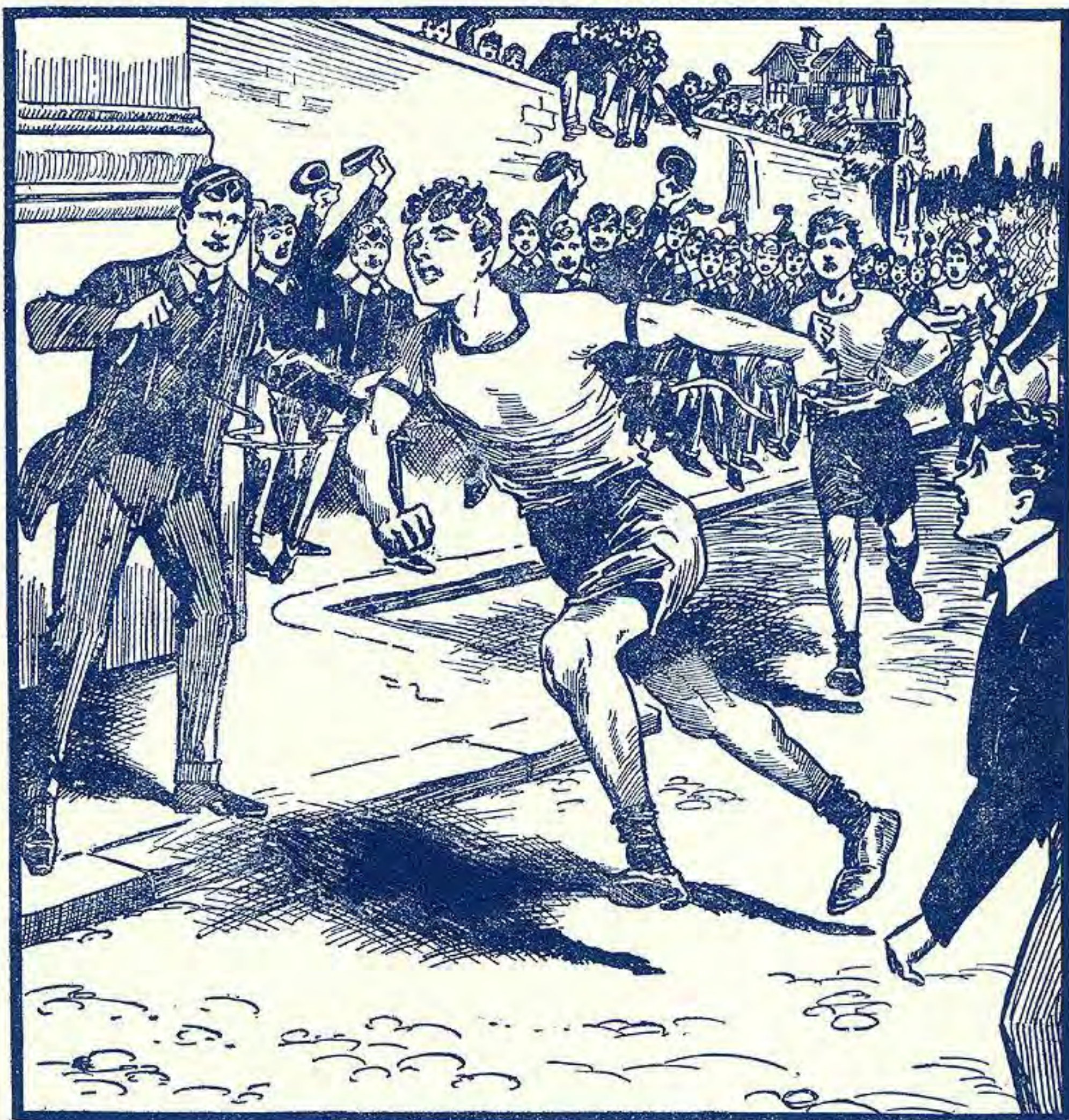


The Magnet

No. 581. Vol. XIII. March 29th, 1919.



GIANTS AT GRIPS!



THE FINISH OF THE GREAT MARATHON RACE!

(A Thrilling Scene in the Long, Complete School Tale contained in This Number.) 29-3-19

A MAGNIFICENT NEW, LONG, COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.



GIANTS AT GRIPS!

.....

By FRANK RICHARDS.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Friend in Need!

DOWN on your luck—what?" Loder of the Sixth looked up quickly.

The black sheep of Greyfriars was seated on a gate in Friardale Lane when the voice hailed him.

There was certainly ample justification for the question, for Loder had looked—and felt—decidedly fed up.

Not for the first time, in a career dark with dishonour, Gerald Loder was in a tight corner. The result of several transactions with Mr. Jerry Hawke, the disreputable bookmaker, had been to land Loder heavily in debt. This, in itself, was bad enough; but matters had now grown desperate. Jerry Hawke was pressing for the money.

Loder had seated himself on the gate in order to think out a solution of the problem. But, with all his astuteness, he had failed to hit upon a way out when the unfamiliar voice addressed him.

"You look as if someone's bitten you," said the stranger. "What's the trouble?"

The speaker was a tall, dark-haired fellow, with clear-cut features, and an air of being well able to take care of himself.

Loder scarcely knew whether to be pleased or annoyed at the interruption.

"What's it to do with you, anyway?" he said at length.

"All right, no need to get huffy. I thought perhaps you were in some sort of a hole, and I might be able to help you out. That's all. If you don't want me to—"

The stranger turned on his heel.

Loder, his heart beating faster than usual, suddenly called him back.

Here was a germ of hope, at any rate. This fellow might, by some mysterious stroke of fortune, be a Good Samaritan. It was just faintly possible that he might be a horn of plenty, from which Loder could draw to avoid ruin.

"It—it's a matter of money," explained the cad of the Sixth. "I don't s'pose you'd be able to see me clear. You see, it's a pretty hefty sum!"

"How much?"

"Six quid. I was a dashed fool. I got mixed up in—"

"Oh, that's all right," said the stranger. "I'm not asking for chapter and verse. I went on the razzle myself at one time, and it got me the sack from my last school. Six quid, did you say?"

"Ye-e-es," stammered Loder.

He hardly dared to hope that this fellow would come up to the scratch. And yet—

The stranger took his wallet from his

pocket, and solemnly counted out six currency notes for a pound. These he handed to the astonished Loder.

The prefect was almost overcome. Manna from the skies could not have been more welcome. He had been saved at the eleventh hour—and saved by a complete stranger!

"I—I don't know how to thank you," he began.

"Don't try, old chap. Look here. My name's Wilding, and I'm coming into the Greyfriars Sixth."

Loder nearly danced with delight.

Life seemed full of good things just now. A moment before the outlook had been terrible to contemplate; now, everything in the garden was lovely.

If Wilding could flash money about like this Loder foresaw great times ahead. This new-comer, even though he seemed to have a shady past, would be a jolly useful fellow to cultivate; and Loder began the cultivation right away.

"You're coming into the Sixth?" he exclaimed. "That's topping!"

"What sort of a crowd are they?"

"Oh, so-so," said Loder. "Not many are what you might call real sports. Wingate's skipper, and he's the complete prig. Proper Good Little Georgie touch, you know. Always butters up to his kind teachers."

Wilding smiled. It was not a nice smile.

"I'll soon settle his merry hash," he said, as he walked with Loder in the direction of the school. "The fact is, I've promised my pater I'll be skipper of Greyfriars in next to no time, as a compensation for having been sacked from my old school. And I'm not going to let the grass grow under my feet, either. By the way, what's your name?"

"Loder."

"Can I rely on you to back me up? If you'd rather not, say so. I always like fellows to speak out straight from the shoulder."

"I'll back you up with pleasure," purred Loder, rustling the precious notes in his pocket.

Wilding darted him a keen look.

"You mean that?"

"Absolutely!"

"Good! Then I'm all out to make Master Wingate sing small. There's just one point. I'm not in the habit of fighting with kid gloves. And I'm not too particular about my methods, so long as I get what I want. Twig?"

Loder grinned.

"You're a chap after my own heart," he said. "I'm awfully keen on seeing Wingate come a cropper. We want a fresh skipper badly, and, if you'll excuse my saying so on the strength of a five-

minute acquaintance, you're just the man for the job."

"Thank you!" said Wilding gracefully.

"You can dig in my study, if you like," added Loder, in a burst of generosity. "We shall see more of each other then."

"All serene!"

"And about this little loan?" said Loder, flushing.

"That's all right. Pay it back in your own time, old chap. There's plenty more where that came from. And if you want to offer up a sort of thanksgiving, your best way of doing it is to move heaven and earth to see that I'm captain of Greyfriars within a month!"

"Rely on me," said Loder. "One good turn deserves another."

And Roger Wilding and his escort passed through the gateway of Greyfriars arm-in-arm—birds of a feather!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Scene in the Sixth!

IT'S high time we had a look-in," said Wingate.

Gwynne of the Sixth nodded good-humouredly across the table.

"A senior sports meeting between Greyfriars and St. Jim's," Wingate went on, "wouldn't be a difficult matter to arrange. If we send the Saints a challenge they'll jump at it."

"That's so!" agreed Gwynne. "I've been thinking for a long time that the Sixth ought to show what sort of stuff they're made of—ever since poor old Courtney died, as a matter of fact."

Wingate nodded.

The passing of Arthur Courtney—that very gallant gentleman who had given his life for another—had left a vacant place in the Greyfriars Sixth which could not easily be filled. Perhaps Gwynne had come nearer to filling it than any other. He and Faulkner and Wingate had become fast friends; and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.

A sufficient time had now elapsed since Courtney's death for the deep wound to be healed. Not that his old chums would ever forget Courtney; but the acute shock of his death had been softened by the passage of time; and it was possible for the seniors to concentrate fully on the routine of school and sport.

"I suggest five bumper events," said Wingate. "We'll invite the St. Jim's fellows over here, and make a proper sports week of it. We can rely on the Head's permission all right."

"Good!" said Gwynne. "Go ahead!" The captain of Greyfriars proceeded to

draw up a letter to the rival skipper. When it was finished he handed it to Gwynne with a smile.

"I think that'll do the trick," he said. Gwynne glanced over the letter with an approving eye. It ran as follows:

"Greyfriars School,
Friardale, Kent.

"Dear Kildare,

"On behalf of the Greyfriars seniors, I hereby challenge your fellows to a series of contests, as follows:

1. Football Match.
2. Boxing Tournament.
3. Boat Race.
4. Shooting Match.
5. Marathon Race.

"There have been so many junior competitions in the past that we feel it's high time the seniors had a look-in.

"If you accept this challenge, I'll arrange with the Head to accommodate your fellows for a week.

"Greyfriars will be represented by a pretty hot crowd, so mind your eye!

"Yours sincerely,
"GEORGE WINGATE."

"That hits it off a treat," said Gwynne. "They'll bite, all right. Trust the Saints for that. Ripping sportsmen, all the merry lot of 'em. I—"

Gwynne broke off suddenly.

From lower down the passage came a scuffling of feet and a series of shrill screams.

"My hat!" exclaimed Wingate, starting up. "Sounds as if someone's getting it in the neck!"

He strode to the door, threw it open, and glanced out into the passage. At the same moment a fat form descended on the floor at his feet.

"Bunter minor! What the merry dickens—"

"Save me!" panted Sammy Bunter, in terror. "He's a villain! He's a beastly Hun! He's licked me black and blue! Yow-ow-ow!"

"Who's licked you, you young ass?" demanded Wingate, sharply.

But it was not necessary to repeat the question. Wilding, the new senior, loomed into view, armed with a cane, with which he had apparently been doing great execution.

Wilding ignored Wingate and Gwynne, and made a savage grab at Sammy Bunter. The fat fag yelled with fright.

"Gerraway! He's mad, Wingate—mad as a batter! Don't let him touch me! Yaroooooh!" yelled Sammy, as the cane came lashing round his fat legs.

But Wilding only struck once. Before he could deliver another blow Wingate fastened a firm grip on his collar.

The captain of Greyfriars was furious and indignant.

"You cad! How dare you lam the kid like that!"

Wilding, himself in a royal rage, tried to shake himself free from Wingate's grasp.

"Hands off!" he hissed.

"Not just yet!" retorted Wingate grimly. "I mean to get to the bottom of this business first. You're the new chap—Wilding—I s'pose? Well, you're not opening your innings very creditably, I must say."

"That young rascal refused to get my tea—"

"So I should think. You've no right to bully the kid into fagging for you."

"I'll do as I jolly well like!"

"That's where we fail to see eye to eye," said Wingate quietly. "If you imagine you can come to Greyfriars and chuck your weight about like this you're mistaken. Buzz off, Bunter!"

Sammy Bunter needed no second bidding. He went squirming away to his own quarters, to solicit the sympathy of

the Second on the subject of Wilding's tyranny.

An ugly light glowed in the new fellow's eyes.

"All right," he said, vainly trying to keep his voice steady. "I'll deal with that fat worm later on."

"If you lay a finger on Bunter again," said Wingate, "you'll hear from me!"

"What will you do, you interfering fool?"

"What I'll do now if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head!" snapped Wingate.

"You—you beastly outsider——"

Smack! Wingate was true to his word. Releasing his grip on Wilding's collar, he hit out with his left, straight from the shoulder. Wilding took the blow on the point of the jaw, and reeled against the wall of the passage. Although Wingate's equal in size and weight, he made no attempt to retaliate.

"I'm ready to go on with it," hinted Wingate.

on the subject at Greyfriars. Harry Wharton & Co., although they were non-combatants, so to speak, were keenly anxious that the Greyfriars seniors should acquit themselves well. The Remove had done their bit in past tournaments; it was now up to the mighty men of the Sixth to keep the pot boiling.

The other Forms were interested, too; and Coker of the Fifth, in his magnificent and lordly way, spoke of entering for the Marathon race—"just to give a final polish to the show," as he explained to Potter and Greene.

Of course, nobody took Coker seriously. The idea of the heavy-booted, ungainly Horace breasting the tape in advance of the crack runners of the rival schools was too much even for Potter and Greene. They became convulsed with merriment.

"What's amusing you?" growled Coker.

"Ha, ha! You are!" spluttered Greene. "Sort of Dorando the Second—what? If you compete, old man, I'll



Wingate plunged beneath the table and hauled forth the quaking Sammy. "You young rascal, you've scoffed my cake!"
"Yow-ow-ow!"

But Wilding wasn't. Muttering an imprecation, and clasping his damaged jaw, he retreated to the sanctuary of Loder's study.

"What a cowardly skunk!" said Gwynne, in disgust. "He could do with another instalment of what you gave him, old man!"

"And he'll get it, if he doesn't mind his p's and q's," said Wingate. "Nothing gets my back up more than bullying. I shall keep a close eye on that fellow in future."

"You'll need to," said Gwynne. And he was right.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Rogues in Council!

KILDARE of St. Jim's accepted Wingate's challenge on the spot; and, Dr. Locke having given his consent, the senior sports meeting was duly arranged.

There was a good deal of excitement

back you to finish fifteenth. That is, if there are fifteen runners!"

"Why, you burbling chump——"

"The first mile would kill you!" said Potter gently. "What with the heat of the sun, and the fact that you'd be giving a lifelike imitation of a cart-horse——"

Coker clenched his big fist.

"Say that again, George Potter," he warned, "and I'll biff you!"

Potter didn't say it again. He had a wholesome respect for Coker's fists.

From that day the great Horace was understood to be going into training. He could be seen puffing and snorting round the Close in the twilight; and he sometimes astonished the natives by turning out half an hour before rising-bell in order to practise. Whatever qualities Coker might have lacked, determination was not one of them.

