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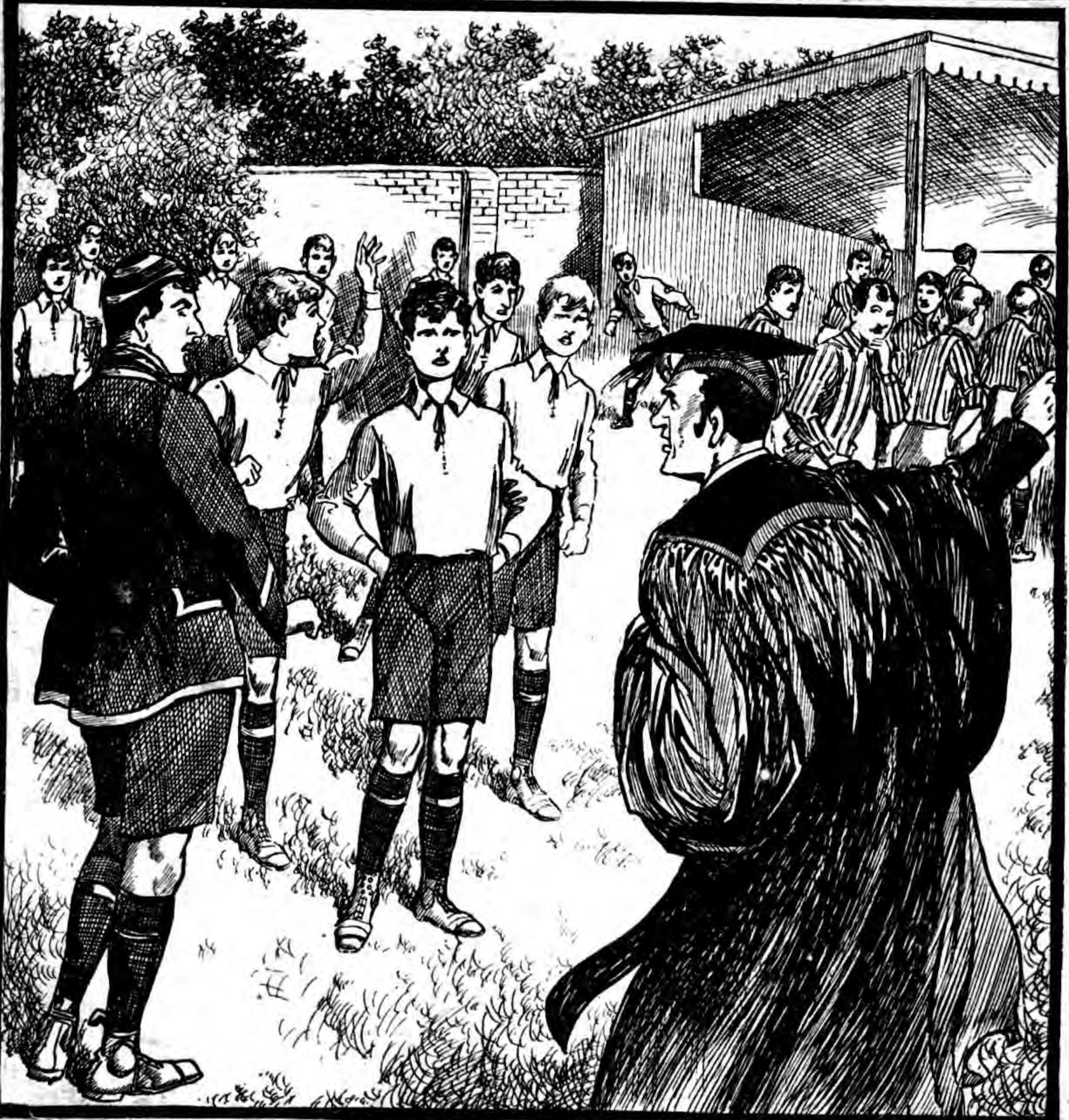
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No. 610. Vol. XIII.

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**MR. QUELCH'S HIGH-
HANDED ACTION!**

(A Dramatic Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.) 18-10-15



The Mystery of Mr. Quelch

A Magnificent Long,
Complete School Story
of Harry Wharton & Co.
:: :: at Greyfriars. :: ::

... BY ...

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Astonishing!

JUST in time!" Bob Cherry, of the Greyfriars Remove, uttered the exclamation as he dashed up to the school gates.

Bob had been over to Courtfield to purchase a football, and he had been engaged in a race against time. Had he returned a moment later the gates would have been slammed in his face by Gosling, the crusty old porter.

It was a near thing. Bob Cherry just managed to hurl himself through into the Close as the gates were being shut.

Gosling gave a grunt.

"Which that was a narrow squeak, Master Cherry!" he said.

Bob chuckled breathlessly.

"Sorry I couldn't give you the satisfaction of reporting me to Quelch!" he said. "Better luck next time, Gossy!"

"Wat I says is this 'ere—"

Bob Cherry did not wait to hear what Gosling had to say. With the brand-new football tucked under his arm, he strode away through the dusky Close.

Standing on the School House steps, with a portentous frown on his face, was Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove.

Mr. Quelch's gaze was directed sternly towards Bob Cherry, and Bob's heart beat faster than usual.

"Quelchy looks upset about something!" he murmured. "Looks as if I'm going to receive the vials of his giddy wrath, too! Wonder what it's all about?"

Bob Cherry could not understand why Mr. Quelch, with a deepening frown, should be waiting for him on the School House steps.

Had he been a midnight prowler, just returning from an excursion to the Cross Keys, Mr. Quelch's expression could not have been more thunderous.

"I'm not coming in late," reflected Bob; "and I've done nothing to get into Quelch's black books, that I know of."

"Cherry!"

"Ye-e-es, sir?" he gasped, halting at the foot of the steps.

Mr. Quelch glared at the junior.

"Where are your lines?" he demanded.

"Mum-mum-my lines, sir?"

"Yes! Where is the imposition I gave you, Cherry?"

Bob looked utterly bewildered.

"I—I—" he faltered.

"Do not attempt to make excuses, Cherry!"

Bob Cherry stared blankly at the Form-master.

"You—you haven't given me any lines to do for you, sir!"

"What?"

"The last imposition you gave me was over three weeks ago, sir. I took the lines to you, and they were quite satisfactory. You made me write out fifty lines of the Iliad as an imposition; since when I have had no other!" concluded Bob humorously.

"Do not dare to jest with me, Cherry! Only recently—this morning, to be precise—I gave you a hundred lines to write. Instead of obeying my commands, you have devoted your time to the purchase of a football!"

Bob Cherry's hand went to his brow.

"I must be dreaming!" he thought.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"You will bring the lines to my study before breakfast to-morrow morning, Cherry!"

"But, sir—"

"Not a word!"

"You—you must be making a mistake, sir!"

"Are you suggesting that my memory is at fault, Cherry?" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

"Well, you certainly didn't give me an imposition, sir! You must have given it to one of the other fellows—"

"Silence, Cherry! The imposition is doubled!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"If you say another word I shall cane you!"

Mr. Quelch turned on his heel and rustled away into the building.

Bob Cherry followed in a dazed sort of way. He was beginning to entertain doubts concerning the Form-master's sanity.

A chorus of welcome greeted Bob as he entered Study No. 1 in the Remove passage.

The other members of the Famous Five were within, roasting chestnuts at a blazing fire.

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "You have got the merry old footer all right, Bob!"

"It's a beauty, too!" said Johnny Bull. "I'll bet it didn't cost a penny less than a quid!"

"Two hundred—" began Bob Cherry.

Johnny Bull jumped.

"Don't try to tell us that a footer cost two hundred quid!" he exclaimed.

"Two hundred pence, if you like!"

Bob Cherry threw the football into a corner, and sank into the depths of the armchair.

"Two hundred lines!" he ejaculated.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Nugent. "Who's been dishing out impots? Did you run into Loder of the Sixth?"

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Quelch's given me two hundred lines for nothing!" he said.

"My hat!"

"For nothing?" echoed Wharton.

"Yes. He was waiting for me when I came in, and he wanted to know why I hadn't done my lines. I told him he hadn't given me any to do!"

"And what did he say?"

"He cut up rusty. Told me he had given me a hundred lines, and said I could consider the imposition doubled!"

"But Quelch hasn't given you any lines for weeks!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Why didn't you explain—?"

"He didn't give me half a chance."

"And so you're saddled with two hundred lines?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful. "Of course, Quelch made a mistake," he said.

"Of course!" growled Bob Cherry. "He must have given a hundred lines to Skinner, or somebody, and then thought it was me. There's a leakage in Quelch's memory-tank. Why doesn't he Spelmanise?"

Bob Cherry's startling news had made a profound impression on his chums.

It was not like Mr. Quelch to behave in an unjust manner. In the ordinary way, he would have given Bob Cherry the benefit of the doubt.

"Quelchy must be ill," said Wharton at length.

"Or wandering in his mind!" suggested Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry snorted.

"I doubt if he's got a mind to wander in!" he said.

There was a pause. The Famous Five had quite forgotten the football, which lay neglected in the corner.

"When does Quelchy want his precious lines?" inquired Nugent presently.

"Before brekker to-morrow morning," growled Bob Cherry.

"Phew! That doesn't give you much time!"

"I've a jolly good mind to let the beastly lines rip!" said Bob.

"Don't do that," interposed Wharton hastily. "You'll be fairly asking for trouble. If you don't show up in Quelchy's study with the lines, it's quite on the cards that he'll detain you to-morrow afternoon, and we're due to play Highcliffe then."

"Oh, all right!" said Bob. "I'll make a start. But I'm not a quick writer, and it's doubtful if I shall get them done in time!"

"Supposing we give you a hand?" suggested Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Quelchy would twig in a minute," he said. "It's no use. I shall have to do them off my own bat."

"It's a jolly shame!" said Wharton.

"The shamefulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Singh. "The esteemed Quelchy must have the batfulness in his belfry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry did not join in the laugh which followed his dusky chum's remark. He sat down at the table and scribbled away as if for a wager.

Bob's handwriting was far from flawless. Indeed, he seemed to be designing a number of pothooks and hangers.

The pace which he set at the outset could not be maintained for long.

When Wingate of the Sixth looked into the study and announced that it was bed-time, Bob Cherry had barely completed his first hundred.

"It means getting up before rising-bell in the morning!" he growled. "And it's jolly cold these mornings, too! Quelchy's a beast!"

"Be careful, Cherry!" cautioned Wingate.

"Well, so he is!" said Bob defiantly.

"He's got no right to give a fellow two hundred lines for nothing!"

Wingate stared.

"You mean to say Mr. Quelch has given you an imposition without cause?" he exclaimed.

Bob nodded; and Harry Wharton explained the situation to the captain of Greyfriars.

Wingate looked astonished.

"You are quite sure it isn't your memory that's at fault, Cherry?" he exclaimed.

"Quite!" said Bob.

"Well, it's jolly queer. Mr. Quelch seems to have been guilty of a miscarriage of justice for once. Would you like me to interview him on your behalf, Cherry?"

"No, thanks, Wingate!"

"Very well! Buck up and get to bed, all of you!"

There was great indignation in the Remove when the injustice to Bob became generally known.

"Quelchy's a Hun!" declared Dick Russell.

"And he ought to be treated as such!" said Ogilvy.

"Are you going to do the lines, Cherry?" asked Vernon-Smith.

Bob nodded.

"I'm half-way through," he said.

"Then I've got no sympathy for you! You're a silly ass! By doing the lines you're as good as admitting that Quelchy's in the right."

"That's so!" said Bolsover major.

"Bob's simply got to do them," said Harry Wharton. "If he doesn't, he'll get a dose of detention, and won't be able to turn out against Highcliffe to-morrow."

"Oh!"

Bob Cherry was one of the first to drop off to sleep in the Remove dormitory, and one of the first to wake.

It was still dark when Bob awoke, and a glance at his luminous watch showed him that it was half-past five.

"Suppose I must slog along and get that second hundred done!" he murmured.

Bob dressed in the darkness, shivering in the raw cold of the early winter morning. Then he went down to Study No. 1, lit the gas, and resumed the task which had been interrupted overnight.

Bob Cherry's hand was cold and numbed, and progress was slow and difficult. But he stuck gamely to his task, and by the time the rising-bell clanged out on the morning air he was nearly through.

At length he gathered up the loose sheets, pinned them together, and took them along to Mr. Quelch's study.

The apartment was empty, and Bob waited for the Form-master to arrive.

The junior noticed that Mr. Quelch must have been working until a late hour. There was a sheet of paper in the typewriter, and quite a pile of sheets, covered with neat typing, lay beside the machine. In the master's ash-tray were several cigar-stumps.

"Talk about midnight oil!" muttered Bob. "It's a wonder Quelchy doesn't knock himself up, churning out that 'History of Greyfriars' in the small hours of the morning!"