Meanwhile, Wilding and Loder of the Sixth were putting their heads together in connection with the sports.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 581.

Loder was under a decided obligation to Wilding, the latter having squared his debts for him; and he meant to back up the new-comer all he knew.

For once in a way Loder was really grateful for service rendered to him. And, apart from this, Wilding was a sworn enemy of Wingate's, and anyone who answered this description was a sworn pal of Gerald Loder's.

"My idea is this," said Wilding, as the precious pair of rascals discussed the situation in Loder's study. "It'll have to be done very carefully, of course, but I don't see much difficulty. You and I will enter for all these rag-time events, and whenever we get a chance of letting Greyfriars down without being spotted we'll take it. In this way St. Jim's will romp home at the finish."

Loder nodded through a haze of cigarette-smoke.

"And then?"

"Then," said Wilding, "we can represent Wingate as being unfit to fill the important post of skipper, and I shall jump into his grave—see?"

"I get you!" said Loder. "We shall have to play our cards jolly carefully, though."

"Don't worry your head about the chances of the wheeze falling through," said Wilding. "Just you follow my lead, and everything will work like a charm. I've done these things before. They only need a bit of savvy. And I'm mad keen on seeing Wingate squashed—especially after what happened the other day."

The incident in the Sixth Form passage still rankled in Wilding's mind. He had left Wingate master of the situation, but he intended before long to reverse the order of things.

"I'll go along and talk nicely to our worthy skipper," he said, with a grin. "I'll tell him we're both competing, and that we're going to put up a rattling good show for the honour and glory of Greyfriars."

Loder nodded.

"Pile it on thick!" he said.

"Thanks!" said Wilding. "I will. I'm a master-hand in these matters."

A moment later Wilding tapped on the door of Wingate's study, and entered.

Wingate, who was compiling the football eleven, with the aid of Gwynne and Faulkner, didn't look best pleased when he saw his visitor.

"Well?" he said curtly.

Wilding assumed a meek-and-mild expression which was strangely out of keeping with his swarthy countenance.

"I came along to apologise for limping young Bunter the other day," he said. "I—I forgot myself! I'll see that nothing of the sort occurs again."

"That's all right!" said Wingate gruffly. "I'd forgotten that little incident."

Wilding shuffled from one foot to the other. Gwynne and Faulkner were glaring at him in a far from friendly fashion. Neither of Wingate's chums had much liking for bullies.

"Ahem! About these sports," said Wilding. "I should like to take a hand, if I may—and Loder, too."

"What can you do?" asked Wingate.

"Oh, I can box and shoot and run, and I'm a good forward!" said Wilding lightly. "I've got a ripping collection of cups and medals and things."

"This is not a pot-hunting establishment!" said Faulkner contemptuously. "We believe in sport for sport's sake at Greyfriars."

"Hold on!" said Wingate. "We'll give him a chance. Fair play's a jewel. I've already decided to give Loder a place in the eleven, provided he keeps himself fit. And if Wilding can play a

good game I'll include him, too. There's one more place to fill."

"If you care to come along to Big Side," said Wilding, "I'll show you what I can do. At my last school—"

He checked himself hurriedly.

Faulkner and Gwynne were glaring at him harder than ever.

"Come along, then," said Wingate. "We'll give you a trial."

And the four seniors went along to Big Side.

Wilding was certainly making no idle boast. He was a first-rate performer, and his shots at goal were deadly in the extreme. Wingate went between the posts, and he had all his work cut out to keep the citadel intact.

"Satisfied?" asked Wilding, with a grin.

"Yes, rather! I'll put you down to play against St. Jim's. We want a good winger badly."

"Good enough," said Wilding.

When he lounged into Loder's study a little later his eyes were gleaming.

"I've worked the oracle!" he said.

"We're both down to play against St. Jim's. And unless something goes wrong with the works," he added, under his breath, "Greyfriars will be beaten to a frazzle!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Out of the Running!

ROGER WILDING soon found his feet in the ranks of the Sixth. He seemed quite at home, and his cool self-confidence, while it jarred on some of the fellows, won him a certain amount of approval from others.

With Loder, in particular, Wilding grew very thick. He had plenty of money, and he spent it freely. Loder took advantage of this fact to ask for a loan on two occasions; and each time he got what he wanted. Verily, Roger Wilding was a useful sort of person to know!

Harry Wharton & Co. detested the new senior. They were indignant at his treatment of Sammy Bunter, and they showed him plainly what they thought of him. Bunter minor wasn't exactly a friend of the family, so far as the Famous Five were concerned; but they weren't going to stand by and leave him to the tender mercies of a fellow like Wilding.

"I see Wingate's put him down to play against St. Jim's!" said Bob Cherry, in disgust. "If I were skipper of the side, I'd never dream of including a rank outsider like Wilding!"

"And Loder, too," said Nugent. "It's asking for trouble to bring him in! I reckon they'll let the side down badly between them."

"Loder's not a bad player when he's in form," said Harry Wharton.

"When!" sniffed Bob Cherry. "How can a smoky boulder like Loder be expected to keep his end up on the footer field? He'll come a cropper straight off, if you ask me!"

The Remove were frankly disappointed at Wingate's action. It was highly essential that Greyfriars should get off the mark in style by winning the football match. And the inclusion of two of the biggest wasters in the Sixth did not augur well for the success of the home side.

Kildare & Co. of St. Jim's arrived on the eve of the match. They were delighted at the prospect of a week's immunity from lessons; at the same time there was a certain grimness in their manner which suggested that they meant business.

"We've arranged for you to sleep in the sanny," explained Wingate, when

the first greetings were over. "It's going to be a rare tussle, and all the nobility and gentry are coming to see it."

"Good!" laughed Kildare. "I hope it keeps fine for 'em."

Wingate escorted his guests to their quarters, saw that they were comfortable, and then returned to his study in order to discuss a plan of campaign with Gwynne and Faulkner.

As the captain of Greyfriars passed the door of Gerald Loder's study, sounds of revelry came from within.

Loder and his companions appeared to be going strong. They were, to say the least of it, very merry.

Wingate hesitated. He could understand and make allowance for a certain amount of liveliness on the eve of the sports. But this was sheer rowdiness, and must be stopped. He stepped into the study.

The next moment he was fighting for breath. The room was hazy with the fumes of tobacco.

Loder and Wilding and Carne were leaning back in their chairs, proclaiming to the world at large that it was the end of a perfect day. There were glasses on the table, likewise a pack of cards.

Wingate strode forward. He shouted to the revellers to shut up, but they were too busy with their vocal efforts to obey immediately.

"D'you hear me?" roared Wingate angrily.

"For memory has painted that perfect day

In colours that never fa-a-de!"

came in a chorus from Loder & Co.

Wingate was at the end of his patience. He caught Loder roughly by the shoulders and jerked him out of his chair.

The song came suddenly to a full stop.

"Lemme alone, hang you!" said Loder thickly.

The prefect's face was flushed, and it was obvious that he had dissipated too freely.

"Yes, let him alone!" growled Wilding, whose condition was not much better. "Go away and mind your own bizney!"

Only Carne was silent. He realised that the three seniors were in an ugly position, and that if Wingate reported them to the authorities there would be trouble.

Wingate released Gerald Loder, and addressed himself to the trio.

"I'll pay you a visit in ten minutes," he said, "and if all these things"—with a sweep of his hand he indicated the cards and glasses on the table—"aren't cleared away, I shall take action at once. As far as the sports are concerned, Loder, I shall rule you out. You, too, Wilding. Neither of you are fit to take part in any decent games. I refuse to let either of you participate in any event against St. Jim's." And with that Wingate strode out of the study.

When he returned to it, ten minutes later, he found everything as it should be. Carne had succeeded in making his companions see matters in a sober light, and the revelry was at an end.

"That's better!" said Wingate. "The air wasn't fit to breathe in this place before. Don't forget what I said about the sports." And he returned to his own study to decide upon two substitutes for Loder and Wilding.

But the latter, though their precious plot to wreck the sports was temporarily at a standstill, had no intention of abandoning their designs. If they couldn't let Greyfriars down one way, they would resort to another. Wilding's selfish ambitions, and his dislike of

Wingate, were very strong; and Loder was determined to back him up in every possible way.

Which all pointed to the fact that the forthcoming sports meeting with St. Jim's would not be barren of excitement, quite apart from the actual events.

Roger Wilding clearly had a strain of Prussianism in his temperament.

He didn't hate by halves!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Good for Gwynne!

THE sports week opened in style. A record crowd had assembled on Big Side to see the football-match. Friars versus Saints was always a popular feature, and on this occasion it was doubly attractive.

"Play up, Friars!"

"On the ball, there!"

Greyfriars opened strongly, with the wind in their favour. Their forwards played together with perfect understanding, and the game was only a few minutes old when Wingate, snapping up a pass from Gwynne, scored with a first-rate drive. The St. Jim's goalie could scarcely see the ball, much less save it.

"Hurrah!"

"First blood to us!" said Bob Cherry.

"Bravo, Wingate!"

"The esteemed Wingate is going strongly," said Hurree Singh, with great satisfaction. "He is determined to impart the lickfulness."

"That goal was a beauty!" said Harry Wharton. "Hope old Wingate gives us an encore!"

But there were two fellows on the ground who did not share Wharton's hope.

Loder and Wilding, their hands deep in their pockets, looked on with frowning faces.

Wingate was the idol of the crowd. A child could have seen that. And Wilding, noting the fact, bit his lip, and wondered how he could compass the downfall of the popular skipper.

For some moments he stood in deep reflection. Then he caught Loder by the arm, and led him out of earshot of the rest of the spectators.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed.

"Got what?" said Loder. "If you mean you've got the pip, the feeling's mutual."

"Don't rot!" said Wilding curtly. "I've hit upon a wheeze for putting Wingate off his game."

"Oh!"

"It ought to work like a charm," Wilding went on. "I'm going to rig up a booby-trap in Wingate's study."

"A—a booby-trap!" gasped Loder. "Where on earth's the sense of playing a fag's trick of that sort?"

Wilding smiled grimly.

"There are booby-traps and booby-traps," he said. "The usual thing—treacle and tar, and all the rest of it—puts the victim to inconvenience without badly hurting him. I mean to go one better than that. I shall get a solid bar of iron, and fix it up over the door of Wingate's study."

"My hat! That's coming it a little too thick, isn't it?"

"As I told you before, I don't believe in kid-glove methods," said Wilding.

"But—but what's the use of fixing up a bar of iron over the door? Wingate won't be going to his study until after the match."

"Oh, yes, he will! As the teams came out of the pavilion I heard him tell Faulkner that he'd busted one of the laces in his footer-boots. There wasn't time for him to cut along to his study and get another lace, so he said he'd leave it until half-time. When he

arrives at his study he'll get such a crack on the napper that he'll think the war's started again!"

"Sounds rather an ugly business," said Loder uneasily. "It—it won't lay Wingate out, will it?"

"Make him unconscious, do you mean? No, not quite; but it'll give him a jolly stiff headache. He won't turn out for the second half of the game, anyway."

"Good!" said Loder.

Cad though he was, he felt relieved to know that there was no danger of Wingate being very seriously injured.

"I think I'll cut along now," said Wilding, "and fix up the little surprise-packet."

"Mind your eye!" cautioned Loder. "There would be the dickens to pay if you were spotted!"

"Rely on me to steer clear of that," said Wilding lightly. And he departed on his blackguardly errand.

Meanwhile, the game proceeded at a rare pace.

Encouraged by their early goal, the Friars put on a great deal of pressure, and it looked as if they would add to their lead.

But the St. Jim's defence was founded upon a rock.

Twice Wingate drove the ball in, and on each occasion it came thudding out again. The Saints had their backs to the wall, and were defending desperately.

Occasionally the St. Jim's forwards came into the picture, but they were never really dangerous, and half-time arrived with the Friars leading by a goal to nothing.

"Good!" said Wingate, as he came off the field with Faulkner and Gwynne. "Nothing to write home about, but we're ahead, anyway. I'm going along to get a new lace."

"Send one of the fags," said Faulkner.

"No, thanks!" laughed Wingate. "I've got a new cake in the study. It wouldn't stay there very long if a fag spotted it."

The captain of Greyfriars, little dreaming that he was walking into a trap, hurried into the building.

As he passed along the Sixth Form passage he noted, with some surprise, that the door of his study stood slightly ajar. He remembered to have fastened it securely before going to the match.

"Some young rascal has been study-raiding, I suppose," murmured Wingate. "If my cake's gone, I shall—"

Wingate got no further.

He gave the door a push, and something hard and heavy crashed down upon him from above.

Fortunately for the captain of Greyfriars, the bar of iron struck him, not on the head, as Wilding had intended it should, but on the shoulder.

But Wingate was badly shaken up, all the same. He stared down in a dazed sort of way at the iron bar; then he picked it up, and stowed it away in his cupboard.

"I'll keep my own counsel about this," he muttered. "But if ever I find the cad who played this trick it will go hard with him!"

The captain of Greyfriars adjusted his lace, and returned to Big Side. He was very pale, for the pain in his shoulder was intense; but no one—with the exception of Wilding and Loder—noticed that anything was amiss.

The game was resumed in ding-dong style.

Kildare had evidently mapped out a plan of campaign with his fellow-players during the interval; for the St. Jim's forwards swept down the field in line, passing the ball one to the other with fine accuracy. Eventually it went out to Darrel on the wing, and the St. Jim's

fellow sent in a swift cross-shot which completely deceived the goalie.

"Goal!"

"Level!" said Harry Wharton. "Our fellows will have to pull their socks up now, and no mistake!"

Loder and Wilding, standing at a discreet distance, chuckled softly.

They had not expected Wingate to put in a reappearance on the ground; but he was obviously off colour, and would be merely a passenger throughout the second half.

For twenty minutes or so play was confined to midfield. The defence on both sides seemed to dominate the game, and the forwards were bottled up.

As the end drew near, however, desperate efforts were made by each team to score the winning goal. Kildare went very close with a shot which travelled on the wrong side of post; and at the other end Faulkner hit the crossbar.

"What's the matter with old Wingate?" asked Bob Cherry. "He's quite a back number this half."

"He's fagged out, I expect," said Nugent. "It's a pretty stiff game."

"Ten minutes to go," said Johnny Bull, glancing at his watch. "Buck up, Friars!"

The cry was re-echoed round the ground. It seemed to stimulate the home side to further efforts, for Faulkner raced away, feinting past three opponents.

But he was hard pressed, and had to get rid of the ball. He lobbed it across to Wingate, who was standing in a good position.

"Get ready to shout!" murmured Bob Cherry.

But, to the dismay of the crowd, Wingate missed the ball completely.

It seemed that such a gilt-edged chance to score was not likely to occur again.

But Gwynne had been waiting and watching. Before the opposing backs could clear he dashed in, and shot hard and true for goal.

It was a great shot, crowned by an equally great save. The goalie got his fist to it, and it whizzed out again on to the field of play.

But Gwynne was not to be denied. He met the ball in his stride, and drove it swiftly and surely into the unguarded corner of the net.

"Goal!"

"Good old Gwynne!"

During the remaining minutes the Saints strove hard to get on terms, but their efforts were nullified.

The whistle rang out, followed by a volley of cheers from the crowd.

Greyfriars First had defeated their time-honoured rivals of St. Jim's by two goals to one.

And—though they did not know it at the time—they had defeated Roger Wilding and Gerald Loder also!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Bout in the Ring!

"DONE!" said Loder savagely. "Dished and done!"

Wilding laughed mirthlessly.

"That wheeze of ours was certainly rather a wash-out," he said. "Still, there's plenty of time to cripple the merry sports yet. I've already hit upon a little scheme for making Wingate look a prize idiot at the boxing to-morrow afternoon."

Loder looked rather doubtful. After their failure in connection with the footer match he was beginning to lose faith in Wilding. But he wasn't going to drop his championship of the latter on this score. The now-comer was well supplied with capital; and so long as

this was the case so long would Loder continue to be on friendly terms with him.

"I sha'n't need you in this act," went on Wilding. "I shall work the dodge off my own bat. Wingate will be representing Greyfriars in the boxing, I suppose?"

"Yes. He's our best man."

"Good enough! I promise you he'll bungle things badly to-morrow."

"But how?" exclaimed Loder.

"Ah, that's a trade secret. I want to convince you that I'm really hot stuff at wangling these things. This afternoon's affair was just a missfire. I shall be careful not to miss next time."

The boxing contest was to be a very simple affair. The rival schools chose their own candidates—Wingate in one case, and Kildare in the other. Each was head and shoulders better than any other fellow in his own school; and a first-rate scrap was expected.

Throughout the morning Wingate was very cheery. He put in some practice on the river with his crew; he took a turn at the punching-ball; and he confided to Gwynne and Faulkner that he had never felt more fit in his life. He was too seasoned a boxer to talk of gaining a walk-over win against a man of Kildare's mettle; but he felt that the victory would eventually be his, none the less.

After lunch Wilding of the Sixth disappeared on his bicycle.

"Not staying for the show?" asked Loder, in surprise.

"I shall be back in time to see Wingate kissing the mat," said Wilding. "So-long!"

And he rode away in high feather.

When the time was ripe for the contest to commence the gym was packed to overflowing. This was indeed a battle of the giants, and the prophets predicted a very close fight, packed with thrills.

Wingate was preparing for the fray, when Gwynne stepped up to him with a telegram.

"For me?" asked Wingate.

"Yes. I should let the beastly thing rip for now, if I were you. Have your bout first, and read it afterwards."

Gwynne more than suspected that the buff-coloured envelope contained bad news. And if that were the case it might have a disastrous effect upon Wingate's boxing.

Wingate hesitated. Then he took the bull by the horns, and ripped open the envelope.

The next moment his face had changed colour. Gwynne saw in a flash that something was wrong.

"Trouble at home?" he asked quietly.

"N-not exactly."

Wingate passed the wire to his chum. It ran thus:

"Your brother seriously ill in Courtfield Hospital."

That was all. There was no mention of the sender's name, though Wingate supposed that the telegram had come from the principal of the hospital, or, perhaps, one of the nurses.

The news hit him hard. It was difficult to understand, too. Wingate's elder brother, Bob, had already been crooked once in the war, and Wingate understood that he was now fit again, and awaiting demobilisation.

But the end of the war did not necessarily mean that there would be no further casualties. A mine might have exploded in France; an accident might have happened, putting Bob Wingate out of action for the second time. Or, possibly, the influenza epidemic had claimed another victim. Anyway, Bob Wingate was in hospital—ill. Very ill.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 581.

indeed, it seemed, or Wingate would not have received a telegram. Perhaps—

Wingate tried to shake off the sudden fear which gripped and chilled him, but in vain. His hand went to his forehead, and he reeled giddily.

"Back up, old man!" said Gwynne. "P'raps it'll turn out better than you think. P'raps—"

"Seconds out of the ring!"

The referee was already clearing the deck for action.

"Shall you go through with it?" asked Gwynne.

"Yes."

Wingate went up for the first round like a fellow in a dream. Try as he might, he could not concentrate on the task before him. His thoughts were not in the densely-packed gym; they were in a hospital a few miles away, where Bob Wingate's life, it seemed, swayed in the balance.

Kildare, for his part, knew nothing of these things. He was concerned simply and solely with the object of beating his man. He had not seen the telegram brought in; he had not seen the expression on Wingate's face when he read it. Had he done so, that boxing contest would certainly never have taken place.

As a matter of fact, very few fellows in the audience knew of the arrival of the telegram; and they marvelled at Wingate's slowness in getting off the mark. He seemed uncertain and pre-occupied; and even when Kildare's left broke through his guard, and thudded smartly against his ribs, he failed to be roused.

"I can't think what's come over old Wingate," said Bob Cherry, in disappointed tones. Himself a fighter, Bob had looked forward to a keen scrap; and this one-sidedness—for Wingate was taking heavy punishment—was disconcerting.

"Kildare's making rings round him," said Vernon-Smith. "Just look at that!"

The captain of St. Jim's had just dealt his opponent a smashing blow between the eyes.

Wingate went down like a log; and only the prompt call of "Time!" saved him from an early defeat.

Gwynne bent over his leader with concern.

"You ought not to go on," he said.

"Let me explain to Kildare—"

"Oh, no! I shall be all right," panted Wingate. "I'm not beaten yet."

But it was only a matter of time.

Half-way through the second round Kildare let out a straight drive. It was a hurricane blow, and Wingate reeled helplessly against the ropes, with all the fight knocked out of him.

"He's done!" said Harry Wharton.

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry. "I'll never believe it. It can't be possible. There's no one in the same street as old Wingate when it comes to boxing. He's surely not going to chuck up the sponge—"

But it was so. Wingate failed to respond to the referee's count. He slipped on to the floor, and lay there dazed and stunned.

Kildare, amazed at the extraordinary ease with which he had won, stood gazing down in surprise at the defeated skipper.

Gwynne, who alone understood the cause of Wingate's downfall, helped his chum to rise.

"I—I must cut along to Courtfield," muttered Wingate.

Gwynne nodded.

Meanwhile, the gym rang with cheering. And the cheers still rang in George Wingate's ear as he crossed the Close.

But they were not for him. He had given a sorry exhibition. He had failed miserably where, in ordinary circumstances, he would have put up a great fight.

Cheer upon cheer! He could hear them yet.

But—they were for Kildare of St. Jim's!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Hidden Hand!

G WYNNE of the Sixth paced to and fro in the Close in the gathering dusk.

He was thoughtful and ill at ease.

Gwynne had a genuine regard for George Wingate. Any misfortune which befell the captain of Greyfriars was Gwynne's misfortune, too. And the news concerning Bob Wingate had given rise to grave forebodings in Gwynne's mind.

It seemed likely that a dark shadow would be thrown over the sports by the arrival of that telegram; for how could Wingate be expected to put his heart and soul into the task of beating St. Jim's when his brother was laid low?

Perhaps Wingate would not be able to compete in any of the three remaining events; in which case the odds were heavily in favour of St. Jim's. The sports without Wingate would be like the play of "Hamlet," with the Hamlet left out. It was unthinkable.

Wingate had been absent from Greyfriars for some hours—a fact which did not tend to lessen Gwynne's anxiety. Had there been nothing wrong, Wingate would have returned at once. As it was—well, anything might have happened.

"It's rotten luck," muttered Gwynne, as he strolled to and fro beneath the old elms. "Simply chronic. And it couldn't have happened at a worse moment. I—"

A heavy form suddenly cannoned against Gwynne in the semi-darkness. The Sixth-Former reeled, and nearly fell.

"Why couldn't you get out of the way, fathead?" demanded a voice. "I was just going strong."

"Coker!"

"Yes, it's me, right enough!" panted the great Horace. "You've pretty nearly winded me, you idiot!"

"Why, you — you —" stammered Gwynne. "I like your cheek! If there's any apology needed it should come from you. What d'you mean by charging through the Close like a mad bull with its eyes shut? You've nearly fractured my elbow, you—you imbecile!"

Coker cooled down somewhat.

"I was running—" he began.

"Don't call it by a fancy name. It seemed more like a stampede of cattle to my mind. And where's the sense of it, anyway?"

"I'm going in for the Marathon," said Coker impressively.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gwynne roared with laughter, in spite of the weight on his mind. Coker as a Marathon runner tickled his sense of humour. Coker had played a good many parts in his time. He was, in the words of the poet, everything by turns and nothing long. This new role of his would give a sort of comic relief to the proceedings.

"Are you seriously going to try to run five miles?" gasped Gwynne.

"Of course!"

"My hat. It'll be a sight for gods and men and little fishes!"

"All right!" growled Coker. "You can snigger now, Gwynne, but the laugh will be with me at the finish!"

"Rats!"

Horace Coker cantered away, and Gwynne continued his vigil. It was nearly locking-up time when Wingate returned.

"Well, old man," said Gwynne, hailing him in the gateway, "how's the big brother?"

"Fit and well," said Wingate.

"What?"

"He's not in Courtfield Hospital at all."

Gwynne whistled.

"But—but that telegram—"

"Must have been a spoof," said Wingate shortly. "Anyway, I made inquiries at the hospital, and drew blank. Then I wired home to my people, to see if they'd had any news. They wired a reply to Courtfield Post Office, saying that Bob was at home and well. Of course, it's a relief to know that nothing's the matter, but I feel savage about the whole thing. It ruined my boxing this afternoon. I couldn't concentrate."

Gwynne nodded.

"Yesterday," he said, "something happened which put you off your game. To-day you receive a telegram which proves to be a spoof. I should say somebody was going all out to smash your chances in the sports."

"Yes; and if I find out who it is there'll be short shrift for him," growled Wingate. "I'm fed up. I've fooled away a whole afternoon which might have been devoted to useful practice. Who d'you think is at the bottom of this bizney, Gwynne?"

"Dunno," said Gwynne thoughtfully. "It's just the sort of thing Loder would delight in doing. He's done it before, you see. All the same, we ought not to jump to conclusions. Because he's been a blackguard in the past it doesn't actually follow that he's engineering the present affair. We must keep our eyes open, that's all, and if we catch anybody trying to throw a damper on the sports we'll give 'em gyp! It's quite possible there will be an attempt made to cripple our chances in the boatrace to-morrow. And if any mysterious telegrams arrive, scrap 'em, and take no notice. That's my advice."

It was sound advice; but Wingate was naturally worried, and he only slept at intervals that night.

Greyfriars and St. Jim's were level, so far; but could the Friars acquit themselves creditably in the remaining three events, when there was a hidden hand at work to crush their efforts?

Early next morning the captain of Greyfriars went for a stroll as far as the Sark, to ascertain if the boats were in good order. Wingate was prepared now for any rascality, and it rather surprised him to see that the boats had not been tampered with. Evidently his unknown enemies were giving him a rest.

"Good-morning!" called a cheery voice.

It was Kildare, who had also fancied an early-morning stroll.

"What was up with you yesterday?" asked the skipper of St. Jim's. "You were right off-colour. I'd been getting into strict training, thinking it was going to be a gruelling affair; and when it came to the actual fight I seemed to meet with no resistance."

Wingate smiled.

"I had something on my mind," he said. "I couldn't concentrate on where I was and what was expected of me. The result was that, as you say, you met with no resistance. But I promise you you'll meet with plenty to-day. We're out for scalps!"

"We've got an eight that works like niggers," said Kildare.

"So have we!"

"Then it's a case of Greek meeting Greek?"

"Precisely!"

Kildare smiled.

Wingate, as he walked back to the

school, could not help wondering whether that smile would still be on Kildare's face if the positions of the rival captains were reversed!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Not According to Programme!

"**W**HO'S going to win the boat-race, old man?" asked Loder of the Sixth.

Roger Wilding, strolling in the Close with Loder in the early morning sunshine, grinned with quiet enjoyment.

"St. Jim's," he said.

"And the shooting-match to-morrow?"

"Likewise St. Jim's," answered Wilding.

Loder stared at his confederate in profound admiration.

"You're a cool card, Wilding," he said.

"I must say you managed that telegram stunt jolly well. And how are you going to do the trick this time?"

"Everything's cut and dried," said Wilding. "Wingate's gone for a stroll, and he's arranged for coffee and cake when he comes back. I'm afraid"—Wilding emitted a dry chuckle—"I'm afraid he'll take no active part in the proceedings after he's drunk that coffee."

"My hat! You—you don't mean to say you're going to drug the stuff?"

"That's an ugly word," said Wilding.

"No, old top, I shouldn't do anything quite so unpleasant. I'm really quite gentle in my methods. I have here"—the speaker produced a small packet—"the ingredients of a sleeping-draught. Somewhat similar to opium, my dear fellow. I slip it into Wingate's coffee just before he comes in, and shortly afterwards he'll be dead to the world. Result—Greyfriars will row without their stroke, and St. Jim's will simply make circles round 'em. That's that. And when the shooting-match comes off to-morrow, Wingate won't have recovered. He'll be dreaming sweet and blissful dreams."

Loder looked thoughtful.

"I'm not so sure that Greyfriars won't pull through without Wingate," he said. "Look at the footer-match the other day. Can't you extend the wheeze, and put two or three of 'em on the shelf?"

"Too risky," said Wilding. "We can't lay the fellows out wholesale. Besides, we've got no quarrel with the others. Wingate's the cad we've got to down. We want to make it appear that he's absolutely indifferent to the sports; and then, when St. Jim's carry off the spoils at the finish, there'll be such a shout against Wingate that he'll be only too glad to slide out of the captaincy. And that's where this child comes in."

Loder caught his breath. He saw that Wilding was prepared to go to any lengths to achieve his object, and that he would not rest until he had made Wingate's downfall complete. Loder was unaccustomed to playing second fiddle; but he realised that he had met his master in cunning and duplicity.

"Do my aged eyes deceive me, or is that Wingate coming along the road now?" asked Wilding. "Jove, we must hustle! Come along!"

The two seniors went along to Wingate's study.

As they passed along the Sixth Form passage they saw Dicky Nugent enter the study with a tray, on which was an uncut cake and a cup of coffee.

Having disported the tray on the study table, the fag emerged, and went on his way with a merry whistle.

"Good!" muttered Wilding. "Stay here a jiffy, and cough if you hear anybody coming."

With that he dived into the study.

When he emerged a moment later his eyes were gleaming.

"All serene!" he said. "I emptied the full dose into the coffee. And now we'd better clear. It won't do for us to be seen hanging about here."

Scarcely had the two conspirators left the spot when Sammy Bunter rolled along.

It was half an hour to breakfast, and Bunter was hungry. Nothing could play havoc with the fat junior's appetite. He felt like a cannibal at that moment.

Curiosity and instinct impelled Sammy to peep into Wingate's study. When he caught sight of the cake and the coffee his little round eyes gleamed behind his spectacles, and he hastily popped inside the study and closed the door.

"This is something like!" he exclaimed.

And without standing on ceremony Sammy Bunter attacked the cake with relish, punctuating his orgy by taking sips of coffee.

Sammy Bunter cleared that tray in record time. He had just finished, and was about to beat a retreat, when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps.

"Oh crumbs!" muttered Sammy.

And he promptly dived underneath the table.

Wingate, his appetite whetted by his early morning exercise, came into his study with a keen sense of anticipation. The sight of the empty tray, however, speedily disillusioned him.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "Somebody's scoffed my cake!"

Sammy Bunter, shaking with apprehension, preserved a discreet silence in his hiding-place. He was crouched on all-fours, and the dust from the carpet gave him a frantic desire to sneeze. It was really a race between the explosion of the sneeze and the departure of Wingate. Unfortunately for Bunter minor, the former happened first.

"Atishoo!"

Light dawned upon Wingate. He plunged beneath the table, and hauled forth the quaking Sammy.

"You young rascal! You've scoffed my cake!"

"Yow-ow-ow! D-d-don't sh-sh-shake me like that, Wingate! I didn't see any cake to scoff—I didn't, really! Besides, I shouldn't dream of laying hands on another fellow's grub!"

Still retaining his grip on the squirming fag, Wingate picked up a cricket-stump, and proceeded to wield it with great vigour. Sammy Bunter's exit from the study was punctuated by wild howls. When he eventually landed in the passage, however, the pain became less acute, and in its place came an overwhelming feeling of weariness—a desire to curl up and go to sleep for an indefinite period.