The minutes passed, and the Form-master did not arrive.

"Must have overslept!" reflected Bob. "I'm not surprised!"

As Mr. Quelch showed no signs of putting in an appearance, the junior placed the lines on his writing-desk and quitted the study.

The other members of the Famous Five met Bob as he emerged into the passage.

"Finished your lines?" asked Nugent.

"Yes."

"Did Quelchy pass them all right?"

"He hasn't shown up yet."

"Quelchy's slacking in his old age!" said Johnny Bull. "He believes in the words of Shakespeare—or was it Harry Lauder?—'It's nice to get up in the morning, but it's nicer to stay in bed!'"

"Let's stagger along to brekker!" said Harry Wharton.

They staggered.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Ructions in the Remove!

BREAKFAST started without Mr. Quelch.

The seat at the head of the Remove table was vacant.

"I say, you fellows!" said Billy Bunter. "It isn't right that Form-masters should be allowed to take an extra forty winks, while we have to turn out at the first stroke of rising-bell!"

"Quelchy was working late last night," said Bob Cherry. "He's been hammering out his 'History of Greyfriars.'"

"About time that 'History of Grey-

friars' was finished!" said Monty Newland. "It's like the brook—going on for ever!"

"P'raps Quelchy's having brekker in his study this morning?" said Dick Penfold.

"I'll bet he's having something better than this, anyway!" growled Bolsover major, pointing to his plate, on which reposed two thick slices of bread-and-dripping.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's happened to the eggs and bacon this morning?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Cook's gone on strike, I suppose!" grunted Johnny Bull. "She wants a two-hour day, and treble her present wages!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shush!" whispered Wharton. "Here comes Quelchy!"

The fellows glanced curiously at Mr. Quelch as he came into Hall. As a rule, the Remove-master was the soul of punctuality, and he expected his pupils to be likewise. But on this particular morning he was at least ten minutes late.

Mr. Quelch's face was pale and drawn, and he appeared to be worried and in a doubtful temper.

Billy Bunter was the only fellow who was not concerned with the Form-master's belated arrival.

The fat junior's little round eyes were glittering behind his spectacles.

"Two mouldy slices of bread-and-dripping!" he growled. "They'll be asking us to eat our bootlaces next! I reckon it's a jolly shame!"

Mr. Quelch, who had taken his accustomed seat at the head of the table, frowned. But he said nothing. He appeared to be preoccupied with his own thoughts.

Billy Bunter continued to hurl imprecations at the bread-and-dripping—or, rather, at the school authorities for providing such frugal fare.

"Shurrup, you ass!" muttered Bob Cherry. "Quelchy will drop on you in a minute!"

"I don't care!"

Mr. Quelch came out of his reverie at length.

"Bunter!" he rapped out. "You were talking!"

"Yes, sir."

The juniors started. They were not accustomed to hearing frank admissions from Bunter.

"You have, in fact, been talking ever since I came into Hall," continued Mr. Quelch. "What were you saying at that moment?"

Billy Bunter pointed to his frugal breakfast.

"I asked Bob Cherry to close the window, in case my breakfast blew away, sir!"

A startled gasp followed Bunter's statement. Seldom had he been known to check Mr. Quelch in such a barefaced manner.

"Bunter!"

"Well, sir?"

"Are you not satisfied with what is placed before you?"

"I'm not, sir. A fellow can't get through the morning on two thin slices of bread-and-dripping, sir. He wants to lay a solid foundation."

"You are grumbling at the food, Bunter!"

"No, sir—at the lack of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter had not intended to be witty. His brain was of the wooden variety, and he was, as a rule, incapable of satire. But he had certainly scored this time.

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch sternly. "This is not a matter for merri-
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ment! You will proceed with your breakfast, Bunter, and if I hear any more complaints from you, you will be severely punished!"

"Groogh!"

Billy Bunter turned with a grunt to his bread-and-dripping. When he looked up again it was gone.

Bunter never dallied with his meals. He was not in agreement with the gentleman who advocated chewing each mouthful thirty-six times.

Having devoured the first instalment, so to speak, the fat junior looked round for fresh worlds to conquer.

"You might shy over that spare slice, Bull!" he muttered.

"I might!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"On the other hand, I might not!"

"Bob, old fellow, you can't tackle all that on your own, surely?"

"Can't I?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Just you watch me!"

Billy Bunter grew restless and fidgety.

Much as he had professed to despise the humble bread-and-dripping, he was quite ready for more.

Bunter waited until Bob Cherry was in the act of drinking his coffee. Then he suddenly shot out his hand and transferred one of Bob's slices to his own plate.

Bob Cherry finished his coffee, glanced at his plate, and gave a howl.

"Where's my slice gone?"

"The way of all flesh!" grinned Peter Todd.

"The ostrich has it, old man!"

Bob Cherry glared at Billy Bunter, who was rapidly bolting the slice before his schoolfellow could recover it.

"You—you fat worm!" muttered Bob.

And, forgetting for the moment where he was, he seized Billy Bunter by the scruff of his neck and jerked him to his feet.

Mr. Quelch fairly exploded.

"Cherry! How dare you, sir! Do you realise what you are doing? Release Bunter at once!"

Bob Cherry obeyed. He let go of Bunter so suddenly that the fat junior, quite unprepared for the move, crashed into the table, and sent his cup of coffee flying. It scattered in playful spray over Johnny Bull's head.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Johnny. That coffee was decidedly hot.

Mr. Quelch glared down the table.

"Cherry and Bull, you will each take five hundred lines!" he snapped. "I am determined to put a stop to these brawls at the meal-table!"

Both Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull shook their fists threateningly at the Owl of the Remove, and mentally promised him a warm time afterwards.

"One moment, Cherry!" said Mr. Quelch.

"You have already had one imposition to write for me."

"It's finished, sir," said Bob. "I left the two hundred lines on your writing-desk!"

"What!" shouted Mr. Quelch.

Bob Cherry repeated his statement.

He could not for the life of him understand why Mr. Quelch should be so excited.

"This is gross impertinence, Cherry! I gave you an imposition of five hundred lines, which was to be completed by breakfast-time this morning—and now you calmly tell me that you have only written two hundred!"

Bob Cherry gasped.

"But—but you only gave me two hundred, sir!" he stammered.

"Do not presume to contradict me, Cherry!"

Bob flushed with indignation.

"You surely can't have forgotten, sir? My original imposition, according to you, was a hundred lines. Last night you doubled it. That makes it two hundred!"

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"I am not prepared to enter into a discussion on elementary mathematics!" said Mr. Quelch drily. "I repeat that you were given five hundred lines to do, and you have not done them! You will report to me in my study after breakfast!"

"But, sir——"

"Not another word, Cherry!"

Bob Cherry clenched his hands, and it looked for a moment as if he would continue to argue the point with Mr. Quelch. But he controlled himself, and sat down.

Bob smarted under the injustice, and his Form-fellows were in complete sympathy with him.

Mr. Quelch was usually a stern but just master; but his present treatment of Bob Cherry was a most flagrant injustice.

When Bob presented himself at the Form-master's study after breakfast, he received six stinging cuts with Mr. Quelch's cane.

"Let that be a lesson to you, Cherry!" panted Mr. Quelch. "And remember that you still have eight hundred lines to write—five hundred for causing the disturbance at the breakfast-table, and the extra three hundred which you should have written last evening."

Bob Cherry could not trust himself to speak. He nodded dully, and quitted the Form-master's study.

His chums were waiting for him in the passage.

"Had it hot?" inquired Frank Nugent sympathetically.

"Yes!"

"You mean to say Quelch licked you?" said Wharton.

Bob Cherry extended his stinging palms.

"Looks like it—doesn't it?" he said.

"And you've got a dose of lines into the bargain?"

"Eight hundred!"

Wharton gave a whistle.

"There will be mutiny in the Form, at this rate," he said. "I can't think what's come over Quelch."

"We shall have to mind our eye during morning lessons," said Johnny Bull. "If Quelch drops on us like he dropped on Bob we shall be buried in impots for the rest of the term!"

The others nodded; and at that moment the bell rang for morning lessons.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

More Ructions!

THERE were glum expressions on the faces of the Removites as they trooped into the Form-room.

It was one of those mornings when everything seemed to go wrong.

Breakfast had been a mere mockery—owing, probably, to an upheaval in the school kitchen. Its quantity and quality had left a good deal to be desired.

And then there was Mr. Quelch. The Remove-master was on the rampage, as Peter Todd expressed it; and there was trouble in store for somebody.

Mr. Quelch swept into the Form-room with a frowning brow. But he had nothing to find fault with at the outset. His class sat very meek and demure.

For a few moments Mr. Quelch sat at his desk with his head resting in his hands. The juniors concluded that he was either ill or that he had received bad news.

Presently Mr. Quelch pulled himself together and stood up.

Skinner of the Remove stood up at the same moment.

"Well, Skinner?" said the Form-master.

"May I go for a walk, sir?"

"What!"

"I—I'm feeling faint, sir."

And, as if to emphasise his remark, the ead of the Remove clutched feebly at the desk in front of him.

Mr. Quelch looked concerned.

"You had better take a stroll in the fresh air, Skinner," he said. "Wharton! Pray assist Skinner from the room!"

Harry Wharton led the ead of the Remove to the door, and his grip on Skinner's arm was none too gentle.

Whether Skinner was really on the verge of fainting or not was open to doubt. If he was shamming, he was certainly acting his part very cleverly.

When the door had closed behind Wharton and Skinner, the first lesson commenced. It was English poetry.

The majority of the juniors had a wholesome dislike for poetry—except of the bright and breezy kind that sometimes appeared in the "Greyfriars Herald."

It was all very well for fellows like Mark Linley and Dick Penfold, who could spout Shakespeare and Shelley until further orders. But it came a bit hard on fellows who preferred George Robey to Shakespeare, and Joe Beckett to Shelley.

Skinner had arranged his fainting-fit at a very convenient moment. Mr. Quelch commenced to make the fur fly as soon as he had gone.

"We will begin with the works of Ben Jonson," said the Form-master. "Bol-sover!"

"Oh, crumbs!" groaned the bully of the Remove, rising heavily to his feet.

"Who was Ben Jonson?"

Bolsover screwed up his face, and assumed a very thoughtful expression, at the same time nudging Ogilvy, who sat next to him.

"Who was he?" he murmured.

"The boxing merchant!" whispered Ogilvy, with a grin.

Light dawned upon Bolsover. He faced Mr. Quelch with the air of a person eager to impart information.

"Ben Jonson, sir? Yes, sir! I know all about him. He's the negro fellow who knocked out Jefferies in the twenty-sixth round!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter went up from the class, but it died away as Mr. Quelch produced his cane.

"Are you presuming to play jokes upon me, Bolsover?" rumbled the Form-master.

"Nunno, sir! Not at all, sir! I'd as soon joke with my own grandmother, sir!"

Mr. Quelch eyed the burly Removite narrowly.

"If I thought you were, things would go hard with you!" he said. "As it is, you will devote your leisure time to writing out five hundred times, 'Ben Jonson was a great English poet.'"

Bolsover sat down, with a grunt.

"Desmond!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. The junior from the Emerald Isle rose to his feet.

"Who was Ben Jonson, Desmond?"

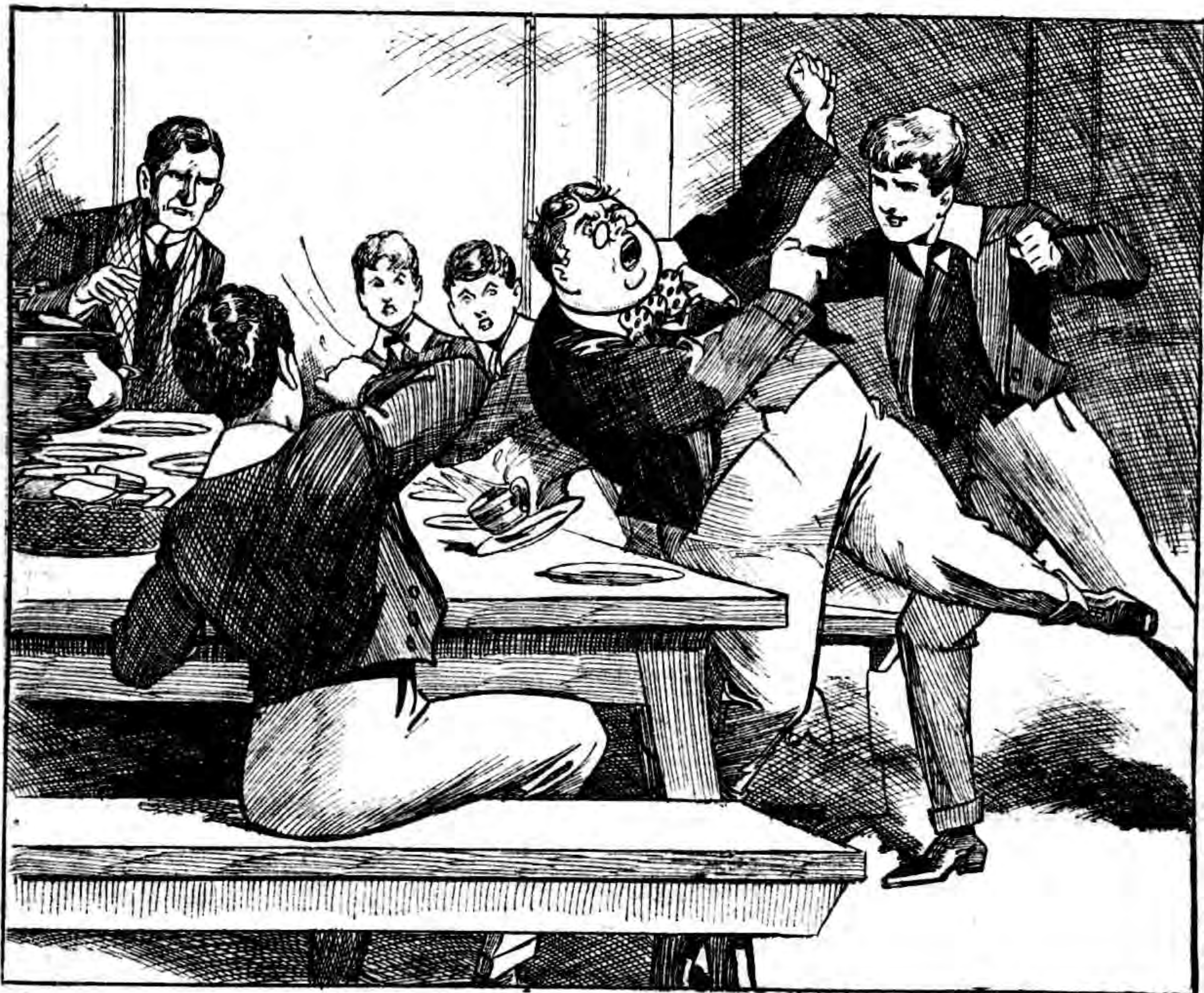
"Shure, an' it's a great English poet he was, sir!" said Micky Desmond confidently.

"Very well. Tell me something he wrote."

Micky Desmond groaned. He felt that Mr. Quelch was taking him out of his depth.

Ogilvy, who sat between Bolsover major and Micky Desmond, was again appealed to.

"Faith, an' what did he write?" gasped Micky.



"Release Bunter at once!" shouted Mr. Quelch. Bob Cherry obeyed. He let go so suddenly that the fat junior, unprepared for the move, crashed into the table, and scattered his cup of coffee in playful spray over Johnny Bull's head. "Yaroo!" roared Bull. (See Chapter 2.)

Ogilvy muttered something in an undertone, and Micky Desmond nodded gratefully.

"Well, Desmond?" snapped Mr. Quelch. "I am waiting! What did Ben Jonson write?"

"When Irish Eyes Are Smilin', sir," said Micky Desmond promptly.

Mr. Quelch gave a startled jump, and he found it more difficult this time to subdue the laughter of the class.

Irish eyes were not smiling the next moment—at least, Micky Desmond's weren't.

Mr. Quelch strode towards the unfortunate junior.

"Hold out your hand, Desmond!"

Micky obeyed, vaguely wondering what he had said to offend Mr. Quelch.

Swish, swish, swish!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Do not dare to venture upon such impertinence again!" rapped out Mr. Quelch. "Field, why were you laughing?"

"Was—was I laughing, sir?" faltered Squiff.

"You were! Tell me, what did Ben Jonson write?"

Squiff was not taken aback, as his schoolfellows expected him to be. He had vague recollections of having heard one of Ben Jonson's songs sung at a school concert. Accordingly, he had a ready answer.

"Wink to Me Only with Thine Eyes——" he began.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch took a tighter grip on his cane, and advanced towards the unhappy Squiff.

Before the infuriated Form-master could reach his objective, however, there was a dull crash.

Mr. Quelch spun round, startled.

"Good gracious! What was that? Why, Bolsover——"

"He's fainted, sir," said Ogilvy calmly.

Mr. Quelch pursed up his lips.

"Really, I cannot understand this extraordinary epidemic of fainting!" he exclaimed. "The atmosphere is by no means close."

"May we carry him out, sir?" asked Ogilvy.

"Yes; you and Desmond may assist him outside."

Ogilvy and Micky Desmond, grunting under Bolsover's heavy weight, staggered to the door.

Five of the Removites were now absent from the class, and Billy Bunter considered it was high time he joined the fainting procession.

Unfortunately, Bunter was not such a skilled actor as either Skinner or Bolsover.

Moreover, Mr. Quelch had already begun to smell a rat, and Bunter could

not have chosen a more inopportune moment for putting his little scheme into execution.

Just as Mr. Quelch was about to deal with Squiff, a piercing scream rang through the Form-room.

Mr. Quelch jumped as if he had been shot.

"Who—what was that?" he gasped.

At the same moment Billy Bunter rolled off the form, and lay on his back, thrashing his legs wildly in the air.

"Bunter, how dare you, sir! How dare you grovel on the floor in that undignified fashion! Get up! Get up at once!"

"Oh, really sir, I—I'm fuf-fuf-fainting, sir! Yaroooh!"

"He's making enough noise about it!" murmured Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"Do you hear me, Bunter? Resume your seat at once!"

"Ow! I—I can't, sir!"

"If you are fainting," said Mr. Quelch grimly, "I will endeavour to restore you to an animated condition!"

And, striding towards the prostrate Owl of the Remove, the Form-master began to wield his cane with tremendous vigour.

"Carpets beaten while you wait!" grumbled Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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Billy Bunter did not remain long on the floor. Mr. Quelch's cane had all the effect of a galvanic battery.

"Yow-ow-ow! It—it's all right, sir! I—I'm beginning to feel better already!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "I will not tolerate this ribaldry in class! Now, Bunter, perhaps you will tell me why you indulged in that disgraceful exhibition?"

Billy Bunter rubbed himself tenderly, but he seemed in no hurry to sit down. Mr. Quelch's cane had done its work too well.

"It's the grub, sir," said the fat junior feebly. "Lack of nourishment brings me very low. As a matter of fact, I'm not a great way from starvation!"

"You are an utterly absurd boy, Bunter! It is clear to me now that Skinner and Bolsover are malingering, and that you have made a clumsy attempt to follow suit! I shall punish the three of you most severely!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Vernon-Smith, go and look for Skinner and Bolsover, and summon them to the Form-room at once!"

"Very good, sir!"

Vernon-Smith departed on his mission, and he returned in a few moments with Skinner and Bolsover, who were looking very sheepish.

Harry Wharton, Ogilvy, and Micky Desmond also returned to the Form-room.

The three delinquents stood in a row, waiting for Mr. Quelch to administer chastisement.

But the chastisement never came.

The Form-master's next actions were extraordinary. He laid down his cane, passed his hand over his brow, and then, with a few muttered words, stumbled from the room.

The juniors surveyed each other in blank astonishment.

Squiff was the first to speak.

"What on earth's the matter with Quelch?" he exclaimed.

"Give it up!" said Wharton, in perplexity.

"He's gone to fetch the Head, I expect," said Peter Todd.

"In that case he'll be back in a few minutes," remarked Nugent.

But the minutes passed and Mr. Quelch did not return.

Seldom in the long and varied history of the Greyfriars Remove had the Form-master been known to quit the Form-

room in the middle of lessons without any explanation.

Skinner's face glowed with satisfaction.

"This is top-hole!" he exclaimed.

"Quelch can stay away until further orders for all I care!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bolsover major.

"I'm going to sit down!"

The class waited expectantly for Mr. Quelch to reappear, but he never came.

"Talk about sheep without a shepherd, begad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer.

"I'm goin' to have a nap!"

And the schoolboy earl suited the action to the word. He leaned back in his seat, and was soon slumbering placidly.

The rest of the juniors began to amuse themselves in various ways.

Peter Todd produced from his pocket a paper which looked suspiciously like "The Boys' Friend." A number of high-spirited youths in the back row opened fire on their schoolfellows with paper pellets. Skinner consulted a new sporting weekly entitled, "Tips for the Turf." Harry Wharton prepared to draw up the list of players for the match with Highcliffe that afternoon.

From the Fifth Form class-room came the droning voice of Mr. Prout. From the room in which the Upper Fourth worked came the equally droning voice of Mr. Capper. In the Sixth Form-room, the Head himself presided. But the Remove were left to their own devices.

"Did somebody say it was a half-holiday to-day?" said Squiff. "Strikes me it's a whole one!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner folded up his paper and stowed it away in his pocket.

"Quelch's not coming," he said, "so I'm going!"

And Skinner calmly walked out of the Form-room. Bolsover major, Micky Desmond, and one or two more followed his example.

The morning wore on, and at length the time of dismissal came. But of Mr. Quelch there was no sign.

The juniors dismissed themselves.

"This fairly beats the band!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the Famous Five emerged into the winter sunshine.

"Hope Quelch keeps it up," said Frank Nugent. "We can do with a week of this!"

"If he doesn't turn up in the Form-room to-morrow the Head will get to hear of it," said Harry Wharton.

"The whole thing's a puzzle," said Johnny Bull. "What's the matter with the man?"

"Ask me another!" said the captain of the Remove.

And until the dinner-bell rang the juniors were absorbed with the mystery of Mr. Quelch.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Last Straw!

DINNER proceeded without Mr. Quelch.

The absence of the Remove-master gave rise to a good deal of comment.

Wingate of the Sixth was appointed to sit at the head of the Remove table, and to keep the juniors in order.

"Where's Quelch, Wingate?" inquired Peter Todd.

"I believe he's unwell," said Wingate, "and I'm not surprised. You kids are enough to turn any master's hair grey!"

"Is Quelch going to spend the rest of the day in bed?" asked Ogilvy.

"Don't ask me! I'm no good at conundrums!" said Wingate. "Get on with your dinner!"

Evidently the dispute in the school kitchen had been satisfactorily settled, for dinner was quite a success. The roast beef was done to a turn, and so were the apple-dumplings which followed.

When the meal was over Harry Wharton & Co. changed into football garb.

The match with Highcliffe was regarded as an important fixture. Only one team ever proved a bigger attraction than the Highcliffians, and that was the St. Jim's eleven.

Harry Wharton & Co. were practising in front of goal when their opponents turned up.

"Welcome, little strangers!" drawled the Caterpillar, who looked very spick and span in his tight-fitting jersey. "We mean to give you a thunderin' good lickin' before sundown."

"You'll have to wait a jolly long time for sundown, then!" said Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha ha!"

"Here's to a good game!" said Frank Courtenay, the Highcliffe skipper, as he shook Harry Wharton warmly by the hand.

The stalwart figure of Gwynne of the Sixth bore down upon the players. Gwynne had graciously consented to act as referee.

"Line up, you kids!" he said.

Both teams looked very fit as they took the field. The Remove seemed the weightier side.

"I really ought to be making a start on my eight hundred lines," said Bob Cherry, as he took his place in the half-back line.

"It will be more to the point," said Peter Todd, "if you make a start on getting eight hundred goals!"

"Hear, hear!" said Frank Nugent. "Don't worry about that beastly impot now, Bob, for goodness' sake! Concentrate your mind and muscle on pulverising Highcliffe. The lines can wait."

"But Quelch can't—"

"Blow Quelch!"

The whistle rang out, and the ball was set in motion.

Highcliffe started off with a keenness and determination for which Harry Wharton & Co. had not bargained.

Frank Courtenay led a dashing attack on the Remove goal, where Bulstrode crouched low awaiting developments.

They soon came.

Courtenay deftly touched the ball to

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Billy Bunter rolled off the form and lay on his back, thrashing his legs wildly in the air. Striding towards the prostrate Owl of the Remove, the Form-master began to wield his cane with tremendous vigour. "If you are fainting, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, "I will endeavour to restore you to an animated condition!" (See Chapter 3.)

the Caterpillar, who sent in an unstoppable shot.

Bulstrode rolled over in the mud, and the ball shot past him into the net.

"Goal!"

Highcliffe had drawn first blood.

Harry Wharton & Co. lined up again with wry faces. They were not accustomed to this sort of thing on their native heath. Highcliffe would have to be made to pay dearly for their audacity.

But as the game went on Frank Courtenay & Co. warmed to their work.

All through the first half the Greyfriars goal was bombarded, and just before the interval Frank Courtenay scored Highcliffe's second goal.

"I don't like the look of things at all!" said Wharton, when the whistle sounded for half-time.