After the study door had been slammed in his face, Sammy Bunter gave one prodigious yawn, and the next moment he lay breathing deeply—dead to the world!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Boatrace!

"**M**Y only aunt!"

Gwynne of the Sixth uttered that exclamation as he came along the Sixth Form passage with Faulkner.

The boatrace was due to commence in half an hour, and the two seniors, in their boating flannels, had come in quest of Wingate.

In the passage opposite the captain's study Sammy Bunter slept soundly. He was curled up like a fat dormouse, and

looked as if nothing short of the last trump would rouse him.

"My only aunt!" said Gwynne again. Sammy Bunter had been known to sleep in some curious places and at curious times, but this was an entirely new departure.

"Looks a charming beast, with its mouth wide open, doesn't it?" grinned Faulkner.

At this point Wingate emerged from his study.

"Ready to pulverise the Saints?" he asked cheerily.

"Rather!" said Gwynne. "By the way, do you usually let your watchdog go to sleep outside your study door?"

"Eh?"

"Gives you a sense of security, I s'pose?" said Faulkner.

Wingate stared in surprise at the recumbent form.

"Well, of all the cheek!" he exclaimed. "The fat beast comes and wolfs my grub, and then calmly sleeps it off in the passage!"

The indignant Wingate intruded his boot gently into Sammy's ribs.

"Get up!" he said shortly.

Snore!

"Seems to be pretty far gone," said Gwynne.

He grasped the slumbering fag by the collar and shook him. Sammy Bunter's mouth still gaped open, he still breathed stertorously, but showed no inclination to wake.

Wingate looked thoughtful.

"He must be ill," he said. "Over-eaten himself, or something. We'd better get him along to his dormitory."

Between them the three seniors carried the Second-Former along the passage. Harry Wharton & Co. encountered the procession in amazement.

"Rehearsing the grave scene in 'Hamlet'?" asked Bob Cherry.

"This kid's ill," said Wingate briefly. "Take him along to the dormitory, and one of you cut off and get medical attendance, if necessary. We've got to be on the river in a few minutes."

"Right you are, Wingate," said Johnny Bull. "Tell 'em to hold up the race till we arrive. Greyfriars won't stand an earthly unless we're there to cheer."

The Removites promptly bundled Sammy Bunter to bed, and forgot all about him. There were more important things to think about just then. Bunter minor might be really ill; he might be shamming; he might merely be extra sleepy. But there was a boatrace under way, and until the last wave of excitement had spent itself there would be no voluntary nurses for Sammy.

The rival crews were pulling into mid-stream when Harry Wharton & Co. arrived on the bank. And the expressions of Loder and Wilding, who were amongst the spectators, were dismayed and incredulous.

They had expected to see a new stroke in the Greyfriars boat—a fellow far less useful than Wingate; and they had hoped to see blank despair on the faces of the rest of the crew.

The Friars, however, looked remarkably fit and cheery. Wingate was in his place, and he seemed particularly wide-awake.

"What's happened?" exclaimed Loder.

"Don't ask me!" Wilding's tone was savage. "The beastly sleeping-draught didn't work, I s'pose."

"Are you sure you tipped the whole lot into the coffee?"

"Am I sure I'm alive?" snorted Wilding. "Still, they mightn't win yet. There's a sporting chance of their coming a cropper."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 581.

Crack!

At the sound of the pistol the two boats leapt off the mark as one.

There was little to choose between the rival crews. Both were trained to perfection; both were stroked by fellows who knew their job.

The Friars, however, possessed a distinct advantage. They knew the river like a book. And Wingate understood exactly when to quicken his stroke with the least exertion to his men.

Slowly the Greyfriars boat crept ahead—ever so slowly it seemed to the tensely excited throng of spectators.

At the bend in the river the Friars still maintained their lead; and some of the St. Jim's oarsmen began to show signs of distress.

Kildare desperately increased the pace. His men responded gamely; and now it was the Saints turn to shoot ahead.

But the lead was short-lived. That strenuous pace could only be kept up for a matter of a few moments; and meanwhile the Greyfriars crew, still comparatively fresh, came on with grim persistence.

"Good old Friars!"

"Pile it on, Wingate!"

"Drive her through!"

The boats, now level, had come to the last stretch of water, but everyone could see that the Friars held the issue in the hollow of their hand.

Kildare's men were far spent; Rushden and Monteith had almost collapsed; and, although the spirit was willing, the flesh was weak.

Read

"BUNTER, THE BILLIONAIRE!"

A Wonderful Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's,

By MARTIN CLIFFORD,

In

THE "GEM."

Out This Wednesday.



"Now, Friars!"

A dozen strokes, long and vigorous, and the Greyfriars crew glided swiftly past the winning-post—victors by half a length.

"Good!" panted Wingate, surveying his loyal crew, while the crowd cheered themselves hoarse. "Jolly good indeed, you fellows!"

But there were two persons who didn't think so. And the comments of Wilding and Loder, as they sullenly watched the winning boat disgorge its occupants, would not bear repetition!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Sleeper Awakes!

SAMMY BUNTER slept long and soundly.

Twenty-four hours had elapsed when, like Rip Van Winkle, the fat junior awoke from his protracted slumber.

His first sensation, as he sat up in bed and blinked around him, was one of intense hunger. Some of his faculties might have marked time while he was asleep, but his appetite had grown alarmingly.

The summer sunshine streamed in at the high windows of the Second Form dormitory; and Sammy Bunter wondered vaguely how he came to be in bed when everyone else was up and doing.

He tried to link up the chain of events which had led to the present situation. And then he remembered the scene in Wingate's study, when the captain of Greyfriars had licked him for disposing of the cake and coffee.

It struck Sammy that there must have been something radically wrong either with the cake or the coffee. Was it possible that the latter had been drugged?

The more he thought about it the more likely it appeared. Sammy looked at his watch, and realised, with a start, how long he had slept. Undoubtedly that coffee must have been drugged. And the intended victim was the captain of Greyfriars!

Sammy Bunter was trembling with excitement now. There was a plot afoot against Wingate, that was certain. But who were the plotters, and what was their object?

He pondered on the subject for a long time. But he came no nearer a solution, and eventually decided that he had better sally forth in search of food.

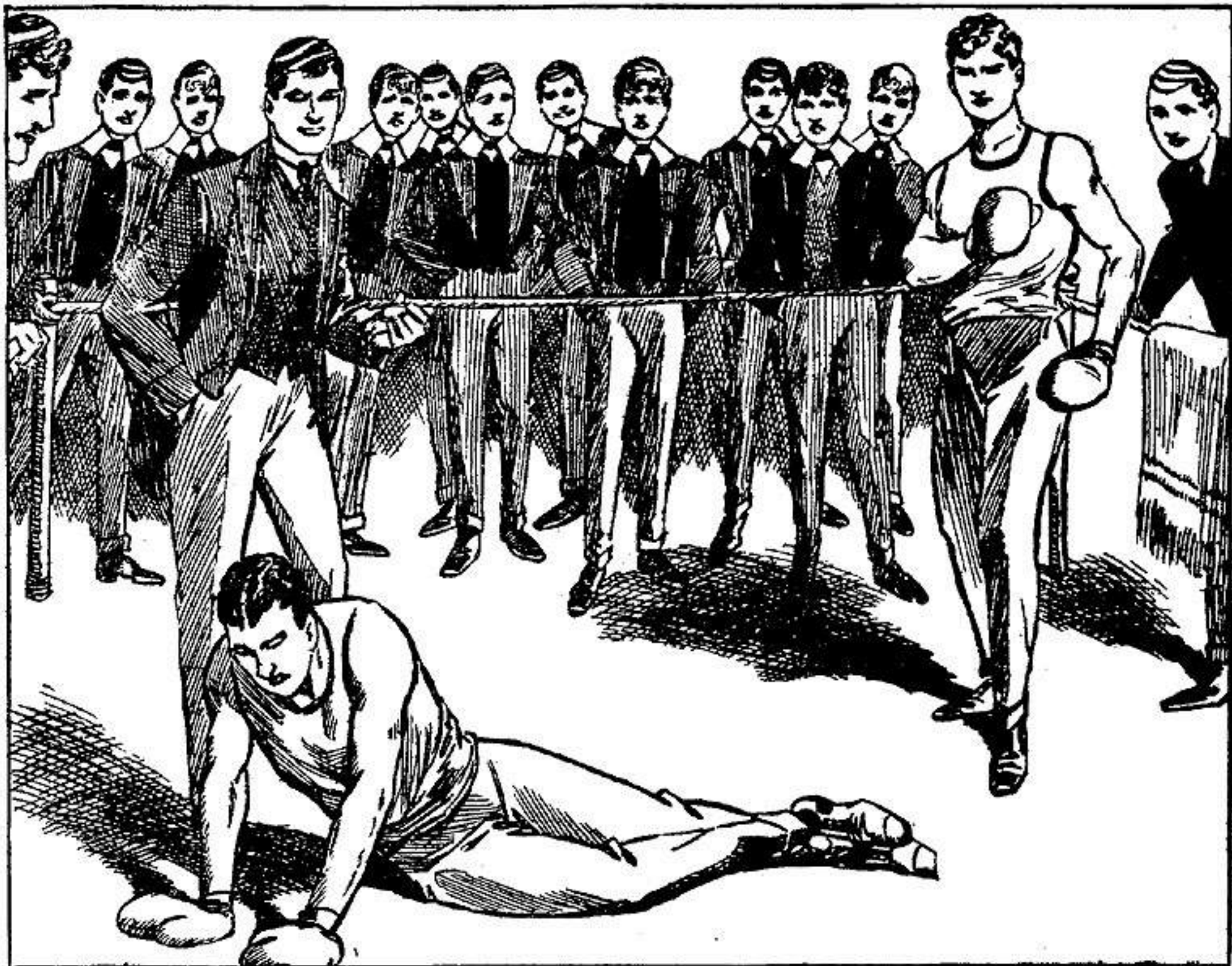
Greyfriars seemed very silent and deserted. Sammy guessed, and rightly, that most of the fellows had adjourned to the rifle-range, where the shooting contest was shortly to take place.

Sammy Bunter rolled out of bed and moved towards the door. As he did so the sound of voices on the landing outside caused him to stop short, breathing quickly.

"There's going to be no mistake this time," Wilding of the Sixth was saying. "We'll be on the spot to see that Wingate drinks the stuff, and Faulkner and Gwynne as well. With those three out of the Marathon, Greyfriars won't stand an earthly!"

"But supposing they win the shooting-match?" growled Loder.

"They won't! I saw Kildare put in a practice shoot early this morning, and I'd back him against any fellow of his own age in the country. Nobody can hold a candle to him. So set your mind at rest about the result of the shooting, my dear fellow, and concentrate on the Marathon. Young Nugent's bringing coffee for three to Wingate's study at five o'clock. The housekeeper's going to make the coffee in the kitchen. I shall go in and talk sweetly to her for a few minutes, then get her out of the kitchen



Kildare let out a straight drive, and Wingate reeled against the ropes. He slipped to the floor, and lay there dazed and stunned while the referee counted him out.

somehow, and drop the dose into the coffee-pot. And when the fag brings the coffee along to Wingate's study we'll be on hand to see that he drinks it—like-wise Gwynne and Faulkner. And if that fat worm Bunter barges in this time we'll pulverise him!"

The fat worm in question stood shaking from head to foot with excitement.

Gradually the voices of the two plotters became inaudible, and they moved on down the stairs.

"M-m-my hat!" muttered Sammy Bunter.

Here was the key to the whole mystery. It was as clear as noonday now what the little game was. Greyfriars was doomed to lose the Marathon. The absence of Wingate, Faulkner, and Gwynne, the three best runners in the Sixth, would mean that St. Jim's would have a runaway victory.

What Sammy Bunter should have done, of course, was to immediately take steps to warn Wingate of the impending calamity, so that it might be averted.

But Sammy Bunter had no sense of loyalty to his school. All he saw, in his limited, selfish outlook, was that here was a fine chance to make money.

He would let the plotters go ahead. He would allow them to carry out their nefarious designs, and then he would proceed to blackmail Wilding and Loder. He knew that the former had plenty of money, and would be prepared to part with a considerable amount rather than court exposure.

So Sammy Bunter, congratulating

himself that he had stumbled upon a very good thing, proceeded to the domestic regions in order to refresh himself.

The sound of distant cheering told him that the shooting-match was in progress.

The seniors were firing seven shots apiece at a range of twenty-five yards. There were ten competitors on each side, and the best eight scores would count.

Gwynne and Darrel were the last to get down on the mat. The result of the contest, however, was almost assured by this time; for the St. Jim's fellows had acquitted themselves splendidly.

There was a stampede towards the targets when Gwynne had fired his final shot. They were collected, and carefully scrutinised by two of the masters.

Kildare's ruddy face brightened into a smile.

"I think we've bagged the honours," he said.

And so it proved. St. Jim's had proved superior to Greyfriars by a matter of fifteen points.

So the two schools were again level, having won a couple of events each, and everything hinged, therefore, upon the Marathon race to be run on the morrow.

Coker of the Fifth had very definite opinions on the subject of that Marathon, but nobody heeded Coker just then. It was to the stalwarts of the Sixth that Greyfriars turned in its hour of need—to the sturdy, athletic Wingate; to the enthusiastic Gwynne; and to the long-legged Faulkner.

But Wilding and Loder were deter-

mined that Greyfriars should turn to those heroes in vain!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Hush-Money!

GREYFRIARS was in a buzz that evening.

Ill news travels apace, and by bed-time it was known to the entire school that Wingate, Gwynne, and Faulkner, of the Sixth, were ill—so much so that their entry into the Marathon was regarded as extremely unlikely.

The three seniors had been discovered fast asleep in Wingate's study, and all efforts to rouse them had proved futile.

Exactly what was wrong with the trio was known only to Wilding, Loder, and Sammy Bunter; but Dr. Short, who had been summoned from Friardale, expressed the opinion that they would certainly not be fit again for some time.

What made matters worse was that the Marathon could on no account be postponed. In the rules governing the sports it clearly stated that the race would be run at the appointed time, irrespective of weather or other conditions.

Even the most hopeful of the fellows, such as Bob Cherry, were bound to admit that the chances of Greyfriars, minus Wingate, Gwynne, and Faulkner, were very remote. The other representatives of the Sixth were good runners, but fell short of the high standard which would

be required of them in order to outdistance fellows as Kildare and Monteith.

It was an appalling prospect; and Greyfriars, for the most part, went to bed with gloomy forebodings of impending defeat.

One of the few fellows unperturbed by the calamity was Coker of the Fifth. Coker had duly entered his name as a runner, and he was confident to the last degree. Wild horses couldn't have dragged from Coker the idea that he was going to breast the tape a good first. He had even gone so far as to arrange a spread for the following evening, to be held in his study in celebration of the triumph of Greyfriars. In vain Potter and Greene wagged their heads at him; in vain Blundell called him the most asinine ass in creation. Coker was out to win, and whatever essentials he lacked to bring about that happy consummation, self-confidence was not one of them.

Wilding and Loder, looking and feeling immensely satisfied with themselves, were discussing the probable collapse of Greyfriars, when a visitor suddenly drifted into their ken. It was Sammy Bunter.

The two seniors gasped. Bunter minor had walked casually into their study without even troubling to knock at the door.

Loder, in his indignation, reached for a cricket-stump. Wilding, who had more imagination than his companion, regarded the fat junior with a certain amount of apprehension. He had heard of Sammy Bunter's habit of prying through keyholes, and of hearing things not intended for his ears, and he felt uneasy. Was it possible—

"Good-evening!" said Sammy Bunter affably. "You can put that stump down, Loder. We're all pals here."