"Two goals down, by Jove!" said Nugent. "It's disgusting!"

The Caterpillar shook an admonishing forefinger at the Remove players.

"You fellows should read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest our school motto," he said.

"What's that?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Nix Insecto Highcliffia."

"What the thump does that mean?"

"There are no flies on Highcliffe."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He will have his little joke, bless his heart!" said Frank Courtenay. "But I can assure you he's quite tame."

"I wish his shots were!" growled Bulstrode. "They're perfect scorers!"

"I hate to keep pesterin' you with my attentions, old top," said the Caterpillar;

but it will be my painful duty to send in a further instalment of scorers, as you call 'em, in the second half."

But the Friars were on their mettle at last, and they resumed the game in spirited style.

Vernon-Smith raced away on the wing, and after evading both the Highcliffe backs he swung the ball across to Harry Wharton, who had no difficulty in scoring.

The spectators, who had long been silent, having little to enthuse over, now gave full vent to their emotions.

"Goal!"

"Well played, Wharton!"

"Good old Smithy!"

"Keep the pot boiling!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were the attacking force now. That goal had acted as a powerful stimulant.

After ten minutes' ding-dong play Frank Nugent netted number two.

"Played, Franky!" panted Bob Cherry. "Let me fold you to my watch-chain and weep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Now that the scores were level, the game grew very exciting.

Each side fought hard for the lead. At one end Frank Courtenay missed by inches, and at the other end Hurree Singh just skimmed the cross-bar.

It soon became apparent, however, that the Remove were masters of the situation. They were still fresh, whereas most of the Highcliffe players had bellows to mend.

Harry Wharton rallied his men for a

great onslaught, and the Remove forwards were closing in upon the Highcliffe goal, when a dramatic interruption occurred.

A figure in cap and gown strode on to the playing-pitch.

"Quelch!" muttered Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith gave a snort of annoyance. He had been in the act of shooting for goal when Mr. Quelch appeared on the scene.

The game stopped automatically, of course. Gwynne's powers as referee did not enable him to order a Form-master off the field.

Mr. Quelch frowned at the players. Then his eye lighted upon Bob Cherry. Bob felt decidedly uncomfortable.

"Cherry!" rapped out the Remove-master. "Have you written your lines?"

"Of course not, sir!"

"How dare you say 'Of course not' to me, Cherry?"

"I've not had time to write eight lines, sir, let alone eight hundred!"

"You are impertinent, Cherry!"

"I don't mean to be disrespectful, sir," said Bob, "but you will quite understand that I haven't had time to get the lines done!"

"I understand nothing of the sort!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Instead of writing the imposition I gave you, you prefer to plaster yourself with mud in an endeavour to trundle a ball from one end of the field to the other!"

Evidently Mr. Quelch did not have a very high opinion of football.

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"I—I'll start on the impot after the match, sir—" began Bob Cherry.

"You will start on it at once, Cherry!"

"Oh!"

"You have deliberately evaded my orders, and these boys"—Mr. Quelch indicated the other members of the Remove team—"have aided and abetted you!"

Harry Wharton stepped forward with flaming cheeks. He resented being spoken of as if he were guilty of a crime.

"Excuse me, sir—"

"Not a word, Wharton! This foolish and senseless game of ball will cease immediately!"

The footballers stared at each other in blank consternation.

"If all the Greyfriars masters are built on the same lines as this merchant," murmured the Caterpillar, "thank goodness I belong to Highcliffe!"

"Same here!" said Frank Courtenay.

"The man must be mad! He's actually going to stop the match!"

The consternation of the juniors changed rapidly to indignation.

Mr. Quelch had seldom been known to act in such a high-handed manner. His interference in an important football-match was regarded as the last straw.

Gwynne of the Sixth, who was nothing if not fair-minded, approached the angry Form-master.

"There's only another quarter of an hour to go, sir," he said, "and the scores are level. Won't you let them play it out?"

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"I am astonished to find you championing the cause of these young rascals, Gwynne!"

"My hat!"

"I have said that this game must cease immediately, and I am not in the habit of saying what I do not mean!"

"But it's most unjust, sir—"

"Be careful, Gwynne!"

"You did not stipulate, as far as I can see, that Cherry was to stay in this afternoon and write out his lines," said the prefect. "Consequently, he felt quite justified in playing in the match. And it is absurd to say that these other fellows aided and abetted him!"

Gwynne spoke fearlessly, without mincing his words.

"If you utter another word in defence of these boys, Gwynne," said Mr. Quelch, "I shall report your rebellious conduct to Dr. Locke!"

Gwynne gave a gasp.

"The Greyfriars boys will go into the building at once!" said the Remove-master. "The Highcliffe players will return to their own school!"

"My only aunt!" muttered Peter Todd. "Did you ever?"

"No, never!" said Bulstrode solemnly.

Harry Wharton & Co. nodded farewell to the Highcliffe fellows, and left the field.

They were in a state bordering on mutiny.

"I'll never forgive Quelch for this!" said Harry Wharton.

"Just as we were on the verge of winning, too!" said Vernon-Smith savagely.

"Quelch's a beastly tyrant!" was Squiff's verdict.

And that verdict was echoed throughout the Remove.

The match with Highcliffe, which had promised an exciting finish, was abandoned; and the Remove players, as they changed from football garb into Etons, told themselves that it was the limit and the last straw rolled into one!

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THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Midnight Mystery!

BOB CHERRY went along to his own study—No. 13 in the Remove passage—to start on his undeserved imposition. He could not work in Study No. 1, because of the heated discussion which was taking place in that famous apartment. The subject of the discussion was Mr. Quelch; and the opinions expressed by Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Johnny Bull would have made the Remove-master's ears burn.

Mark Linley was in No. 13, and in the company of the Lancashire lad Bob Cherry could work in peace.

At first Bob had decided not to do the lines—to let Mr. Quelch whistle for them, as he expressed it.

But wiser counsels prevailed. To defy Mr. Quelch would only be to add fuel to the fire.

And so, while Mark Linley did his prep, Bob Cherry covered sheet after sheet of impot paper with his rather ungainly scrawl. By the time bed-time arrived he was fairly "whacked." He laid down his pen with a gasp.

"How many, Bob?" asked Mark Linley.

"Two hundred and fifty. That leaves five hundred and fifty to be done!"

"My hat!"

"Cheerful, isn't it?"

"It's a downright shame!" said Mark Linley, speaking with unusual heat. "Why couldn't Quelch leave you alone? He's acting like a perfect tyrant!"

"The maddening part of it is," said Bob Cherry, "that it all started out of a mistake on Quelch's part. He imagined he'd given me lines when he hadn't!"

Mark nodded sympathetically.

"If it wasn't mean to go over the Form-master's head," he said, "I'd speak to Dr. Locke about it. I've never known Quelch to behave like this before. Can you give any reason for it, Bob?"

"I'm inclined to think he's got indigestion, and it's made him irritable," said Bob.

"But he's got no right to work off his irritation on us!"

"P'raps he doesn't look at things in that light."

"It's a rotten shame, anyway!"

"Bed-time, kids!" announced Wingate, looking into the study.

"And I'm not sorry!" said Bob Cherry. "Sleep seems to be the only giddy pleasure in life, just now!"

The two juniors went up to the Remove dormitory in silence. But the dormitory itself was not silent. Everybody seemed to be speaking at once.

"Quelch's potty!"

"Absolutely off his rocker!"

"He wants putting in a padded cell!"

"Why don't they pack him off to Hanwell?"

"He mucked up the footer-match!"

"Shame!"

Feeling ran high in the Remove. Never had Mr. Quelch been so thoroughly unpopular.

Skinner had composed a little ditty concerning the Remove-master, and he started singing it to a popular tune.

"Quelch is a Prussian,

Quelch is a Hun;

Takes away our pleasure,

Robs us of our fun,

Quelch's heavy-handed,

Wrecked the footer-match;

Soon he will be landed

Safe in Colney Hatch!"

There was a sudden hush as Skinner concluded that verse.

Mr. Quelch himself had appeared on the scene.

Skinner nearly fell down when he caught sight of the Form-master.

"I cannot congratulate you on your vocal attainments, Skinner!" said Mr. Quelch drily. "You will never rank with the really great singers. Indeed, I think it will be to everyone's advantage if you remain a non-singer. In order to assist you in that direction I shall administer suitable chastisement. You will present yourself at my study after breakfast in the morning!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Skinner.

Mr. Quelch said no more. He started to pace up and down the dormitory, and the observant fellows noticed that the Form-master's face was pale and haggard in the gas-light.

Harry Wharton & Co. watched Mr. Quelch in wonder, not unmixed with alarm. They began seriously to think that their Form-master was mentally deranged, or, as Peter Todd put it, "not all there."

Finally, Mr. Quelch turned abruptly on his heel and quitted the dormitory.

"Mad!" said Johnny Bull expressively.

"Mad as a hatter or a March hare!" said Squiff.

Skinner gave a groan.

"I don't feel like facing a madman in the morning!" he said. "Quelch might forget the existence of his cane, and start lamming me with the study poker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors were so interested in Mr. Quelch's strangeness of manner that they forgot to undress.

When Wingate came in to see lights out he found the Removes seated, fully dressed, on their beds. An excited discussion was in progress.

Wingate frowned.

"Turn in at once, all of you!" he rapped out. "I'll give you three minutes to undress. Anyone who exceeds that time-limit will report to me in my study to-morrow!"

A wild scramble followed.

Clothes were literally torn off, and within the specified time the whole of the Removes were in bed.

Wingate uttered a gruff "Good-night!" and went on his way.

Tired by the exciting events of the day, the juniors soon fell asleep. In a few moments the unmusical snore of Billy Bunter floated through the dormitory.

Just as midnight began to chime Harry Wharton awoke.

Wharton was a light sleeper, and something had disturbed him.

It was a moonless night, and Wharton, although he strained his eyes and peered around, could not detect anything unusual.

At the same time he felt confident that someone was moving about in the dormitory.

Chink!

There was a sound as of money being rattled close at hand.

Harry Wharton sat up in bed.

"Who's that?" he ejaculated.

There was a further chink, and then—silence!

"Who's that out of bed?" exclaimed Wharton sharply.

There was no response.

Wharton set his lips grimly. He felt certain that one of the fellows in the dormitory was absent from his bed, and he made up his mind to investigate.

With all speed the captain of the Remove slipped out of bed and lighted a candle. Then his eyes scanned the rows of beds.

Every bed was occupied.

"My hat!" muttered Wharton.

Evidently the person who had been

out of bed had lost no time in getting back between the sheets again.

Strongly suspicious, Harry Wharton made a tour of the dormitory, peering closely at the face of every sleeper.

There was nothing to show that anyone had recently vacated his bed.

When Wharton came to Frank Nugent the latter yawned sleepily and opened his eyes. He blinked drowsily at his chum.

"What's the matter, Harry?"

"I thought I heard someone moving about."

"Your imagination, old man!"

"I—I suppose it is, and yet—"

Harry Wharton went back to his bed, feeling far from satisfied. He blew out the candle, and for upwards of an hour he lay awake listening for a repetition of the sound which had startled him before.

But the Remove dormitory remained hushed and still, and no solution was forthcoming to the midnight mystery.

Finally, Harry Wharton, unable to keep his eyes open any longer, fell asleep.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Morning After!

CLANG, clang!

The rising-bell rang out on the morning air.

Unwillingly—for the morning was cold and frosty—the Removites turned out.

"I believe old Gosling gets up earlier and earlier every blessed morning!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"My penknife!" hooted Bolsover major.

"Somebody's walked off with a couple of slabs of toffee belonging to me!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "Who was it? Own up, you rotter!"

"Faith, an' I had a couple of tickets for the Courtfield Empire to-night," said Micky Desmond, "and they've vanished entirely!"

There seemed to be no limit to the number of losses sustained by the juniors.

Coins, knives, watches, and periodicals—articles of value and articles which were valueless, except to the owners—had been spirited away.

The Removites stared at each other in blank consternation.

"This accounts for the noises I heard in the night," said Harry Wharton.

Everybody turned at once to the captain of the Remove.

"I awoke about midnight," explained Wharton, "and thought I heard somebody moving about. I got out of bed to investigate, but everything was normal, so I turned in again. I didn't dream there had been a wholesale burglary!"

"Call it a jape!" said Monty Newland. "I can't think that any fellow in the Remove would steal such a big quantity of stuff. Besides, where would he stow it all?"

"Must be somebody outside the Remove!" said Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "Coker, perhaps, or Temple. This may be their idea of scoring off us."

Wharton looked fixedly at Billy Bunter.

can jolly well disgorge your ill-gotten gains!"

Blundell stared.

"What the thump are you talking about?" he exclaimed.

"Somebody's been through our pockets in the night!" growled Johnny Bull.

"My hat!"