"You—you—" stuttered Loder.

"I must say," Sammy went on, "that between the two of you you did the trick very well."

"Trick!" echoed Wilding, trying to keep his voice steady. "What trick, you fat cormorant?"

An angry light danced in Sammy Bunter's little round eyes.

"I should advise you to be more civil," he said. "Otherwise—"

"Look here," said Loder desperately, "what are you driving at? What fool's idea has got into your fat head?"

Sammy Bunter calmly dropped into the chair which Loder had vacated, and blinked meaningly at the Sixth-Formers.

"You drugged Wingate and Gwynne and Faulkner, and you can't deny it!" said Sammy Bunter, his voice rising to such a pitch that Wilding glanced fearfully into the passage. "I was under the table in the kitchen when you came in and dropped that stuff into the coffee-pot. And I was outside Wingate's study when they drank it and were taken queer. You can't get over me, you know. I've got eyes in the back of my head. All right, Loder! You needn't look so savage. I'm not going to eat you!"

There was a long pause. Wilding seemed uncertain whether to hurl Sammy Bunter neck and crop from the study, or to parley with him. At last he said gruffly:

"How much d'you want?"

Sammy Bunter shot bolt upright in his chair.

"Ah! Now you're talking!" he said. "Make it a tenner, will you?"

"I'll see you hanged first!" growled Wilding.

He pulled out his wallet, and produced a five-pound note.

"Here you are! Take it or leave it! I'm not going beyond that!"

The unfamiliar sight of a five-pound note caused Bunter to act, for a few moments, as if he were in a trance. He

grabbed eagerly at the note, held it up to the light, turned it over in his fat palm, and finally stowed it away in his pocket.

"Thanks!" he said. "That'll do nicely to be going on with!"

Wilding eyed the fat junior fiercely.

"I want to make it quite clear to you," he said, "that if you let drop so much as a hint of what you've seen this afternoon you'll go about with a disfigured dial for the rest of your days! You know me well enough to understand that I'm not given to the use of kid gloves!"

"Oh, you can trust me!" said Sammy Bunter. "I'm anything but a sneak. Still, I must say it was an awfully cute wheeze—awfully cute! Three of 'em laid low in one sweep! He, he, he!"

"Take yourself and your gloating cackle outside!" snarled Loder. "And don't forget the penalty if you split!"

"Set your mind at rest," said Sammy Bunter.

And with a condescending nod to the two plotters he rolled out of the study, the richer by five pounds than when he had entered it.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Marathon!

"TEN of 'em!" said Bob Cherry.

"Six of theirs and four of ours!" said Nugent. "What hopes?"

"It's a putrid outlook," agreed Harry Wharton. "If Greyfriars win, the age of miracles will have come back."

The six St. Jim's runners looked very fit and confident as they stood in line with the Greyfriars four. The Friars, in the absence of their three best runners, were represented by Walker and two others. Coker was there, too; but everybody regarded Coker's entry into the race as a screaming joke. That he would finish last—if he finished at all—everyone felt certain.

Coker heard the chuckling around him, and clenched his hands tightly.

"I'll show those cackling asses that I mean business!" he muttered.

The order was given, and the twelve runners started off down the dusty road.

Coker certainly started well. As they watched him the crowd became aware that he carried himself much less clumsily than he used to do. He ran with the strong, steady stride of an experienced runner.

"But it won't last!" said Potter of the Fifth. "He'll have bellows to mend at the end of a mile."

Greene nodded.

"Don't you think it was rather cruel to let him go and make a fool of himself?" he said. "The fellows will never let him hear the end of this."

Potter shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see that we were called upon to interfere," he said. "If he starts obstructing the other runners, and gets shied into the nearest duck-pond, he'll only have himself to blame. Poor old Coker!"

Poor old Coker, however, didn't see matters in this light at all. He was revelling in the joy of the chase, and when Friardale was reached he found himself in the foremost group of runners.

And then an idea occurred to Coker. The fellow whom he had most cause to fear was Kildare. This being the case, he resolved to hitch himself on, as it were, to the captain of St. Jim's, and never fall back from that position.

For a couple of miles Coker did this, and it was a much sterner task than he had imagined.

Kildare had a swift, apparently effortless, way of running. He took the hills as if they were level ground, and he

never varied his pace. He was still comparatively fresh at the end of those two miles, whereas Coker, flogging painfully along in his wake, was conscious of a frantic desire for a cold bath, a pint or so of lemonade, and a long, refreshing sleep.

There was a sudden pattering of feet, and a moment later Walker, of Greyfriars, and Rushden, of St. Jim's, went in front with long, sweeping strides.

Rushden screwed his sun-scorched face up into a grin as he passed Kildare, who nodded cheerfully in return.

Coker's first mad impulse was to give chase to the two fellows who had assumed the leadership; but wiser counsels prevailed, and he decided to remain on the heels of Kildare.

Jove, how hot it was! The sun blazed down fiercely upon the countryside. The roads were parched and dusty, and the going was difficult.

But Coker consoled himself with the philosophy that what one fellow could endure could be endured by another, and he set his teeth and stuck it out.

Half a mile farther on Walker of the Sixth was discovered lying at full length by the roadside. He had run himself out, and had set himself a pace altogether beyond his powers. Walker had not trained for the race—he seldom troubled to train for anything—and his omission had cost him dear.

He raised himself on his elbow as Kildare and Coker went past, and rubbed his eyes in astonishment.

Coker!

Was he dreaming? Or had the much-abused Horace actually managed to keep in tow with Kildare right up to this point?

Walker was too overcome to cheer Coker on. He was still pondering over the amazing miracle when the two runners disappeared round a bend in the road.

Coker realised, with something of a start, that he was the only Greyfriars fellow in the running. Walker had abandoned the race, and the other two Greyfriars representatives must be at least half a mile behind. So it was two to one, was it—Kildare and Rushden versus Horace Coker?

The Fifth-Former's mouth tightened, and he plodded on gamely.

Surely it wasn't so far to go now! Wapshot Camp, with its rows of white tents, and its crowd of cheery Tommies, had been left behind. A couple of stiff hills to climb, a clear stretch of level roadway for half a mile or so, and then—home!

Rushden was still leading. Coker, blinking ahead with eyes which were rapidly becoming bloodshot, could discern the tall figure of the St. Jim's senior.

And now Kildare suddenly quickened his pace, and poor Coker felt that he was at the end of his tether. His legs were like leaden weights. He ran mechanically, and his head was throbbing painfully. And Kildare was leaving him farther and farther behind.

Lucky it was that Coker possessed a stout heart, or he would have thrown up the sponge at that moment.

Instead, he pulled himself together, threw back his head, and struggled on. Come what may, he wouldn't give in.

And then the unexpected happened. Kildare of St. Jim's suddenly swerved to one side, and fell like a stone.

Coker paused when he came to him, but Kildare urged him on.

"Never mind me," he said. "I'm done!"

Over-exertion was the cause of Kildare's sudden collapse. The strain of the previous contests had told upon him, and his recent spurt had sapped all his

strength. He could not have run another yard to save his life.

Propping himself up on his elbow, he watched Coker flounder by.

"My hat! That fellow deserves to win!" he muttered. "He's whacked, but he won't give in. Strikes me Rushden will have all his work cut out."

The first runner to greet the eyes of the waiting crowd on the school wall of Greyfriars was Rushden. He was nearly exhausted, and his gait was unsteady; but he looked a sure winner.

Then came Coker, with his pathetic, cumbersome stride. Save for those two the road was clear.

The fellows had looked twice before they were sure it really was Coker.

It was amazing—incredible!

"Hold my hand," remarked Potter to Greene, "and tell me if you see a mad sort of light in my eyes. Is that really our pet Horace?"

"It is—it are!" gasped Greene.

"But—but how did he get here?"

"Don't ask me," said Greene.

"Coker! Coker!" And he kept muttering the name like a parrot.

The sight of the crowd had a wonderfully stimulating effect upon Horace Coker. He realised that the end was very near now. It was only a question of making one last desperate spurt. Fortune would surely not let him down at the finish, after he had covered all those heartbreaking miles!

Coker's feeble limbs suddenly became animated with new life.

Rushden plodded on ahead, knowing nothing of the danger until Coker was abreast of him; and then the tussle began in grim earnest.

Neck-and-neck the two fellows drew nearer to the tape which fluttered across the roadway. Neck-and-neck, their breath coming and going in great gasps, they strove for the mastery.

And the crowd watched them spell-bound. They were too astonished at Coker's amazing performance to cheer.

Then, with a supreme effort, Coker hurled himself forward at the tape. He passed it, and then his knees sagged, and the ground seemed to rise up and strike him in the face.

Not until half an hour had elapsed did he learn that he had beaten Rushden of St. Jim's by a bare yard in one of the most stubbornly contested finishes on record.

There was great rejoicing in the Greyfriars camp that evening. After all their trials, their anxieties, and their disappointments, they had defeated the rival school. And the lion's share of their triumph belonged to Coker of the Fifth!

It was a very radiant Coker who presided at the spread with his chums that evening, and throughout the meal fellows from all Forms poured in to congratulate him.

The miracle had happened, after all, and the daily running practice in which Coker had indulged, to the amusement of all Greyfriars, had not been in vain.

The Friars had won the day!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Honour Among Cads!

"YOU fellows have got to thank me for this!" said Sammy Bunter.

"What?"

The Famous Five were naturally astonished.

"You!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Why should we have to thank you, you young cormorant?"

Sammy Bunter chuckled.

"Well, if I hadn't interfered," he said, "Coker might have been drugged as well. I—I mean—in other words—"

Sammy realised that he was letting his

tongue run away with him. It would not be to his advantage to give Wilding and Loder away just yet.

But the remark which he had been foolish enough to drop did not remain unchallenged. The curiosity of the Famous Five was fully roused.

"Coker drugged!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Explain yourself, you fat toad!"

"Who'd be likely to drug Coker, anyway?" said Nugent.

"Ahem! It was only—er—a figure of speech, you fellows," said Sammy Bunter. "Of course, Wilding and Loder weren't to know that Coker would put up a record. They thought it was only necessary to get Wingate and Faulkner and Gwynne out of the way. Ahem! That is to say—"

Harry Wharton seized the speaker none too gently by the shoulders.

"Do you realise what you are saying, Bunter?" he exclaimed. "You've practically said that Wilding and Loder drugged those three Sixth Form fellows, to keep them out of the Marathon race."

"Oh, really, Wharton—I didn't say anything of the sort. Wilding and Loder are awful rotters, I know; but they'd never go so far as that. I believe they only did it for a joke. They couldn't have known how it was going to turn out."

"You admit they did it, then?"

"Nunno!" said Sammy hastily. "I don't admit anything. It's got nothing to do with me, anyway. I hope I can be trusted to mind my own bizney."

"But don't you see, you fat image, that it's a very serious matter? If Wilding and Loder drugged those fellows, they deserve to be sacked. And if you knew they did it it was up to you to report it at once."

"Ow! I tell you I don't know anything about it! I wasn't in the kitchen when Wilding put the stuff in the coffee, and I wasn't outside Wingate's study when the three of them drank it, and were taken queer. Yow! Wharrer you shaking me like that for?"

"The fat's in the fire now!" said Bob Cherry. "Matter of fact, I suspected all along that Wilding and Loder weren't playing a straight game."

A buzz of indignant comment arose. Greyfriars had won the sports, true; but that did not diminish the blackguardly action of the cads of the Sixth.

Fellows who so far forgot the rules of decency as to resort to such underhand tricks deserved to be kicked out. There was something positively Hunnish in the manner in which Wingate & Co. had been treated. Wilding's dastardly action ranked with the poison-gas atrocities.

"Why should they want to play such a low-down game?" growled Johnny Bull.

"It's the same old story," said Bob Cherry. "Loder's been jealous of Wingate from the beginning of things, and he'd never miss a chance of downing him. And Wilding's a cad of the first water. He was sacked, I understand, from his last school; and can you wonder at it? He's a perfectly poisonous beast."

"Why didn't this young sweep report the affair directly he discovered it?" demanded Nugent. "It jolly nearly meant Greyfriars losing the sports."

"Yes, rather!"

"Bump the fat rotter!"

Sammy Bunter stammered and struggled and protested, but there was no way of escape. Furious hands seized him, and he landed with a terrific concussion on the flagstones of the Close.

The process was being repeated when Loder appeared on the scene.

Loder of the Sixth was in a savage temper.

To think that Coker—Coker, of all people!—should be responsible for the failure of the plot to wreck the sports!

Coker, whose abilities were always doubted—whose prowess was supposed to exist only in his own imagination—who was, as a rule, the laughing-stock of Greyfriars in general, and the Fifth Form in particular.

It was maddening!

The unexpected result of the Marathon race had infuriated Loder to such an extent that he was only too ready to work off some of his spite upon the juniors. And the sight of Sammy Bunter being bumped gave him a favourable opportunity.

Striking forward, the prefect seized Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, who were nearest him, and swung them back.

"What do you mean by bullying a lag in this way?" he demanded. "It's outrageous! I shall report you all to Mr. Quelch at the first opportunity."

Johnny Bull shook himself free, and faced Loder with blazing eyes.

"We shall have something to say when that happens!" he exclaimed. "We were bumping this fat worm because he deserved it; for not reporting the fact that you and Wilding were responsible for drugging Wingate, Faulkner, and Gwynne!"

Loder's face blanched. Johnny Bull's heated accusation had robbed him of the power to speak or act.

"Bull!"

A sudden hush fell upon the juniors. Mr. Quelch had swept on the scene with rustling gown.

"I heard your statement, Bull," said the Remove-master. "You have directed a very grave charge against Loder and Wilding. The matter must be investigated at once!"

"I'm prepared to stick to my guns, sir," said Johnny stoutly.

"Do you suggest that Wingate and his companions were drugged by Loder and Wilding?"

"Bunter minor's as good as admitted it, sir."

Mr. Quelch turned to the squirming Sammy.

"Get to your feet!" he said sternly. "What do you know of this affair?"

"Nun-nun-nothing, sir! Nothing at all! As I've already told these fellows, sir, I wasn't in the kitchen when Wilding put the drug in the coffee, and I wasn't in the Sixth Form passage when Wingate and the other chaps drank the stuff."

"Bunter!"

"And whoever says Wilding bribed me to keep my mouth shut is a rotten fibber!" continued Sammy Bunter wildly. "I'm quite in the dark about how they did it; in fact, I don't even know where they bought the drug!"

"Enough!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. "You are an utterly perverse and stupid boy, Bunter minor! In your anxiety to hide the facts you have exposed them. I am quite satisfied, in my own mind, that there has been a despicable plot on foot against Wingate. I shall make a report to your Form-master, Bunter. You, Loder, will come with me!"

Loder had no time in which to eloquently plead his cause. The blow had struck him all of a heap. He followed Mr. Quelch into the building with a dazed expression on his face. One terrible thought hammered at his brain—that his innings at Greyfriars was over.

Mr. Quelch went straight to Loder's study, where Wilding was reclining on the couch with a cigarette between his lips.

The senior's face paled at the sight of his visitor. But, although he knew that the end had come, Wilding knew, also, how to meet it.

He rose casually to his feet, and threw the half-smoked cigarette into the fire-place.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 581.

"I have reason to believe, Wilding," said Mr. Quelch, "that you, in company with Loder, are responsible for the present indisposition of Wingate, Faulkner, and Gwynne. You drugged their coffee in order to make them unfitted to take part in the Marathon race."

"That's so, sir," said Wilding calmly. "Your information is quite correct, except in one detail."

"Namely?"

"That Loder was in no way mixed up in this business, sir. I guess he's not deep enough for these things. It was I who thought of drugging the coffee; it was I who actually drugged it. And whilst on the subject I may as well admit that it was I who sent the wire calling Wingate away just before the boxing-match."

Loder darted a grateful look at his study-mate.

He had expected anything but this. He had feared that Wilding would let him down badly. Instead of which he had taken the whole of the blame upon himself.

"But Loder was an accessory after the fact?" said Mr. Quelch.

Wilding shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, by gad!" he murmured.

"I'm not sure that I know what that means, sir," he said. "I assure you that everything that has been done to wreck the sports has been done by me."

"You know what this means, Wilding?"

"Well, sir, I hardly expect to be treated like a conquering hero," said Wilding, with a faint grin. "I plotted to win, and I've lost. That's it, and all about it. And I'm not going to whine because I've been bowled out middle peg."

"You will accompany me to the headmaster," said Mr. Quelch. "As for you, Loder, I am satisfied that you took no active part in the proceedings; but your conduct has not been above suspicion, and I warn you to be more careful in future. That is all!"

Mr. Quelch left the study with the unabashed Wilding.

When they had gone Gerald Loder heaved a deep, deep sigh of relief. He realised that he had come out of a tight corner far more fortunately than he deserved.

Next morning Roger Wilding left

Greyfriars, and his going was deplored by none. He was a clever enough fellow in many respects, but he had yet to learn that ambition is far more likely to succeed when it is of the healthy sort than when directed unscrupulously. Had he come to Greyfriars in the first instance with a desire to make good by fair means, who knows but what he may have succeeded? Brilliant alike in sports and lessons, he could have won for himself a high position at Greyfriars; but he could not play the game.

Greyfriars was rid of him for good; and when the excitement of his departure had died away, the outstanding figure in connection with the recent sports was Coker of the Fifth, who, by an exhibition of sheer pluck and loyalty to his School, had frustrated the knavish tricks of Wilding and Loder, and caused Greyfriars to emerge, after all, with flying colours!

THE END.

(DON'T MISS "THE ARTFUL DODGER!"—next Monday's Grand Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co., by Frank Richards.)



Goggs, Grammarian

By Richard Randolph

SYNOPSIS.

Four new boys—Goggs, Blount, Trickett, and Waters—come to Rylcombe Grammar School from Frankingham, which has been burnt down. Goggs, the real leader of the four, ventriloquist, ju-jitsu expert, and all-round sportsman, looks particularly simple, and intends, with the help of his chums, to hoodwink the Rylcombe fellows into thinking him simple. Goggs & Co. fall foul of Larking, Carpenter, and Snipe, three of the "smart set" at Rylcombe, and Goggs uses his ventriloquism to mystify them.

The Frankingham four share Study No. 3, and are assigned to Dormitory No. 29, which they share with Tadpole, who fancies himself an artist. Weird, who talks in rhyme, and Larking & Co. There is a fight between Larking and Frank Monk, in which Larking fouls, but is hopelessly beaten.

Goggs again uses his ventriloquism, and Larking & Co. suspect that a ventriloquist is at work, though they suspect Blount or Trickett, thinking Goggs too simple.

Goggs overhears a plot of Larking's to rag Monk's study, with the object of putting the blame of Goggs. Goggs, in the guise of an elderly woman, impersonates his grandmother.

(Now read on.)

Granny Plays the Goat.

IT was quite a warm afternoon, and Carker and Lacy were lounging by the gates when a female figure came in sight along the road from the station.

Neither paid particular attention to it at first. They were talking gee-gees. Lacy had a tendency that way, and Carker pretended one. Carker would pretend anything if he saw his profit in doing so, and Algernon Lacy was well-to-do.

But as the figure drew nearer Lacy noticed it, and elevated his eyeglass.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 581.

"Oh, crikey!" exclaimed Carker.

"Must be that ass Goggs' grandmother, by gad!"

"Can't be, you know, old top."

"Why can't it be, chump?"

"Goggs ain't with her."

"Oh, that's nothin'! It would be just like the dashed silly ass to miss her!"

"Not such a dashed silly ass to miss that, either!" said Carker, grinning.

The lady who approached certainly was a queer-looking figure. Her hat was the last thing in gorgeousness to be placed on top of grey hair. It was not so much the style of it, for style it had none that could be recognised. But it was big, and it was trimmed with a variety of trimmings, which included ribbons and feathers of all the primary colours, and most of the secondary ones.

Underneath it a wisp of grey hair dangled over her forehead, and behind the grey hair was in even greater confusion.

She wore a costume of a striking blue tint, also a short coat of an orange hue, decorated with large buttons, upon each of which showed in relief the head of some different breed of dog. She had open-work stockings, well displayed by short skirts; and her shoes, rather large for a lady of her size, had very high heels, which gave her a mincing gait.

There were many lines and wrinkles upon her face; but out of it shone a pair of singularly youthful blue eyes.

But Lacy and Carker had scarcely had a chance to take in the full effect of the picture she made before she was upon them.

She looked at them with a searching look, and then addressed herself to Lacy, apparently preferring his appearance to that of Carker.

"Excuse me, my dear little man," she said, in a high-pitched voice, "but I can hardly

be wrong. I think, in my assumption that this is Rylcombe Grammar School?"

"It is, madam!" replied Lacy, gazing upon her through his eyeglass in a kind of fascinated awe.

"What an awful old geezer!" whispered Carker in his ear.

"Shurrup, ass! She'll hear you!" growled Lacy.

"There is a boy named Goggs here—a very nice boy," said the lady.

"Oh, yes, madam! Great chum of mine, Goggs!" answered Lacy.

The blue eyes that seemed so out of keeping with the old, wrinkled face looked at him searchingly.

Then the arms of the strange lady were flung affectionately round his neck, and her face was pressed to his.

"Here, I say!" protested Lacy, struggling, red with confusion and ire.

"Let me kiss you, my dear little man! Any friend of my dear Johnny's must be so very, very dear to me, you understand!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Carker.

Lacy had brought it upon himself. It was very far indeed from being the fact that he and Goggs were chums. In the slight intercourse they had had thus far Lacy had been consistently rude to the queer new fellow.

Three sounding smacks the strange lady gave to the flushed and angry face of Algernon Lacy. Then she released him, and turned to Carker.

"And are you also a friend of my dear Johnny's?" she asked.

"Nunno, ma'am! I—I hardly know the chap!" faltered Carker.

"Ah, I will not kiss you, then! I am not sure that I should care to do so in any case. You do not look wholesome. What is your name, little boy?"

"Carker!" was the sullen answer. And Carker, in giving it, hardly knew why he did so, unless it was that those blue eyes

had a sort of compelling force upon him—the force of a nature stronger than his own.

It was true that Carker looked less wholesome than Lacy. Lacy was a dandy, and took great pains with his personal appearance. Carker took no pains at all with his. If there was anyone in the Fourth whom any lady, from seven to seventy, would not have kissed in preference to kissing Ezra Carker, that person was Cornelius Snipe. But there was very little to choose between the two.

"Why do you have pimples, Carker?"

Lacy gasped, and Carker spluttered.

"I—I—that's no business of yours, is it?" he said warmly.

"Perhaps it is not precisely my business. But at my age I can talk in plain terms to a mere child, I suppose? You should not have pimples, Carker! I shall speak to the matron on the subject. A few doses of cleansing medicine—"

"You let my pimples alone!" hooted Carker.

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Lacy.

"I shall certainly let them alone! Nothing would induce me to touch them. I have a strong objection to pimples, and should positively refuse to let Johnny have them. But I fear that you are uncleanly in your habits, Carker! Your neck looks as though it would be very much the better for a more frequent application of soap. But possibly you do not use soap at all?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lacy.

"You let my neck alone!" almost sobbed the victim of Granny's attentions.

"But the lady's quite right, Carker, old gun!" said Lacy. "I've often heard the fellows say that you're a dirty beast. Not bein' in your dorn, I can't say for certain that you never do wash; but I must say that I've never seen you what I should call clean, by gad!"

"Oh, hang you! I'm as clean as you are!" howled Carker.

"That is untruthful, and untruthfulness is even worse than uncleanness!" Granny said reprovingly. "You are very far from being as clean as Johnny's chum, who is such a nice, clean, neat little boy that I must really kiss him again!"

The last few words came with such a rush that Lacy had no chance to get away before the lady's arms were around his neck again, and her wrinkled face was pressed affectionately to his.

"Here, I say, madam, don't—please don't!" he pleaded. "You're creasin' my collar, y'know, an' rumplin' my hair frightfully! Oh, stop it!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Carker. "Glad I'm not clean, if that's the first prize for being so!"

Granny released Lacy. His collar certainly was creased, and his hair was badly rumpled. The grasp of Granny had been unexpectedly vigorous. Lacy, who was not at all a vigorous person, gasped in weak anger, unable to express what he felt.

"And now I must ask you to take me to dear Johnny," said Granny, patting his rumpled head, from which the cap had fallen. "You need not come, Carker, thank you!"

"I wasn't thinking of coming!" snarled Carker.

At that moment Mont Blanc came up. He had been to the village alone, on some private errand, and when Granny reached the gates had been only a hundred yards or so behind her. But he had not hurried.

There was a merry twinkle in his black eyes as he looked from the dismayed Lacy to the strangely-dressed female, and from her to the sulky Carker.

He had seen all that had passed. Another fellow in his place might have hesitated to show up until Granny has passed on; but Mont Blanc had his own reasons for not hesitating.

"Here's a chap who will take you to him!" gasped Lacy. "I—I must go an' brush my hair, an' put a clean collar on, y'know!"

And with that Lacy fairly bolted.

"May I have ze-plaisir to conduct madame to vere it ees her vish to go?" said Mont Blanc politely.

"And are you also a chum of my dear Johnny's?" inquired Granny.

"Oui, oui! Oh, certainement! Yow! Goggs, you boundaire!"

Granny had thrown her arms around the neck of the French junior. It was to that action on her part that the exclamation was due.

But the last three words were hissed into the ear of Granny, and Carker did not hear them.

The grip was relaxed, but not before Goggs had breathed:

"You won't give the game away, will you?"

To which Mont Blanc had replied:

"Non, non!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Carker.

Mont Blanc gave him a lofty look.

"You will be so vair' good as to take of heem no notice, madame," he said. "He is von rude garcon, ees eet not?"

"Very rude indeed," said Granny. "I am glad that all my dear Johnny's school-fellows are not like him. If it were so I should remove him at once to some other scholastic establishment, where the boys are not all Huns and Hottentots! Now, the other boy, the boy with the nice clean face and the eyeglasses, was really sweet!"

That compliment to Lacy was no real kindness. Carker was sure to repeat it, and Lacy would fairly writhe when he heard it repeated.

Granny and Mont Blanc left the gates together, and proceeded across the quad, apparently on the best of terms.

"Beastly little Froggy!" snarled Carker.

"How did you tumble, kid?" asked Goggs of Mont Blanc.

"Zat is vot you call an easy one. Moi, I vas on ze road, ven you into ze barn did go. An' ven you did come out, moreovaire. But—oh, vat a difference in ze mornin', as you say, ees eet not?"

The grease-paint wrinkles which adorned the face of Johnny Goggs were weirdly contorted as he grinned.

Mont Blanc's detection of his wheeze came to him as a complete surprise. He had left the little French junior entirely out of account.

But since Blanc was willing to keep the secret it really did not matter much.

"You can cut as soon as we get inside," he said. "I know my way about, you know."

"Ah, but madame will have ze difficulty in finding ze beloved Johnny, ees eet not?" returned Mont Blanc, with a sly twinkle.

"Oh, I can find him all serene when I want him. It's other people who won't be able to find him while his Granny's about, eh? I sha'n't want your help in finding him, anyway, and don't you go helping other people!"

"Zat is vat you call all right-ho, Goggs!"

They were inside the school now, and Mont Blanc promptly mizzled.

He had noticed something upon which he had not remarked—that the speech of Goggs had been quite different in those last few sentences from what it usually was. He supposed that the way in which the curious new boy generally talked was not his natural way. But in that he was not wholly correct.

Goggs hurried up to the study floor. It would not be well that Granny should be seen by anyone in authority. Nearly all the prefects were away, for the First Eleven had an out match; but there were masters about.

He did not doubt his ability to support his impersonation even to Mr. Adams. But he was bound to be detected sooner or later, and to take in his own Form-master was to prepare vials of wrath for the future.

As he minced along the corridor a study door opened, and the head of Jasper Weird protruded.

The tame poet gasped in surprise.

Then he spoke to Tadpole, inside the study.

"Oh, Taddy, Taddy, leave your book, And on this awesome creature look!"

Tadpole's long-haired cranium appeared at the door. Tadpole gasped.

"Oh, Taddy, did you ever see A sight like this? It frightens me!"

went on Weird.

"Shush! The lady will hear you!" hissed Tadpole.

"Fair, maiden, prithee, come to us, And give us each a hearty buss!"

To Tadpole it seemed that Weird was addressing the apparition in this extraordinary manner.

Tadpole gasped again.

But Weird knew that he had not spoken those words, and the gasp of Tadpole was as nothing to the gasp of Weird.

"Look out! She's coming!" quavered Weird, and he made a hurried movement to the rear.

"Yow! Owwwwp! Yaroooooh!"

Tadpole was never too firm on his legs; and at that moment his position—standing on tiptoes to look over Weird's shoulder—rendered him less firm than ever.

Weird's retreat bowled him clean over on

to his back, and Weird fell heavily on top of him.

But even in falling Weird had the presence of mind to slam the door to with his foot.

"Really, Weird—"

"You silly fathead! She was going to kiss us—to kiss us!"

In his acute alarm Weird was forgetting to talk in rhyme.

"But you asked her—"

"I didn't!" howled Weird. "You fat-headed idiot, do you think I'm out of my senses?"

"Your behaviour of late, Weird, would justify such a suspicion, I must say!"

That much Goggs heard from behind the closed door. Then Wagtail appeared, and clutched him by the arm.

"I say, Goggles—"

"Chump! You'll be giving the game away!"

"No, I sha'n't; there's no one to hear. I say—"

"And how are you, my dear Waters? My dear little fellow, how you have grown, and how very, very much you have improved!" said Goggs, in the high voice of Granny, just as Lacy came round the nearest corner, and halted apprehensively.

Into Wagtail's ear the disguised junior whispered:

"Play up, aas! Here's Lacy!"

Wagtail played up so far as to abstain from struggling in the arms of Granny. But the expression of his face was almost tragic as the supposed elderly lady gave him a sounding kiss on each cheek, and rattled on:

"You wash your ears now and brush your hair. Really, you can hardly imagine how much better you look than in the days when I had so frequently to tell you of your lack of regard for such things!"

"Oh, shut it!" groaned Wagtail pathetically.

"I shall never hear the last of this!"

"It's all right," said Goggs, in his natural voice. "Lacy's done a bunk. Having had some, Lacy desires no more. Into the study, quick, before Weird and Tadpole come out again!"

They hurried into No. 3.

But there was no occasion for hurry, as far as Weird and Tadpole were concerned.

Those two really felt much safer behind a closed door; and Weird had now taken the precaution to turn the key in the lock.

Foiling the Study-wreckers.

"I SAY, Goggles, those three rotters are at it!"

"My dear Wagtail, pray be more explicit! Who are the three rotters, and what are they at?"

"Larking and Snipe and Carpenter, of course. Wasn't it them I was told off to watch? Carpenter went to footer, and I thought he was out of it; but he came back a few minutes ago, walking lame, and I heard him slanging one of the Woottons—said the boulder backed him. Of course, it was an accident if that happened; but he wouldn't have it that way, and Snipe made out that he was jolly sure it was done on purpose."