"Was it you?"

"Not guilty!" said Blundell promptly. "And if you dare to hint that I'd do that sort of thing, young Bull, you'll get a thick ear!"

"We're not suggesting the stuff was stolen," said Nugent. "We thought you might have played a practical joke on us."

"You silly young ass! Why, even Coker wouldn't play a practical joke of that sort!"

"I'm not so sure," said Squiff. "Coker's not responsible for his actions sometimes."

The great Horace clenched his big fists.

"Look here—" he began.

"Can't!" said Squiff. "Every time I look at your face I feel sea-sick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat!" gasped Coker. "I—I'll—"

But the juniors had retreated before Coker had a chance to commit assault and battery.

"The Fifth know nothing of it, that's obvious!" said Wharton.

"Try the Upper Fourth," said Peter Todd.

At that moment Temple, Dabney, and Fry came clattering down the stairs.

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Frank Nugent nodded as he groped for his trousers.

"We shall be having rising-bell in the middle of the night soon!" he said. "It's perishing cold, too! My hat!"

Nugent broke off with a sudden exclamation.

"Anything wrong?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"I should jolly well say so! I've lost ten bob!"

"Eh?"

"Ten bob in silver!"

"Great Scott!"

Frank Nugent's announcement produced quite a sensation.

"Where did you leave the money, Franky?" asked Bob Cherry.

"In my trousers-pocket; and it's taken unto itself wings!"

"Of course, it's a lark on somebody's part," said Bob.

"Those sort of larks aren't in the best of taste," said Vernon-Smith. "The merchant who took Nugent's money for a joke can hand it back; likewise my gold ticker!"

The sensation grew.

"You mean to say your gold ticker's disappeared, Smithy?" exclaimed Peter Todd.

Vernon-Smith nodded.

The rest of the fellows, feeling strangely uneasy, began going through their pockets.

A chorus of exclamations arose.

"My pocket-book!" shouted Ogilvy.

"I suppose you know nothing about this, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Wharton, how should I? I'm one of the victims. Two slabs of nice, creamy toffee—"

"Dry up!"

The juniors dressed in a state of excitement and irritation.

Either there was a thief at Greyfriars, or someone with a distorted conception of a practical joke.

Practically everything which the Removites possessed had been taken by the unknown midnight prowler.

Several fellows, including Lord Maulverer, had lost sums of money, and there was no one in the dormitory who had not sustained a loss of some kind.

"Back up, you fellows!" said Harry Wharton. "We'll go and interview Coker & Co. first."

The juniors scrambled through their ablutions, and made their way to the Fifth Form dormitory.

The Fifth were leisurely dressing.

"Remove fags!" snorted Coker, as Harry Wharton & Co. marched in. "Sling them out on their necks!"

"Yes, rather!" said Potter.

But Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, noted the troubled expressions on the faces of the juniors.

"Anything wrong, you kids?" he inquired.

"Yes," said Wharton. "Did you fellows raid us last night?"

"Eh?"

"If you did," said Bob Cherry, "you

"I say, Temple," said Wharton, "have you been up to any larks?"

"What do you mean?"

Wharton recounted the mysterious events of the night.

The trio of Fourth-Formers stopped short on the staircase.

"What do you take me for—a blessed Raffles?" exclaimed Temple indignantly.

"We just wanted to make sure—"

"Well, you've come to the wrong shop!" growled Dabney.

"It's beneath our dignity to raid the Remove at all," said Fry. "As for helping ourselves to money and penknives and all the rest of it, you ought to be bumped for suggesting such a thing!"

"But—but if you didn't raid us, who did?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I'm not a good hand at conundrums," said Cecil Reginald Temple. "Come on, you fellows! These cheeky fags can go and eat coke!"

And Temple & Co. vanished down the stairs.

When they had gone, Harry Wharton & Co. stared at each other in perplexity.

"This is a giddy poser, and no mistake!" said Nugent. "Who on earth could have raided the dorm if it was neither the Fifth nor the Upper Fourth?"

"The fags, perhaps?" suggested Johnny Bull.

"That's hardly likely," said Wharton.

"Still, we'll make inquiries. We can't afford to let the affair rest where it is."

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"No, rather not!"

Inquiries were made of the fags in the Second and Third. But on each occasion Harry Wharton & Co. drew blank.

Dicky Nugent, in particular, waxed highly indignant.

"If this isn't the limit!" he exclaimed. "A few weeks ago I was accused of pinching your mouldy stamps, Wharton, and now you're trying to make out that we've looted your money and goodness knows what!"

"We're not," said Wharton. "We merely want your assurance that you didn't raid our dorm last night."

"Well, you've got our assurance, and you can buzz off!"

The Removeites "buzzed," and something like a hiss followed them as they went.

The mystery of the missing articles had not been solved when Harry Wharton & Co. went in to breakfast.

"It's altogether too thick!" growled Bulstrode, as he seated himself at the table.

"If I don't get my penknife back there'll be trouble for somebody!" granted Bolsover major.

"And there's my toffee!" said Billy Bunter, in his high-pitched tones. "Two slabs at fourpence a slab!"

Mr. Quelch, who had arrived punctually at the breakfast-table, although he looked decidedly off colour, glared at the Owl of the Remove.

"Bunter, you were talking!"

"Yes, sir."

"What were you saying?" demanded Mr. Quelch testily.

"Some beast has boned my toffee!"

"Bunter!"

"Two slabs of delicious toffee, guaranteed to melt in the mouth, sir!"

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Are you asserting, Bunter, that one of your schoolfellows has robbed you of that sticky comestible to which you refer?"

"Yes, sir. I think the dormitory door ought to be locked at night, sir. When there are thieves about—"

Mr. Quelch looked grim.

"Be careful what you say, Bunter!"

"But it's a fact, sir! Some thieving rotter stole my toffee! And I'm not the only victim, either!"

"Wharton!" rapped out Mr. Quelch.

The captain of the Remove rose in his place.

"Is Bunter's statement correct?"

"Quite correct, sir!" said Wharton. He had not wished the strange affair to reach the ears of Mr. Quelch, but there was no help for it now.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the Remove-master, with a worried frown. "This is a very serious matter. The boys who have been victimised in this way will kindly stand up."

Every fellow in the Remove rose to his feet.

Mr. Quelch gasped.

"Am I to understand that a wholesale robbery has taken place?"

"We were hoping it was a practical joke, sir," said Wharton.

"Was any money taken?"

"Heaps of it, sir!" said Skinner, who had lost exactly fourpence-halfpenny.

Mr. Quelch looked very grave.

"In that case it cannot have been a practical joke," he said. "Money is not taken for a joke! It will be necessary for me to acquaint Dr. Locke with details of what has occurred."

"I suggest that you engage a detective, sir," said Ogilvy.

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"I trust it will not be necessary to go to that length," said Mr. Quelch. "A thorough investigation must be made by the prefects. I will place the matter before Mr. Locke at once!"

And Mr. Quelch quitted the hall, leaving his breakfast untouched on his plate.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Mutiny!

AFTER breakfast the prefects, acting on the Head's instructions, made an exhaustive search of all the dormitories and studies at Greyfriars.

Wingate was in charge of the search-party, and he was nothing if not thorough.

"It's a beastly business," he said; "but we must go through with it."

The search lasted a long time, and the seniors were very dusty and breathless when it was over.

The missing articles had not come to light.

"No go!" said Gwynne.

"Must have been somebody outside the school," said Faulkner.

Wingate shook his head.

"That's too far-fetched," he said. "It would be next-door to impossible for an outsider to break into the Remove dormitory and carry off such a haul."

"Then who the dickens could it have been?" said Gwynne in perplexity.

"Give it up! We'd better go and

report to Quelch that there's nothing doing."

Morning lessons had commenced when the seniors arrived at the Remove Form-room.

Mr. Quelch was leaning against the mantelpiece, staring before him with unseeing eyes.

The juniors had their history-books open in front of them, but the Form-master had not yet unlocked his desk, nor did he show any signs of doing so. He did not stir as the seniors came in.

Wingate paused, and coughed to attract the Remove-master's attention.

"Ahem!"

Mr. Quelch remained staring into space.

"Ahem!" repeated Wingate.

Some of the juniors began to chuckle. Mr. Quelch was behaving like a deaf mule.

"Sir!" ventured Wingate.

Mr. Quelch made no sign that he had heard.

"My hat!" muttered the captain of Greyfriars. "What's wrong with him, I wonder?"

"He doesn't seem to have woken up yet," murmured Gwynne. "This is what comes of sitting up half the night hammering at that typewriter!"

Wingate could stand it no longer. He stepped up to the preoccupied Form-master.

"Mr. Quelch!" he exclaimed.

Slowly the Remove-master turned his eyes towards the captain of Greyfriars.

"Well, Loder?" he said.

The class gave a gasp. So did the Sixth-Formers.

Mr. Quelch was not short-sighted, and it was astonishing that he should mistake Wingate for Loder.

"I—I'm Wingate, sir!" stammered the Greyfriars skipper.

"Oh—ah, yes, to be sure! What do you want, Wingate?"

"I have to report that the search has proved fruitless, sir."

"Search?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"What search?"

Wingate nearly fell down.

Had Mr. Quelch been a younger and less austere master Wingate would have concluded that his leg was being pulled. But it was impossible to suspect Mr. Quelch of indulging in the flippant pastime of leg-pulling.

Wingate found his voice at last.

"You—you instructed us to search for the missing property, sir!" he said.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"You are talking in riddles, Wingate! I have not the foggiest notion to what you are referring."

"M-m-my hat!" stuttered Wingate.

For a fleeting instant it occurred to him that the Remove-master might be under the influence of drink. But he dismissed the notion. Mr. Quelch was an abstainer; and, in any case, he would not have imbibed intoxicating liquor at that early hour of the day.

"I—I—" began Wingate. Words failed him.

Mr. Quelch made an impatient gesture.

"Leave the Form-room," he said—"all of you!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Gwynne.

Like a fellow in a dream, Wingate went out. The rest of the seniors followed.

Out in the passage they eyed each other in blank astonishment.

"What—what do you make of him?" gasped Wingate.

Gwynne shook his head gravely.

"It's a case for Hanwell, right enough!" he said.

"I've never known Quelch to behave so queerly before!" said Faulkner.

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The juniors were still going strong when the rising-bell commenced to clang. "This is where the fun starts!" said Bob Cherry. Quelch will turn up presently. If you hear a dull thud, you'll know he's fallen down in a fit outside the door!" (See Chapter 8.)

"Ought we to tell the Head?" asked Walker.

"Oh, let him rip!" growled Wingate. "After all the trouble we've taken to ransack the place—burrowing in cupboards, and goodness knows what—Quelch hasn't a civil word for us! He can go to Jericho for all I care!"

And the seniors tramped away to their own Form-room.

Meanwhile, Mr. Quelch was causing his own pupils to tap their foreheads significantly.

"Skinner!" he rapped out, when the seniors had gone.

The cad of the Remove stood up.

"Where are your lines?" demanded Mr. Quelch.

"Lines, sir?" gasped Skinner.

"Yes! Have you not written them?"

"Written them, sir?"

"Do not repeat my observations in that parrot-like fashion, Skinner! I gave you five hundred lines to write—"

"You—you didn't, sir!" protested Skinner indignantly. "You licked me this morning for singing in the dorm last night, but you didn't say anything about lines."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"You are an utterly incorrigible boy,

Skinner, and I shall cane you severely!" So saying, the Form-master strode to his desk. He was about to unlock it in order to produce a cane, but he seemed to change his mind.

A pointer lay on top of the desk. Mr. Quelch seized it.

"Stand out before the class, Skinner!"

Skinner obeyed, though he knew that, for once in his life, he was undeserving of punishment.

An angry murmur went up from the class—a murmur which swelled into a roar.

"Shame!"

"Skinner's done nothing!"

"Let him alone!"

Mr. Quelch spun round upon the class with glittering eyes.

"Silence!" he thundered. "How dare you!"

Harry Wharton sprang to his feet.

"It's not fair to punish Skinner, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Hear, hear!"

Mr. Quelch looked positively Hunnish. Brandishing the pointer, he strode towards the captain of the Remove, and the juniors held their breath.

Harry Wharton calmly awaited the onslaught.

The Form-master swung the pointer

over his shoulder as if he were about to deliver a savage blow; then his hand fell limply to his side, and the pointer clattered to the floor.

A murmur of amazement ran round the class.

"I—I—" Mr. Quelch pressed his hands to his temples. "Sit down, Wharton. Go to your place, Skinner."

The Form-master's anger had entirely evaporated, though his face was very pale. He resumed his original position by the mantelpiece.

The class sat spellbound.

Mr. Quelch was acting so strangely that everyone wondered what was going to happen next.

But there were no further developments—not that morning, at any rate.

The Remove-master uttered no further word, save that of dismissal when the time came.

As the juniors streamed out into the Close they excitedly discussed the events of the morning.

"Carry me home to die, somebody!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Quelch's potty!"

"The pottyness of the esteemed teacher sahib is terrific!"

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"There can't be any doubt about it, after what happened this morning!"

"I—I say, you fellows!" said Billy Bunter. "I think the Head ought to be told—"

"Rats!"

"But it's a jolly serious thing! Quelch might run amok with a carving-knife, or something like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful.

"There may be something in what Bunter says," he remarked. "Still, we shall know how to take care of ourselves if anything like that happens."

"Yes, rather!"

"Wish it was a half-holiday to-day!" said Nugent. "I'm not funky; but I hardly like the idea of an afternoon in the Form-room with Quelch behaving so jolly queerly!"

"He's calmed down by now," said Johnny Bull.

"True, O king! But he's liable to break out again at a minute's notice!"

Frank Nugent's fears were confirmed when the Remove went in to lessons after dinner.

Mr. Quelch was in a most aggressive mood. He found fault with everybody; and in nearly every instance he was guilty of rank injustice.

Impositions were as plentiful as leaves in Vallombrosa. And the Form-master made free use of the pointer.

In the comparatively short space of an hour every fellow in the class had been punished for some imaginary offence. Even studious and painstaking fellows like Mark Linley and Dick Penfold came under the ban of the Form-master's displeasure.

The room was in an uproar.

So great was the commotion that Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, looked in to see what was going on.

When Mr. Prout arrived he found no less than twelve juniors lined up in a row waiting to receive chastisement at the hands of Mr. Quelch.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Prout. "You seem to be finding your charges particularly troublesome this afternoon, Quelch."

Mr. Quelch turned a furious face to his colleague.

"Go!" he said. "I want no interference from you, Capper!"

The master of the Fifth could scarcely believe his ears.

"My dear Quelch, I—"

"Go!"

"Are you not aware of my identity?" exclaimed Mr. Prout in astonishment. "You—you addressed me as Capper!"

"Leave this room!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

And he brandished his pointer so threateningly that Mr. Prout promptly hopped back out of range.

The master of the Fifth did not regard the Remove Form-room as a safe place to linger in. He took a final look at Mr. Quelch, and at the row of delinquents, and beat a hasty retreat to his own quarters.

Mr. Quelch continued to make the fur fly, as Bob Cherry expressed it.

Lickings and lines were the order of the day; and the victims rubbed their tingling palms and said things under their breath.

Billy Bunter did not escape, of course!

Mr. Quelch heard the fat junior jingling money in his pocket—three-half-pence, to be precise—and he ordered Bunter to hand over the amount, which he deposited on the top of the master's desk, for Bunter to recover at the end of the lesson.

Other fellows had things confiscated in the same manner; but as most of their things had disappeared in the night, it

was only a small pile of property which found its way on to Mr. Quelch's desk.

The afternoon dragged on like a slow nightmare.

Mr. Quelch behaved, for the most part, like a raging lion; though there were brief intervals when he was silent and apparently remorseful.

After what seemed an age the time of dismissal came, and the juniors staggered, rather than walked, out of the Form-room.

Harry Wharton & Co. were so upset by the afternoon's proceedings that they had no heart for football. They paced up and down the Close with frowning faces.

"Jove, what an afternoon!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Quelch went altogether too far!" growled Johnny Bull. "Did you see the way he lammed me for nothing? If it wasn't bad form I'd complain to the Head!"

"We can't possibly go through to-morrow what we've been through to-day!" said Harry Wharton.

"No fear!"

"I vote we refuse to go down to lessons!" said Nugent.

"Phew! That would be rather thick!" said Wharton.

"If we all stood together," said Bob Cherry, "we should be all right! The Head couldn't sack the lot of us!"

"No, but—"

"Let's hear what the other fellows have got to say about it."

The Famous Five beckoned to a group of their schoolfellows. Vernon-Smith, Peter Todd, Bulstrode, and half a dozen others came up.

"The question of the hour is," said Bob Cherry, "are we going to take this lying down, or are we going to mutiny?"

"What do you mean by mutiny?" said Peter Todd.

"Have a sort of barring-out to-morrow morning in the dorm!"

"I see," said Peter. "Refuse to go down to lessons unless Quelch promises to be decent?"

"That's the idea!"

"I'm in favour!" said Vernon-Smith. "Same here!" came in a chorus from the others.

There was not a dissentient voice. It was a very bold step to take; but, as Bob Cherry pointed out, there would be safety in numbers. Besides, the Remove had a genuine grievance, and if they stood together in the matter the authorities would be practically helpless. So the juniors thought, anyway.

The news spread swiftly through the Form, and there was no prep done that evening. Everyone was in a state of suppressed excitement.

When the juniors went up to bed, many of them smuggled provisions into the dormitory, for they had intended to "cut" breakfast in the morning.

"Mum's the word, everybody!" said Harry Wharton, as the Removes undressed. "If Bunter starts letting the cat out of the bag when Wingate comes in, gag him!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"We know what a tactless ass you are, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry.

"I'll be as mum as a mouse!" declared the Owl of the Remove.

"If you're not," said Bob, "you can look out for squalls and cataracts!"

Billy Bunter kept his word.

Wingate came in and extinguished the light, and nothing was said to arouse his suspicions.

"Get to sleep, you fellows!" said Harry Wharton. "And don't scoff your provisions to-night, or you'll have to go through to-morrow on empty stomachs!"

"Groogh!"

Most of the fellows were too excited to go to sleep at once; but as the night wore on they dropped off one by one, and when midnight sounded the prospective rebels were in the arms of Morpheus.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Shock for the Head!

TUMBLE out, you fellows!" The rising-bell had not yet sounded when Harry Wharton spoke, and the new day had not fully dawned. Dark shadows still lingered in the Remove dormitory.

"Wass time?" came in a hoarse murmur from Bob Cherry.

"Close on six o'clock," said Wharton.

"Groogh! Then I'm going to take another forty winks."

"You're jolly well not!" said Wharton warmly. "There's work to be done!"

"Work! What sort of work?"

"We've got to barricade the door, to begin with!"

"Barricade it with Bunter!" growled Bob.

And he turned over in bed as if with the object of going to sleep again.

Harry Wharton advanced grimly towards the washstand. He immersed a sponge in water, and started to squeeze it over his chum's face.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bob Cherry.

"What the thump—"

"This is your own method of rousing slackers, Bob!" said Wharton, with a laugh.

The icy water roused Bob Cherry only too well. His pillow was swamped, and so were his features.

"Franky next!" murmured Wharton.

But Frank Nugent had no desire to share Bob Cherry's fate. He scrambled out of bed, and the rest of the Removes followed.

The last two to rise were Billy Bunter and Lord Mauleverer; but Wharton's sponge had the desired effect in the long run.

When the juniors were dressed, Harry Wharton rapped out his commands, and the dormitory door was effectively barricaded by means of a couple of beds.

"What about the windows?" asked Peter Todd.

"We needn't worry about those," said Wharton. "If anyone tries to reach us by means of ladders we'll open fire with our peashooters!"

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter, in peevish tones, "I'm jolly peckish!"

"Who says brekker?" queried Bob Cherry.

"Brekker!"

The chorus was unanimous.

Blankets were spread out on the floor, and supplies of tuck were placed thereon.

"Pile in!" said Wharton.

It was a novel meal, and its novelty helped to make it a great success. The juniors were still going strong when the rising-bell commenced to clang.

"This is where the fun starts!" said Bob Cherry. "Quelch will turn up presently. If you hear a dull thud you'll know he's fallen down in a fit outside the door!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch, however, was not the first arrival.

The door-handle rattled, and Wingate's voice could be heard without.

"What's up with this door?"

"It's gone on strike, Wingate!" shouted Johnny Bull.

"And so have we!" added Peter Todd.

The captain of Greyfriars thumped on the door with his clenched fist.

"What is the meaning of this nonsense?" he exclaimed sharply.

"We're fed up with Quelch!" said Harry Wharton.

"You mean to say you're not going to get up?"

"We'll get up all right—in fact, we're up already—but we're not going down!"

"You silly young asses!" roared Wingate. "Chuck this tomfoolery at once!"

There was no response.

"Do you hear me, Wharton? If the Head gets to hear of this there will be ructions!"

"Quelch's acting like a raving lunatic," was Wharton's retort, "and we're going to steer clear of him!"

"Hear, hear!"

There was an exasperated snort from the captain of Greyfriars.

"I'll give you ten minutes to come to your senses!" he said. "If at the end of that time you still refuse to budge, I shall report the matter to Mr. Quelch!"

And the rebels heard Wingate's retreating footsteps.

"Things are warming up!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Quelch will be on the scene before long. But we're going to stick to our guns!"

"Yes, rather!"

The juniors waited breathlessly for further developments.

At the end of the allotted time Wingate returned.

The captain of Greyfriars thumped angrily on the door.

"Time's up!" he said shortly. "Have you young rascals changed your minds?"

"No!"

A score of juniors roared out the word.

"Very well," said Wingate grimly.

"You sha'n't have another chance!"

And he strode away.

"He's gone to fetch Quelch," said Squiff.

Harry Wharton nodded.

A few moments later there was another knock on the door—a knock just as violent as Wingate's had been.

"Boys," thundered the familiar voice of Mr. Quelch, "what does this insubordination mean?"

Bob Cherry pushed Harry Wharton forward.

"Talk to him like a Dutch uncle, Harry!" he murmured.

"We're staying where we are, sir," said the captain of the Remove, "as a protest against your unfairness to us in class yesterday."

"What! What!" shouted Mr. Quelch.

"We can put up with a good deal, sir," continued Wharton, "but we've come to the end of our tether. And we're not going to risk a repetition of what happened yesterday!"

"No jolly fear!" came in a chorus from the crowd of juniors who stood behind Wharton.

Mr. Quelch nearly choked.

"This—this is outrageous!" he fumed. "Open this door immediately!"

Bolsover major said something which sounded suspiciously like "Rats!"

"Open this door!" repeated Mr. Quelch, in a voice trembling with rage.

"We're quite willing to open it, sir, and to carry on with the normal routine, provided you give us a guarantee that there shall be no more undeserved lines or lickings," said Wharton.

Mr. Quelch almost foamed at the mouth.

"How dare you attempt to dictate terms to me, Wharton! I will see that you and the other ringleaders in this outrage are expelled with ignominy from the school!"

"We're all standing together in this, sir!" said Bulstrode doggedly.

There was a moment's impressive silence. Then—

"For the last time, I call upon you to open this door!" rumbled Mr. Quelch.

Harry Wharton turned to the others.

"Are you all agreed to go through with this?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather!"

"No surrender!"

The captain of the Remove nodded.

"We refuse, sir!" he said. His tone was not insolent, but it was firm.

Mr. Quelch said nothing further.

In a towering rage he descended the staircase and rustled away to the Head's study.

As he crossed the Close the Remove-master stumbled once or twice, as if about to fall; but he recovered himself, and finally arrived at his destination.

Dr. Locke was seated at his writing-table. Close to his elbow was an early morning cup of coffee.

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The Head started to his feet in surprise as Mr. Quelch entered without a preliminary knock.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Dr. Locke. "What is amiss, Quelch?"

The master of the Remove looked almost like a fanatic as he stood there, clenching and unclenching his hands.

"I—I have to report—undisciplined young rascals—defying my orders—"

Mr. Quelch's voice trailed off incoherently. The Head regarded him in growing alarm.

The Remove-master opened his lips as if to continue, but no word came. Instead, Mr. Quelch's face grew deadly pale, and he seemed to stagger.

Dr. Locke put out his hand to support him, but he was too late.

Mr. Quelch collapsed on the floor at the Head's feet—insensible!

At the same instant the door opened, and Mr. Lascelles, the mathematics master, advanced into the study.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery Solved.

LARRY LASCELLES was a man of action.

Instead of stopping, as many men might have done, to ask a lot of needless questions, he promptly assisted the Head to lift the inanimate form of Mr. Quelch on to the sofa. After which he rang the bell, and when the Head's maid appeared he despatched her for some brandy.

"This is terrible, Lascelles!" murmured the Head in great agitation. "What can be the matter with poor Quelch?"

"The doctor will soon tell us, sir. I will go for him at once, if you will be good enough to administer the brandy when it comes."

Dr. Locke nodded, and Mr. Lascelles hastily quitted the study.

After a brief interval he returned, accompanied by Dr. Short, whom he had had the good-fortune to meet on the way to Friardale.

Mr. Quelch had recovered consciousness, but he was unable to rise from the sofa. He was muttering to himself in a sort of delirium.

The doctor bent down and made a brief examination. Then he rose, and turned to the Head.

"Have you noticed if Mr. Quelch has been peculiar in his manner for some time past?" he inquired.