"Your instructions, Wagtail, hardly included listening at keyholes, I think," said Goggs gravely.

"Fathead! I haven't been listening at any keyhole! You know well enough that's not my line. I was in the corridor, and they didn't take any trouble to lower their voices. I suppose they thought they were sure no one was about."

"Accept my apology, dear boy. But I did not really mean it. What are the sweet trio after?"

"The game they planned, of course—ragging Study No. 1."

Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and the Wootton brothers occupied No. 1. Lane and Carboy, who had formerly shared that apartment with Monk, had lately moved out, and were now in No. 8 with Mont Blanc.

"It would seem that I have come in the very nick of time. They will scarcely go on with the ragging of a study in the presence of a lady visitor, I imagine."

"That's off," said Wagtail. "They've locked the door—I tried it."

"Their scheme included throwing the guilt of the dark deed upon us," Goggs said thoughtfully. "Have you gathered any notion as to how they propose to do that?"

"Eh? I didn't know anything about that! I see now. I did rather wonder why you bothered to keep them off the wrecking bizney. It's a dirty trick—the way they'd do

it, anyhow. But it didn't seem to me our affair."

"It was remiss on the part of Bags not to inform you fully of the circumstances," replied Goggs, shaking his head. "He left too much to your unaided intelligence, which is not—"

"I don't see how you or Bags or anybody else could expect me to guess that!" broke in Wagtail warmly. "But that isn't the thing now. The thing is, what are we going to do?"

"You are partly correct, my dear Waters, but not quite. The thing is, what am I going to do? Your part is played."

"Oh, is it? Well, then, what are you going to do?"

"I am going to stop them at their little game," answered Goggs coolly.

"But you can't get in, dummy!"

"I am not a dummy, dear boy, and I can get in!"

"I don't see how."

"That merely shows that you have a very limited imagination as well—"

"Oh, come off it! Look here, it's not a bit of good imitating Adams' voice. They'd only lie low."

"That is slightly better, Wagtail! You are now bringing your imagination into play. But you have not hit the mark. I do not propose to order them to open in the deep and manly voice of our respected preceptor."

"Well, you can imitate Gay or Monk. But I'll bet they won't open for that!"

"I myself should not expect them to do so. I should consider it certain that the voice of any one among the occupants of No. 1 would induce them to emulate Brer Rabbit, and lie low, as you aptly put it."

"What on earth—"

"There is the window, my dear Waters."

Wagtail stared rather blankly at the window.

"But— Oh, I see!" he said, suddenly remembering Goggs' comment on the occasion of their first inspection of the study.

Goggs moved towards the window.

"I say, you know—in those things—suppose anybody spotted you from the quad!" gasped Wagtail.

"They will only suppose that my beloved grandmother is a singularly active person for a lady of her advanced age," Goggs said, throwing up the sash.

"Here, I say! Come back!"

But Wagtail's protests were of no avail. Goggs had made up his mind what to do.

There might have been danger for anyone less cool than he, for the footing he could get on the lower string-course of masonry was but a narrow one, and his grip by the upper projection left something to be desired. His high-heeled shoes were a nuisance, too.

But all these things were matters of indifference to Goggs. The one thing that did seem to him to matter was whether he would be seen from the quad. If that chanced, awkward questions might arise.

It would take but a few seconds to get from one window to the outside of the other, however. He did not even glance down to see whether anyone was watching from below.

Outside the window of No. 1 he paused.

He was careful not to stand in front of the window so as to obscure the light and give warning of his coming.

He wanted to get inside without the study-wreckers witnessing his entry.

It was a difficult task, but not, given luck, by any means an impossible one.

Peering round into the window he saw what he had hoped to see—that Larking, Snipe, and Carpenter all had their backs turned to it.

They were piling up something on the floor, stripping the walls of pictures and photographs to add to the pile.

Goggs had not arrived too soon. In a minute or two treasured possessions of the four who shared that study—home photos, footer and cricket groups, and the like—would have been irretrievably spoiled.

The window was open a few inches at the top. The Three Wallabies and Frank Monk believed in fresh air; and their hygienic theories stood them in good stead now.

The sash went up without a sound as Goggs pushed at it.

Without a sound he clambered over the ledge and dropped into the room. Hampered as he was by skirt and high-heeled shoes, it was no mean acrobatic performance. But Goggs was no mean acrobat.

He put his hand behind him and pulled the sash gently down; and still the three were unaware of his coming.

"That's the lot," said Larking. "Now let's jump on them!"

"And then mix them up with ashes from the grate, and treacle, and ink, and a few little things of that sort," Snipe said, with venom in his voice.

"I say, though, it's a bit thick!" protested Carpenter feebly.

Goggs was glad to hear that protest, weak as it was. He did not think Carpenter such an utter blackguard as Larking, and even in Larking he could see some traces of decency that Snipe lacked.

"Ass! What would be the use of taking all this trouble just to turn the table upside-down and scatter books on the floor?" asked Larking contemptuously.

"Well, it would seem pretty weak," admitted Carpenter. "But this is a bit too strong for my liking. And there will be the very dickens of a fuss when those chaps—"

"There won't!" said Snipe.

Carpenter stared at him. Carpenter now had one side of his face turned towards Granny; but he had not yet perceived the intruder. Snipe and Larking still had their backs towards her.

"What do you mean?" demanded Carpenter roughly. "It's sure to come out who did it."

"So it will!" Snipe said, with an evil leer.

"But then—"

"It will come out that Goggs and Waters did it!" snarled Larking.

"I really think not!" spoke a high-pitched voice behind him.

"My hat!" said Carpenter, first to perceive the intruder. "Oh, crumbs! How did she get here?"

Snipe and Larking had wheeled round. Snipe's lower jaw fell, and his unpleasant countenance went almost green with alarm.

Larking tried to put a bold face upon the situation.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said, "but I really think you have made some mistake."

"No mistake at all!" said the intruder crisply.

She stood with her skirt gathered up in one hand in such a manner as to show to the best advantage her open-work stockings. It occurred to Carpenter, who had some sense of humour, that her legs really looked quite absurdly younger than her face; and that thought, combined with her queer appearance generally, made him giggle behind his raised hand.

Possibly Carpenter felt that he was not so completely in the soup as Snipe and Larking, and that feeling enabled him to see the funny side of the affair which they quite failed to discern.

"But this is our study, and we don't know you!" Larking said desperately.

That was a poor lie, and the contortions of Snipe's unwholesome face showed plainly that he so considered it. The visitor would have had to be as mad as she looked to believe that the trio were wrecking their own study for a pleasant afternoon's amusement. And, somehow, Snipe did not fancy she was quite so mad as she looked. There was something very keen and searching in those bright blue eyes of hers.

"Let me introduce myself," said Granny, in mining accents, and with an ingratiating smile. "I am Miss—er—I should say, Mrs. Strongitharm, the grandmother of Johnny Goggs, who is, I have no doubt, a friend of all of you."

"Not in the least!" said Larking rudely. "We hardly know the chap, but that's enough for us. He isn't here, so I can't see what you want here."

"I don't know how you got in, madam, but it isn't a bit of use looking for Goggs here," said Snipe, growing bolder. "Shall I open the door for you?"

He moved towards the door as he spoke. But with a couple of long strides, very unlike her mincing gait when Lacy and Carker had first sighted her, Granny got ahead of him, and her hand was on the key before he could touch it.

The key turned without a click or squeak, and Snipe, cunning as he was, failed to see it turned.

"I could have sworn I locked that door!" said Carpenter, in a low voice, to Larking.

"You couldn't have done, you idiot!" snarled Larking. "That harridan must have

come in by it. The window's shut; and, anyway, I shouldn't say she could fly, though I wish she'd been an angel before she blew in here!"

"But if she'd come in at the door we couldn't have been off seeing her," argued Carpenter, glancing from window to door and back again in utter perplexity.

"Well, we didn't, and that's all about it! Open the door for the lady, Snipe!"

"I—I— She won't go, Larking!" whined Snipe.

"But she must go! I don't want to be rude, madam—"

"Then you are rude without desiring to be so, which shows a very unpleasant nature, Master Larking!" said Granny sharply. "Larking—Snipe. I shall remember those names. Do you mind telling me yours?"

Carpenter met Granny's gaze with rather a sulky look; but his tone was quite civil as he replied:

"My name is Carpenter, madam."

"Oh, you are a carpenter, are you? Now, I had half imagined that you were all three in the furniture-moving line."

And Granny giggled, as if pleased with her own wit, and pointed to the pile on the floor and to the overturned chairs and table.

"Well, it really is something like that," said Snipe, catching at the chance which seemed to be offered him. "As a matter of fact, we are changing out of this study into another, and we are just getting our things together, you know."

"I am afraid you are not at all a truthful boy, Snipe!" snapped Granny.

"Oh, I say!" squeaked Snipe.

"Look here, madam, I really must ask you to go! Your grandson is not here, I give you my word!" said Larking irritably. "You can search the room if you like; it won't take long!"

"My dear Johnny is not here, you say? Then how comes it that this is here?" retorted Granny.

And as she spoke she snatched up from the floor, where it had lain half concealed by an overturned chair, a blue-bordered handkerchief.

Larking suppressed a groan with difficulty. That handkerchief was to have proved to Gordon Gay & Co. that Goggs had had a hand in the ragging of their study. Snipe had purchased it to that end. And now—

Granny Grows Popular.

"HE must have been here and dropped it!" said Snipe lamely.

"And, of course, Master Larking's remark concerning Goggs and Waters was merely a little joke?" Granny said sweetly.

"That's all. I—I hadn't even seen the handkerchief then. And how should I have known that it was Goggs' if I had seen it? Tell me that, ma'am!" bluffed Larking.

Granny put her hand to her chin reflectively. The gesture was very like one that Goggs frequently made. But these three had not studied Goggs closely enough to recognise it.

"That certainly does call for some thought," said Granny. "Naturally, I knew the handkerchief at once; but, as you say, how could you know it? Unless, indeed, you had wickedly put it there to throw suspicion upon my poor, blameless Johnny!"

Carpenter, the least guilty of the three, flushed at that; but neither Larking nor Snipe changed colour. And Granny did not look at Carpenter. It was as though she knew him to be half unwilling to share in the plot.

"You don't think we would do a thing like that, surely, Mrs. Strongitharm?" asked Snipe oily.

"I am sorry to say that my simplicity is not equal to the strain you seek to put upon it," was Granny's dignified reply. "I have met with many curious coincidences in the course of a long and, I trust, tolerably useful life; but the words I heard just after I entered and the finding of that handkerchief would constitute—if there were really no connection other than that of accident between them—the most curious of all."

A spiteful gleam showed in Larking's eyes as he said roughly:

"Prove it, then! You come butting in where you've never been asked to come, and then—"

"Steady, Lark!" protested Carpenter. "You can't talk to a lady like that!"

Granny turned to him.

"I am very glad to see that one of you three has some sense of decency and chivalry," she said gravely. "If I were in your place I think I should leave these two to their own vile devices, and have no more to do with an affair that is discreditable to all of you."

Carpenter winced, and shuffled his feet. He wished that he could get out of it as easily as that.

But loyalty forbade. Carpenter had some sense of loyalty if Snipe and Larking had not. Snipe certainly lacked it. As to Larking, there might be more doubt. He really had some affection for Carpenter.

"I can't do that, ma'am," Carpenter said. "I'm in the game, and I'm bound to see it through. I don't admit that the notion you've got hold of is correct, mind you. But thank you all the same."

"You have made an accusation against us, ma'am," said Larking. "I don't want to be rude to a lady, but if you were a fellow, and of anywhere near my own weight, I should punch your head!"

"Don't talk rot!" snapped Carpenter.

"Bravo! That's the style, Lark!" cried Snipe.

It was all that Johnny Goggs could do to keep himself from saying "Punch it, then!" But he refrained. He was not yet tired of his impersonation.

"You are very rude, Master Larking! As to proof, I really do not think any unprejudiced person would ask for more than I can offer."

"Your word against three of us!" replied Larking.

"And this evidence," replied Granny coolly. She pointed to the overturned furniture, the pile of stuff on the study floor, and the blue-bordered handkerchief she held.

"Ragging a study isn't anything so very desperate," said Larking, in a tone of defiance. "We've had ours ragged before now."

"And did those who—er—ragged it seek to throw the blame upon others by what I believe are termed faked clues?" asked the troublesome old lady.

"You haven't a scrap of evidence that we tried to do anything of the kind," replied Larking, still hoping to bluff the thing through.

"Oh, come along, you fellows!" said Snipe. "What's the use of staying here? Mrs. Strongtharm doesn't want to be entertained by us, I'm sure. She seems to have taken a violent dislike to us all—that's the only way of explaining it."

"On the contrary," said Granny. "I am so charmed by your society that I cannot think of letting you go yet."

She stood in front of the door, and it was plain that she did not mean to move.

All three saw that; and it made all three feel very uneasy.

Before long everyone would be coming back from the football-field. If the ragers were caught red-handed they had a warm time in store for them. And it looked very much as if they were going to be caught practically red-handed.

Granny would not shift, and it was out of the question to use force to move her.

Snipe and Larking looked at one another. Carpenter, avoiding the eyes of both, sat down, with a depressed and sulky face.

"Won't you take a seat, ma'am?" asked Larking politely.

"Thank you, I will—if you will bring me one here!" answered Granny.

Larking scowled. Carpenter got up from his own chair, took it across the room, and placed it right in front of the door, Granny moving aside to allow him to do so.

She sat down, and Carpenter lounged moodily to the window. Larking and Snipe favoured the nicely-brushed back of his head with glares of resentment.

There was silence in No. 1 for fully ten minutes, and no one stirred. Then Snipe moved over to Carpenter's side.

He stared out into the quad. He continued to stare for a minute or two. Then he said, quite naturally:

"Why, there's Goggles himself! I was wondering what had become of the fellow!"

It was very well done. But there was an excellent reason why it could not possibly take in Granny.

"I have no doubt that he will rush to my arms the moment he hears that I have arrived!" she said, with a beaming smile. "My dear Johnny is a very affectionate boy!"

"Oh, hang her!" muttered Larking. "We've got to shift her some way!"

"Do you still perceive my Johnny, Master Snipe?" asked Granny. "And is the dear child looking about as if in search of me?"

"No," answered Snipe. "He isn't looking

(Continued on page 16.)

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:

THE MAGNET. THE GEM. THE BOYS' FRIEND. CHUCKLES. THE PENNY POPULAR.
Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Monday. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Monday:

"THE ARTFUL DODGER!"

By Frank Richards.

There is an element of light comedy in next week's grand long complete story of Greyfriars which will provoke roars of merriment.

Wally Bunter's real identity has not yet been discovered; but he is placed in a perilously tight corner by the news that Billy Bunter's sister Bessie is paying a visit to Greyfriars. Fearing that the keen feminine eyes will penetrate his deception, Wally makes desperate endeavours to keep the intruding Bessie at arm's length. Eventually he succeeds, but only at a tremendous price, which involves letting Snoop into the secret, besides making a vast hole in the pocket-money of the harassed Wally. But the wiles of

"THE ARTFUL DODGER"

prove successful, and Wally at length manages to extricate himself from a position bristling with awkward possibilities.

OURSELVES AND THE FUTURE!

I promised last week to refer to this important subject, and I can introduce it in no better way than by reproducing in full a set of verses which have come to hand from a loyal Repton reader, whose outbursts used frequently to appear on this page in the past. Here are the verses:

Prithee Mr. Editor,

Now we're not at war,
May we have the MAGNET
Lengthened as of yore?
"D.O.R.A." soundly slumbers,
War-time rules fall flat;
Give us Double Numbers!
Give us extra Chat!

When will all your papers
Flood the stalls again
Looking fat and healthy?
("D.O.R.A." shrieks in vain!)
Hitherto I've said nought,
Though I'm feeling blue;
Give us back the "Dreadnought,"
And the "Herald," too!

Once upon a time, sir,
Franky Richards penned
Three penny books of Greyfriars,
Thrilling to the end!
Give us all the glories
Of the golden past;
For extended stories
All your readers fast!

Now that Bill, the Kaiser,
Brought to heel and beat,
Impotent doth lie, sir,
In his Dutch retreat;
Joy and benediction
On your readers pour;
Give them feasts of fiction,
As in days of yore!

My Repton chum has raised some very important points. He is not merely voicing his own wishes, but he is the spokesman of hundreds of readers who are wondering what developments the Companion Papers will undergo during this period of transition from war to peace.

But the writer of these verses is a young man in a hurry. He seems to imagine that I have but to press a button, and lo! the MAGNET will double its size, and those papers which shut up shop owing to the war will suddenly spring into new life.

But my chum must be rational and reasonable. We are not living in an enchanted "Arabian Nights" period, when by waving a magic wand we may produce anything to order. Although my correspondent tells us

that "D.O.R.A." soundly slumbers," she is still in many respects a very wide-awake old lady. The paper restrictions are still with us. They are not so stringent, perhaps, but they do not permit as yet of our flooding the market with new periodicals.

But I will not throw a damper on the hopes of the bard of Repton. His wishes shall be met—in the fulness of time. I do not guarantee that either the "Dreadnought" or the jolly little "Herald" will reappear; but some equally fine ventures in boys' literature are being contemplated, and I hope shortly to make this page a medium for some stupendous announcements.

My Repton chum, in company with my loyal army of readers at home and beyond the seas, will do well to watch this page for developments.

YOUR EDITOR (H. A. H.).

NOTICES.

Correspondence, etc.

Hubert Beaumont, 35, Bancroft Road, New-some, Huddersfield, will contribute jokes, stories, etc., to amateur magazines. Stamped addressed envelope.

Bob Bennett, 29, Sauer's Buildings, Johannesburg, Transvaal, South Africa—with a boy reader in Queensland, Australia, 14-15.

Abie Shorkend, 121, Sir Lowry Road, Cape Town, South Africa—with readers, 15, anywhere where the English language is spoken.

R. Fields, Southampton Road, Romsey, Hants—with readers interested in any kind of engineering, 14-15.

The Editor of the "Beta"—the first number of which will be issued in April—06, Cambridge Street, Belgravia, S.W.1, would like to hear from readers. Contributions received. Stamped addressed envelope.

Miss Dorothy Mather, 20, Barker Street, Queen's Park, Harpurhey, Manchester—with readers anywhere.

Alec Watkins, 1, Mayfield Park North, Fishponds, Bristol—with readers in U.S.A. and Colonies, to exchange stamps, etc.

A. S. Geen, 15, The Terrace, Creighton, Cardiff—with readers anywhere, view to purchase MAGNETS and "Gems" up to 100.

Miss Doris Kemp, 44, Perkin Street, North End, Port Elizabeth, South Africa—with readers anywhere.

J. H. Davidson, c/o J. W. Jagers & Co., Main Street, Port Elizabeth, South Africa—with readers anywhere.

R. Veysey, 51, Pen-y-dre Heath, South Wales, will contribute short articles and stories to amateur magazines.

V. Hayhoe, Tostock, Bury St. Edmunds—with anyone interested in flying.

J. McEwen, 18, High Street, Tillicoultry, Clackmannanshire—with readers, 10-17, interested in rabbit-keeping.

W. Farrer, 208, Albert Road, Heeley, Sheffield—with readers interested in Meccano.

R. Stacey, 48, West St. Helen Street, Abingdon, Berks, invites readers to join Stamp Exchange Club, 12-18; Colonials welcomed. Stamped addressed envelope.

Stanley Nicol, 24, Craigie Street, Aberdeen—with readers in Australia and Canada, 10-13. All letters answered.

Ralph Broadbent, jun., 23, Newsham Drive, Newsham Park, Liverpool—with reader in Australia, 11-13.

Wm. McNally, Glensiew, Glenluce, Wigtownshire, wants readers for amateur magazine, 11d., post free.

Back Numbers Wanted by—

Lancelot Keeble, 23, All Saints Street, Nottingham—MAGNETS, 1-100, 1s. each; 100-400, 3d. and 6d., according to popularity of story, 1s. for No. 254; 1s. 6d. for No. 392. "Gems," 200-400, 3d. and 6d. offered; double price for double numbers. Write first.

Fred Eccles, 39, Garden Street, Newcastle, Staffs—MAGNETS, 119, 120, 390, 411, 487, 488, 489, 490. "Gems," 472, 473, 475, 476, 477, 539; 11d. each.

for you, and I don't fancy he will get the chance. Hake of the Sixth had just collared him! Oh, dash it all, that's too thick! I'm not keen on Goggles—I think he's an ass—but that's no reason why Hake should kick him, the bullying cad!"

Again it was very well done. Granny could not be expected to be aware of the fact that Hake might have kicked any member of the Fourth except Snipe himself—including with the rest Snipe's own dear pals, Larking and Carpenter—until he grew tired of kicking, without its troubling Cornelius Snipe.

But Granny was quite well aware of one thing—that if Hake were kicking Goggs in the quad while she was upstairs in Study No. 1, then the days of miracles were certainly not at an end.

"Is Hake a very large, rough person?" she asked.

"Six feet two, and horribly rough, ma'am!" replied Snipe mournfully. But his wink at Carpenter was not mournful.

"Oh dear! I hope he will not hurt Johnny too much. The poor child is not used to being kicked!"

"Haden't you better go and stop him?" asked Larking.

Granny shook her head.

"It would take me some time to get downstairs," she said. "And by the time I got there this cruel person whom you call Hake would have got tired of kicking my Johnny; or, if he went on so long, poor Johnny would probably have succumbed before I arrived upon the scene. Oh dear! Why did I ever allow the innocent child to come to a place like this?"

It was plain to all three that Snipe's second attempt had failed, and that a third would have no better issue. But he did not venture a third.

"Has the person Hake stopped kicking my Johnny?" asked Granny, after a short pause.

"Still at it!" snarled Snipe. But he knew now that Granny did not believe a word he spoke.

"They're coming from the footer-field!" said Carpenter heavily.

"Look here, ma'am, we really must go!" roared Larking, losing his self-control.

"I fail to see the necessity," replied Granny, very coolly.

"If you don't move away from that door of your own accord I shall move you, and that's all about it!" Larking hooted.

"You won't!" snapped Carpenter.

He came forward, clenching his hands. He was weak and plastic. Larking and Snipe had led him into many shady affairs that he would have steered clear of but for them. But he was too decent to stand this.

He was under a delusion, of course. Had he known, or even guessed, the truth, he would have been as ready to go for Granny as Larking was.

And Larking was not keen on it. It was sheer desperation which induced that threat.

Larking could not bear the thought of being caught in Study No. 1 by its occupants—of having the story of his base trick told by this eccentric old woman to Gordon Gay & Co.—of seeing the disgust on their faces when they realised that, not content with fouling Monk in flight, he had attempted a mean revenge upon him and his chums for the licking he had got. It was as certain as anything could be that they would know now; it had never been certain that they would not find out. But to stay and have his rascality exposed was more than Larking knew how to bear.

He moved upon Granny. Carpenter moved upon him.

"You won't!" repeated Carpenter.

"Stand back!" howled Larking. "If you touch me—"

Carpenter seized him by the shoulder, and Larking broke off in his speech, and struck savagely at his chum.

The blow took Carpenter upon the temple, and he turned deadly pale as he staggered back. Snipe caught him as he reeled.

"I say, Lark!" faltered Snipe, in sudden fear.

But Larking was in such a rage that all prudence had fled from him.

"Get out of the way, you old mix!" he roared.

Granny did not get out of the way. On the contrary, Granny advanced a step or two.

A grip as of steel fell upon the right wrist of Larking. His arm was twisted back with a jerk that felt as if it were breaking. A pair of blue eyes that had suddenly gone very fierce blazed into his face.

And then, before he could realise what was being done to him, he found himself upon his back on the floor!

At that very minute the door flew open, and Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and the Wootton brothers appeared.

Behind them, in the corridor, were others—Bags and Tricks and Wagtail, Lane and Carboy and Lacy, and a very knowing grin upon his dark face, Mont Blanc.

"Hallo! My eye, what's all this?" cried Gordon Gay, looking upon the scene in amazement.

"I say, what's wrong with Carpenter?" inquired Frank Monk anxiously.

Snipe had let Carpenter, more than half dazed, slide to the carpet.

"And with our study?" snapped Harry Wootton.

"And who's the lady?" asked Jack Wootton, staring at Granny.

Bags came forward at that, while Monk and Gay knelt by Carpenter, whose face was now of a leaden hue.

"Hallo, Gran!" said Bags cheerily.

"My dearest Bertram! How are you, my dear boy?" cried Granny, in glad accents. And she fell upon the neck of Bertram Bagshaw Blount and kissed him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lane and Carboy.

But Bags took it very coolly. They would know sooner or later, and what did it matter?

Tricks played up in even better style.

"Hallo, Gran! How are you?" he said, coming forward and throwing his arms round the weird lady's neck.

"My hat!" muttered Carboy.

"I must say, those chaps aren't too dashed particular!" sneered Lacy.

"Then you're Goggs' grandmother, madam?" said Gordon Gay, looking up.

Carpenter had moaned and lifted his head. He was hurt; but it was plain that the hurt was less serious than they had feared at first. Larking had scrambled to his feet, and stood looking down at his chum with a crimson face and hard, defiant eyes. He was sorry that he had struck—more sorry than anyone there could easily have believed; but he knew that they would not value any expression of sorrow he made, and he kept silence.

"Mrs. Strongitharm!" whispered Granny in the ear of Tricks—and Tricks tumbled at once.

"This is Gay, and that's Monk, and the other two are Wootton major and Wootton minor, Gran," he said. "Mrs. Strongitharm, you fellows!"

Granny bowed.

Snipe, keeping in the background as much as possible, thought that the name which Granny bore was a well-fitting one. He was still puzzled by her treatment of Larking. How had she done it? Larking, a strong fellow, had gone down before her in an instant; and yet she had not seemed to exercise much force.

"Look here, who's been playing these games in our study?" shouted Wootton minor. "I beg your pardon, ma'am—I don't mean to be rude to you—but somebody's going to be made to pay for all this!"

"Shut up, Harry!" whispered Gordon Gay in his chum's ear. Aloud he said:

"I don't think there can really be any doubt what's happened, or any doubt but that more would have happened if Mrs. Strongitharm had not come in looking for Goggs, I suppose."

"Yes, where is Goggs?" asked Frank Monk.

"It's queer that he hasn't shown up."

"I'm dashed if it is!" said Algernon Lacy to Carboy. "I dashed well wouldn't show up if that were my grandmother! Not that it would be possible for me to have such an extraordinary female relative as that, y'know!"

"Shurrup!" snapped Carboy. "She may look a rum 'un, but I reckon she's the right sort."

"The dear boy cannot be much longer in making his appearance, I think!" said Granny. "I regret to say, Master Gay, that I found these apparently unprincipled persons"—she pointed to Larking and Snipe—"engaged in what looked very like wanton destruction here!"

"Very like it!" snapped Jack Wootton, with a glance at the heaped-up pile of stuff, and a glare at Larking and Snipe.

"And you stopped them at it?" said Gordon Gay. "We are all very much obliged to you, I am sure, ma'am!"

"She stopped them, and she jolly well kept them here till you fellows came along!" spoke up Wagtail. "I saw her before she went in, half an hour or more ago. And I heard that rotter Larking threaten to shift her from the door if she wouldn't move herself!"

"Get out!" said Gordon Gay scornfully.

catching Larking by the shoulders and thrusting him towards the door. "We'll deal with you later on—it isn't possible to do it properly with a lady here. Get out, I say!"

And Larking went, with a look of concentrated fury. Snipe slunk out after him. Monk helped Carpenter up, and Carpenter also followed, with hanging head.

Gay turned to the smiling visitor.

"We're more than obliged to you, Mrs. Strongitharm!" he said politely. "I don't know where Goggs can be; but in his absence will you do us the honour of taking tea with us? We shall have to get the study straight and change our things first; but that won't take long. And, of course, we want your grandson and these fellows to come, too!" he added.

"Oh, that's all right, then!" said Bags, with a good pretence of relief. "I was just going to remark that dear old Gran's more our guest than yours, you know!"

"Not a bit of it!" replied Gay. "You'll honour us, won't you, ma'am?"

"I shall be pleased to accept your kind invitation, Gay," said Granny, with a stately curtsy. "My dear Bertram, I really think I am going to be quite popular at Rylcombe!" she added, as the four passed out.

The End of the Tea-party.

"YOU can't carry it through, Goggles," said Wagtail.

Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, the Wootton brothers, Blount, and Trickett had all gone to change, and Goggs, in his Granny disguise, and Waters were left alone in their own study, to which the other three ex-Frankingham boys had conducted their supposed visitor.

"Oh, can't I?" returned Goggs.

"Of course you can't, chump! Shouldn't wonder if some of those chaps suspect already. And when you don't turn up they'll smell a bigger rat than ever."

"But, my dear Wagtail, there is no need for me to turn up, as I am here."

"You ain't here, silly ass! Goggs ain't here, I mean. You're Granny!"

"The absence of the innocent Johnny does certainly constitute a difficulty, but not, I think, one that cannot be overcome. Could you not play the part, Wagtail?"

"What, me? Why, I couldn't look such a silly ass as you do, not to save my life!"

"Now, I wonder—I really wonder!" murmured Goggs.

"Wonder what, fathead?"

"Never mind, Waters—never mind! Why, if here is not that very nice little French boy!"

The tone of Goggs had suddenly become that of Granny, as Mont Blanc put his head in at the door.

"Voila, Goggs, ees eet not?" said Mont Blanc.

"Parlez-vous Francais? Moi, aussi, but only a little bit," answered Goggs, still in the accents of Granny.

"Why, the boulder knows!" said Wagtail, in surprise.

"Oui, oui—moi, eet ees zat I know vairy vell, ees eet not, Goggs, mon ami?"

"Look here, the whole blessed wheeze is up the giddy spout if that kid knows!" snorted Wagtail.

Mont Blanc closed the door, and advanced farther into the room. The look he gave Waters was a distinctly hostile one. The French junior had given his word to Goggs not to let on, and he resented the attitude of Waters.

"And vy for ees ze 'ole vat-you-call veeze up ze spout for zat I know?" he demanded.

"Because it is—because you are certain to tell the other chaps!" Wagtail snapped, clenching his hands.

"Zat ees von beeg lie! I tell zem not—not anyon at all!"

"I'll see that you jolly well don't!" declared Wagtail, with intense determination. "See here, Goggles, there's only one safe thing to do. We shall have to tie and gag this foreign merchant, and leave him here till the game's over."

"But, my dear Waters—"

"Vat? You would tie me oop—gag me? Je ne pense pas—I zink not! Joost you try heem, zat ees all about eet! I defy you—oui, I snap my fingers onder ze nose of you!"

And Mont Blanc snapped his fingers under the nose of Wagtail so closely that he flicked it.

(There will be another splendid long instalment of this grand school story in next Monday's issue of the MAGNET. Order your copy in advance.)