Dr. Locke nodded.

"He has struck me as being tired and run-down," he said. "I have several times suggested to him the advisability of taking a holiday, but he has insisted upon remaining at his post."

"Has he behaved abnormally?"

"Yes; now that I come to think of it, he has acted very curiously at times. What, might I ask, is the cause of this sudden collapse?"

"It is due to excessive mental strain," said Dr. Short. "I should be inclined to call it a nervous breakdown."

"Is the outlook serious?"

"That I cannot say. Mr. Quelch must be removed immediately to his bed; and in the meantime I will telephone for a specialist from London. As you are aware, Dr. Locke, I am merely a practitioner, and am therefore not qualified to undertake this case."

From the window of the Head's study Mr. Lascelles sighted a number of seniors strolling in the Close. He promptly summoned them, and Mr. Quelch was conveyed to his own room.

The Head—who was not aware that a rebellion had broken out in the Remove—instructed Wingate to take that Form in the absence of Mr. Quelch.

The captain of Greyfriars—who was beginning to understand what Harry Wharton & Co. had had to put up with during the past few days—went up to the Remove dormitory and rapped on the door.

The rebels imagined that the Head had arrived to remonstrate with them.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Wingate!" came the reply. "You can chuck this silly game now, and come on down to lessons!"

"Sorry, Wingate," said the captain of the Remove, "but we refuse to put up with any more of Quelch's tyranny!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You can set your minds at rest," said Wingate. "Mr. Quelch won't trouble

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you for some time. He's in bed with a nervous breakdown."

"My hat!"

"Honest Injun, Wingate?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Yes!"

This startling news caused quite a sensation in the Remove dormitory.

"A breakdown, by Jove!" ejaculated Nugent. "I begin to see daylight now! That accounts for the curious change in Quelch's manner lately."

"We might have known this would happen," said Harry Wharton. "Quelch hasn't had a holiday for ages, and he's been burning the candle at both ends, slogging away at his 'History of Greyfriars.' It's enough to crock any man!"

"No wonder Quelch developed a leakage in his memory-tank!" said Bob Cherry. "No wonder he addressed Wingate as Loder, and Prout as Capper!"

"Are you kids coming?" asked Wingate, waxing impatient.

"Yes," said Wharton. "One minute, though. Who's going to take the Remove while Quelch's away?"

"I am!" said Wingate grimly. "And, what's more, I'm going to keep you kids in order!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors did not seem to mind that prospect in the least.

Harry Wharton declared the barring-out at an end, and the barricade was removed from the door. Shortly afterwards the juniors took their places in the Remove Form-room as if nothing had happened.

Wingate stationed himself at the master's desk.

"Where's the key of this desk?" he exclaimed.

"Quelch keeps it in his study, Wingate," said Harry Wharton. "It's one of a bunch that you'll find hanging up on the wall."

Wingate nodded, and quitted the Form-room. He returned in a few moments, and proceeded to unlock the desk.

As he raised the lid he gave vent to an exclamation of astonishment:

"My hat!"

"Anything wrong, Wingate?" inquired Bob Cherry.

For answer, the captain of Greyfriars plunged his hands inside the desk, and brought to light a miscellaneous collection of articles, which included money, penknives, pocket-books, and toffee.

The juniors sprang to their feet in amazement.

"My penknife!" shouted Bolsover major.

"My ten bob!" exclaimed Nugent.

"My two slabs of toffee at fourpence a slab!" said Billy Bunter excitedly.

Wingate's astonishment was no less than that of the juniors.

"How on earth did these things come to be in Mr. Quelch's desk?" he exclaimed.

That was a riddle which no one could solve. At the same time, the juniors were immensely relieved at the discovery of their property.

"Can you kids identify your stuff?" asked Wingate.

"Yes, rather!"

"You'd better come forward and claim it, then. Don't all rush!" added Wingate, as the Removites swarmed towards him. "I'll deal with you one at a time. Now, Bunter! What did you lose?"

"Ahem! Two slabs of toffee, Wingate, and—and ten bob in silver!"

"You fat fraud!" shouted Frank Nugent. "That silver's mine!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Why, you've never had ten bobs' worth of silver in all your natural!"

"Silence!" rapped out Wingate. "Here's your toffee, Bunter. The rest of your claim is ruled out."

Billy Bunter subsided with a grunt. His hopes of getting something for nothing were rudely shattered.

The rest of the juniors identified the various articles, and returned to their places.

Morning lessons passed off pleasantly enough under Wingate's jurisdiction, and when the word of dismissal came the fellows swarmed out into the passage fairly seething with excitement.

"Well, of all the rummy things that ever happened!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"What do you make of it, Harry?"

"The only explanation I can think of," said Wharton, "is that some fellow looted our pockets in the night and then hid the loot in Quelch's desk."

"But why?"

"Ask me another! The whole thing's a mystery."

But the mystery was soon solved.

When the specialist arrived from London he announced that Mr. Quelch's brain had been overtaxed to such an extent that it was miraculous how the Remove-master had escaped an attack of brain-fever.

"Excessive mental strain," said the specialist, "was the cause of Mr. Quelch behaving so strangely during the few days before he collapsed. He suffered at times from loss of memory and an ungovernable temper—which was not surprising in the circumstances. Doubtless he was in the habit of walking in his sleep."

Dr. Locke, to whom this report was communicated, gave a start.

"The captain of the school has just been telling me," he said, "of a most extraordinary occurrence. It appears that someone entered the Remove dormitory by night, and abstracted a number of articles from the boys' pockets. These articles were discovered

this morning in Mr. Quelch's desk. Can it be possible that—"

"That Mr. Quelch was responsible?" said the specialist. "Not only is it possible, Dr. Locke, it is extremely probable. Mr. Quelch, like most other masters, had been in the habit of confiscating articles in class, and it is therefore not altogether surprising, having regard to his mental condition, that he should take away his pupils' property in a fit of somnambulism and lock it up in his desk. Of course, such an action was quite unintentional, and no blame whatever attaches to Mr. Quelch."

The Head nodded.

"And what of his present condition?" he asked.

"There is no cause for anxiety. Mr. Quelch must take a complete rest and change, and he must on no account return to duty until he has completely recovered from his breakdown."

"I have several times urged Quelch to take a holiday," said Dr. Locke.

The specialist smiled.

"He would have been wise to conform to your wishes," he said. "As it is, he must take an enforced holiday. I understand he has been engaged on a literary task involving a great deal of study and strain. He must not be allowed to resume this task until he has thoroughly recuperated—even if it means hiding his manuscript and his typewriter."

The Head smiled, too.

"I will see that both are placed out of his reach for some time to come," he said.

Billy Bunter, who had listened to this conversation through the keyhole of the Head's study, lost no time in making the facts known to the Remove.

Harry Wharton & Co. were amazed.

"I feel awfully sorry for poor old Quelch!" said Wharton.

"Same here!"

"Let's hope he soon gets over it," said Bob Cherry.

But a long period of time elapsed before Mr. Quelch resumed his position at Greyfriars.

And when he eventually returned he looked better and fitter than the juniors had ever seen him look, and the Remove turned out in force to welcome their Form-master, of whom most of them were genuinely fond.

Greyfriars pursued the even tenor of its way, and the mystery of Mr. Quelch was a mystery no longer.

THE END.

(Don't miss next Monday's Grand Long Complete Story of Greyfriars School, entitled "HURREE SINGH'S SURPRISE PACKET!" By FRANK RICHARDS.)



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A Slip of the Memory!

HARRY RHODES laughed at his companion's last remark.

"Not for me," he said.

They were standing outside the shop of old Sam Hirst, the shoemaker, at the corner of the first lane from the north end of the main street of Lexborough village, exchanging a few words before leaving to seek their respective homes.

"Well, an' why not?" demanded Sam. "Ain't bed t' best place for us, though it is midday, an' t' sun shining an' all? It is for me, anyhow. I'm main tired."

Harry laughed again.

"All right, Sammy; don't get riled. You go to bed. I don't want to keep you away from it," he replied. "But I'm not going there myself—not yet."

"What are you going to do, then, Harry?" inquired Lomax.

"Well, first of all I'm going to have a clean-up—a bath."

The "clean-up" looked necessary for both of the lads. The face, neck, and hands of each were coated with a layer of grime, sprinkled with coal-dust. Nor was it to be wondered at, for they had come direct from the pit, where they had been working on night-shift.

Then it was Sam's turn to laugh.

"Happen Ah'll find some water an' soap myself," he said, looking at his disreputable hands. "An' what'll you be doing when you've had bath, Harry?"

"Get into singlet, shorts, and shoes, and have a turn with the gloves, I hope," Harry answered him. "Then maybe I'll turn out for a run—just a mile or so—come back, have a jolly good rub down; then I'll be off to bed."

"Should think so! Are you made o' cast-iron? Don't you ivver feel tired? Ah tell you straight, when Ah coom back from pit like this Ah'm fair ragged an' done up."

"Perhaps that's because you don't take any exercise or get out in the fresh air when work is over. It agrees with me."

And Harry laughed with a hearty jollity that suggested that his own preference for exercise and fresh air agreed with his lungs and temper.

"Happen it is," admitted Lomax.

"Well, by-by, Harry. See you t'-neet."

"Right-ho! Two-thirty, as usual."

And down the street swung Harry Rhodes, whistling cheerily, with a light and springy gait that told of muscles still full of vigour and elasticity in spite

of the eight hours of gruelling work from which he had just come away.

Tired! He wasn't the least bit tired; not a sign of dulness in his alert blue eyes. Somebody was going to make very sure of that within the next half-hour. He was a big lad, looking a good deal older than was the actual fact; strong as a pity pony, and supple as an ash; the very picture of an English youth full of health, strength, and happiness.

So thought a man standing on the footway outside a small cottage wedged in between two larger houses. Apparently he had nothing particular to do, and was doing it well. Hands thrust into the pockets of his light-coloured, wide-checked trousers, he whistled gently to himself as he looked up and down the street.

He had noticed Harry coming along, and as the lad drew near he nodded, and said, "Mornin'!"

"Good-morning!" returned Harry. "Looks as though it might be a fine day," he added.

"Hope so," agreed the other. But it was at Harry he was looking, taking a critical survey of his features with suddenly developed interest.

He had left off whistling.

"Say, where've I seen you before?" he shot out.

Harry, coming to a standstill, smiled amusedly.

"I don't think it is likely you have ever seen me before this morning," he answered. "Have you ever been in Lexborough before?"

The man shook his head. He was still looking at Harry, and frowning, as though taxing his memory.

"And it was only the day before yesterday you arrived," pursued the lad.

"That's so."

"Then you can't well have seen me anywhere," smiled Harry, "for I've never been out of the village in my life!"

"What's your name?" the man asked abruptly.

There was no reason why Harry shouldn't give his name; he was not ashamed of it; but he hesitated, not being able to understand why this man should have developed so sudden and acute an interest in himself.

He was aware who the man was—knew his name to be Joshua Martin, and that he was the manager and principal backer of Anthony Hanna—"Cast-iron Tony"—his friends and admirers called him—the wonderful Scottish light-weight boxer,

whose phenomenally hard hitting, exceptional toughness, and general wickedness in the ring had procured the downfall of every boxing-man who had yet come up against him.

Within the short space of ten months he had won a reputation from Plymouth to Aberdeen as the "boxer who couldn't be hurt." Better than that, the fighting Scot's victories, so numerous, swiftly gained, and decisive, had attracted attention and won recognition in London, the Mecca of the boxing world.

He was now matched for a twenty-round contest with Nat Dover, the holder of the English championship, the match to be decided at the Isthmian Stadium, with the promise from the promoter that the winner should be offered a match with the American, "Terrible" Dan McCarthy, whom the American public claimed to be the best man of his weight in the world.

Tony Hanna had come down to Lexborough to train, meaning to leave no stone unturned in his endeavours to win a match which meant so much to his future. He, his manager, and half a dozen attendants and boxers, had reached Lexborough early in the afternoon, two days before, and had been met at the railway-station by a small crowd of boxing enthusiasts, all curious to see the man whose advent into first-class boxing had created so considerable a sensation.

Amongst these had been Harry Rhodes; but he thought it hardly probable that Joshua Martin could have taken any notice of him in the bustle and excitement of the arrival.

"My name is Harry Rhodes," he answered.

"Rhodes!" repeated Martin. "Rhodes!"

He frowned, shaking his head. Evidently the name conveyed nothing to him.

"Do any boxing?" he asked.

"Yes, a little. I am very fond of it," replied Harry.

"Oh, ah! Well, Rhodes, perhaps you'd like to come along one of these days, and see Tony at work?"

"Thank you!" said Harry.

And at that moment, hearing the click of the latch of the cottage outside which this conversation was taking place, he said "Good-morning!" hurriedly, and turned towards the cottage, the door of which had opened, with a short, squarely-built man, of some forty years of age, standing in the entrance.

"Hallo, uncle!" Harry greeted him, smiling, and passed into the cottage.

"Got back, Harry?" the man said mechanically, his eyes fixed on Joshua Martin, who was staring back at him with a peculiar intentness.

The jaw of the man in the doorway had dropped, and in his black, deeply-set eyes was an expression very much like fear.

For twenty seconds the two men thus regarded each other, and then Martin, emitting a low whistle between his teeth, moved towards the doorway.

"Well, blow me! To think o' finding you here!" he exclaimed. "What in thunder—"

With a warning gesture the man whom Harry Rhodes had called "Uncle" swiftly raised his hand.

"Hush!" he almost whispered.

"An' what for?" demanded Martin. "After all these years, when no one knew where you was or what'd become of you, fancy me happening on you in this forsaken hole. Why Jimmy—"

"Shut up!" came back in a fierce whisper. "No names here. And if you must talk, don't shout like that!"

He made as though to close the door, but Martin stopped him.

"Here, stop that. I want a word with you!"

The other looked quickly up and down the wide street as though fearful that someone might be observing them, but there was no one in sight. Then he leaned forward.

"Come inside. Just for a minute. You can't stop. And, for Heaven's sake, don't make a noise!" he jerked out. "Wait a second," and he drew back, pulling the door to behind him.

"Well, I'm blowed!" ejaculated Martin, left on the footway. Then a queer smile crept over his cleanly-shaved lips. "Jimmy ashamed of his old acquaintances! Queer, ain't it?"

The Rejected Offer.

MOVING very quickly and noiselessly, James Rhodes crossed the living-room, into which the front door opened, and to the foot of a short, steep flight of stairs leading to the rooms above.

"Harry—Harry!" he called softly.

And then he heard a noise in the wash-house beyond the stairs. Harry had just entered by the door leading into the garden behind. He had a pail in his hand. He didn't take his "clean-up" in the house, but in a shed he had built himself in the garden.

There, with plenty of hot water that his uncle always had ready for him, and a cold shower-bath arrangement that he had himself fixed up, he removed the dirt and grime with which his work liberally coated him, and emerged clean and refreshed for the hour or so of brisk physical exercise he was in the habit of taking.

"Want me, uncle?" he called out.

"No, Harry. Only come to see if you'd got everything all right. Water in the copper nicely hot?"

"Fine, thank you, uncle. Going to enjoy myself!"

"That's right, Harry."

"Be ready for our usual turn with the gloves, uncle?"

"Righto, my boy, when you are. Ten minutes from now?"

"About that."

Rhodes went back into the living-room, closing the inner door. Then he opened the door leading into the street, and nodded to the waiting Martin.

"Come in. Can give you ten minutes. But don't talk loud!"

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Joshua Martin stepped inside the cottage, smiling as if something were amusing him.

"What in thunder's the meaning of all this blooming mystery?" he asked. He glanced about him curiously at the furnishing of the room. "Don't seem to be a millionaire, Jimmy!" he commented.

"I'm not!" the other man said shortly. "What is it you want?"

Martin pretended to look aggrieved.

"Nice way to talk to an old friend like me, I don't think," was the answer. "And after we ain't seen one another all these years. Let me see—fifteen or sixteen, ain't it?"

"About that."

And, judging by Rhodes' expression, the renewal of the acquaintance wasn't giving him a great deal of pleasure. His eyes were resentful; his lips compressed. He had not even asked his visitor to sit down.

"Well," said Martin, "seein' you so sudden like, an' when I didn't expect it, Jimmy, I thought we might have a bit of a talk about old times. What are you doing now?"

"Making a living."

"What's your trade now—the old one?"

"No."

"Well, Jimmy, I must say you don't seem over an' above communicative, nor yet overwhelmed with joy at seeing me again."

"To tell the truth, I'm not," Rhodes said curtly. He paused a moment. "One of the things I'm trying to do is to forget."

"Forget what? Oh, I know! That—"

An almost threatening look came into Rhodes' eyes; he made a step forward, and Martin stopped abruptly. He laughed.

"Oh, all right, Jimmy, I won't mention it!" he said. "And you ain't pleased seein' me because I remind you of it—eh? Is that it?"

"Yes."

Rhodes glanced with meaning at the outer door, but the other did not take the hint.

"Who's th' kid—him I was talking to outside?" he inquired.

"My—my nephew!"

"Brother's kid?"

Rhodes did not answer.

"'Cause if he is, I was wonderin' if he was anything like you. Didn't know, Jimmy, you ever had a brother."

"That's very likely."

"He wasn't in the game, anyhow. But this kid—Harry, he said his name is—he says he can box a bit. Suppose you teach him—eh, Jimmy?"

"What of it?"

"Well, you know what I'm doing here? That I come down with Tony Hanna. You've heard of him, I guess?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's down here training. S'pose you know that, too?—And I told your nephew—likely lookin' kid, Jimmy—that he might come down an' see Tony working one day. We're fixed up at th' White Rose. It ain't a bad show. And when I saw you, Jimmy, an' knew who it was, just for th' sake of old times, if this nephew o' yours is any good with th' gloves—why, I thought perhaps as he might earn an extra dollar or so givin' Tony a hand. Works in the coal-mines, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, by all accounts that the landlord of the White Rose was givin' us, there's a tolerable deal o' scrappin' goes on hereabouts, so I reckoned we might get some of your local talent to put up a bout or so."

"I'd rather Harry didn't do anything of the kind," Rhodes said with decision.

"And why not, Jimmy?"

"I'd rather not."

"That ain't a reason. Now, look here—"

He continued talking, but Rhodes was not paying the least attention; he seemed to be listening, and suddenly interrupted Martin's efforts to persuade him into altering his decision.

"I said I'd give you ten minutes. Time's about up," he said.

And at this plain intimation Joshua Martin really became annoyed.

"Tell me to go—eh?" he cried.

"That's because you don't want your precious nephew to see me talkin' with you, I s'pose? I can see through your little game, with all your whisperin' an' sneakin' about; don't you think I can't! Don't want him to know that you ever was a boxer—ever had anything to do with the blessed Ring. Don't want him to know why you left it—eh? Afraid, I s'pose, of him ever learnin' that you once—"

James Rhodes was at Martin's side like a streak of lightning. His fingers bit deeply into the other's shoulder.

"Quit that!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

"You let fall a word of that while you're in Lexboro', Joshua Martin—you let Harry come to know about that terrible business, and it'll be the sorriest day's work you ever have done in your life! I know what I'm doing, and I won't have you or anyone else interferin'!"

"I only thought I was doing you a good turn, Jimmy!" grumbled Martin, wincing under the pressure on his collar-bone. "If you don't like—"

"I don't like!" interrupted Rhodes grimly. "And you just remember what I'm telling you!"

And quietly, but with a force against which there was no denial, he led Martin to the door, which he opened with the other hand.

"So-long!" he said, and shut the door.

Alone, James Rhodes dropped into an armchair by the hearth, the excitement died out from him. Chin on hand, he stared vacantly in front of him, lips compressed, and once more the sad tragedy of his life came before his eyes. Sixteen years back it lay, and yet the sight of his late visitor, the few minutes of his company, had brought back the grievous and terrible happening as vividly as though it had taken place only the day before.

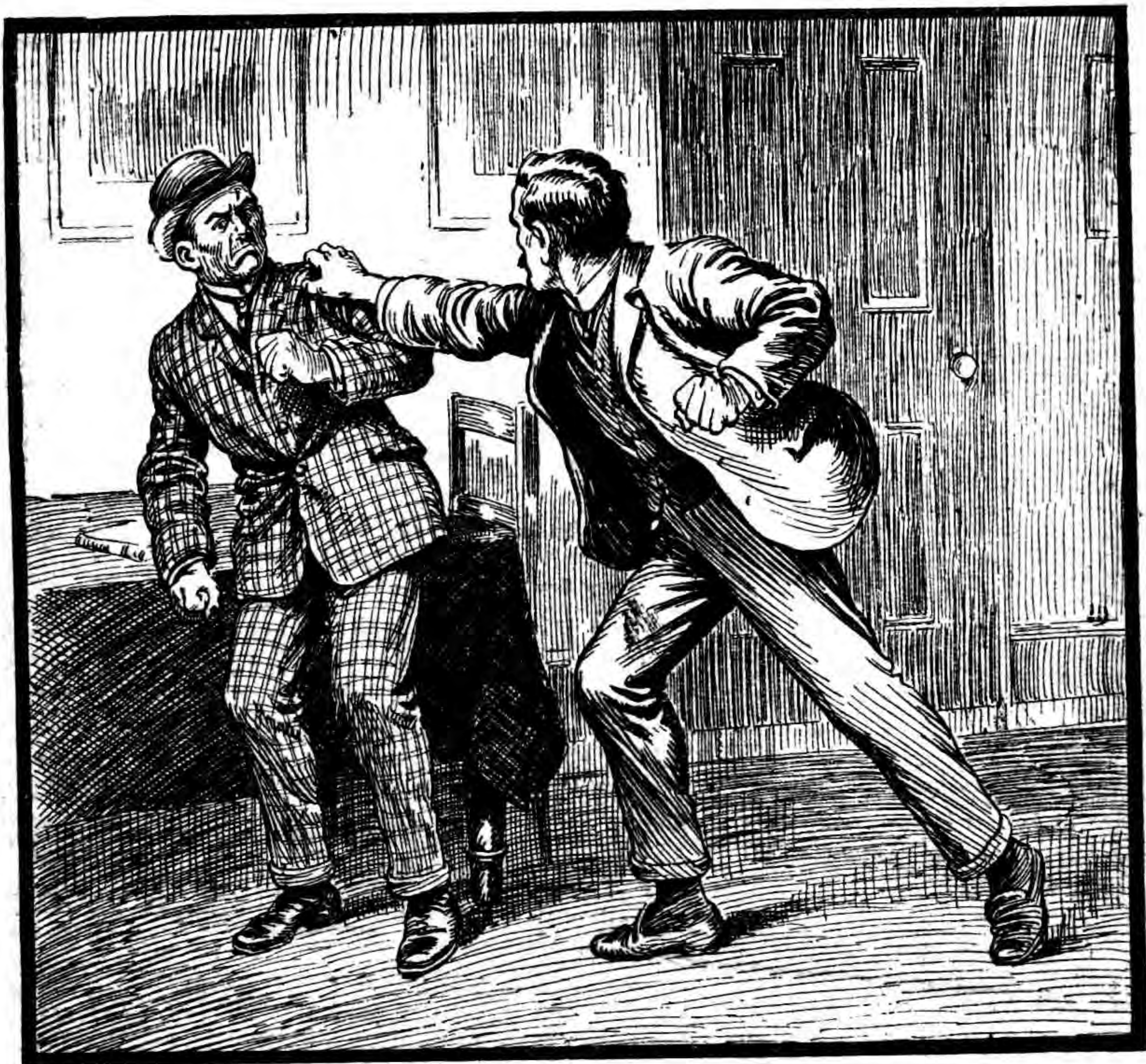
At twenty-four years of age had befallen that which had embittered his whole existence, changed his entire life; never would the shadow of the tragedy be lifted from him. Yet Joshua Martin had referred to it as though it were a matter of the lightest consequence.

At forty years of age, strong of body, never knowing what it was to be physically ill, he felt himself an old and miserable man, and doomed so to remain for so long as he should live.

Not only was he haunted by the awful recollection which for sixteen years he had been unable to banish, but hanging over him was another fear—one that meant for him the acting of a part for all time, which denied him the full expression of his natural feelings, which caused him misery beyond all words.

And from his suffering there was no hope of relief.

Suddenly James Rhodes stirred. A slight noise had broken into his dismal reflections. Rising quickly, he slipped off his coat and waistcoat, and turned up his shirt-sleeves over lean but muscular



James Rhodes was at Martin's side like a streak of lightning. His fingers bit deeply into the other's shoulder. "Quit thar!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

looking arms. Then he went to and unfastened a cupboard set in the wall beside the fireplace. As he did so the door opened.

"Ready, uncle?" asked Harry's cheery voice.

"I'm just getting the gloves, Harry," he replied.

The Challenge.

IT may be safely said that the mining village of Lexboro' contains more enthusiasm for the boxing game than any other place of equal size in England. There is a good reason for this. Whether the rest of England is or is not aware of it, Lexboro' owns an ambition—one that it confidently expects to realise one of these fine days.

That ambition is to produce a champion—a real champion of England.

This accounts for the enthusiasm.

A goodly number of years ago, in the palmy days of the old prize-ring, a Lexboro' man very nearly did annex the title of champion. It was a near thing—

so close that Lexboro' folk were fully satisfied that it was only a fluke, a mere mischance, their man failed. It is the fact that he had tried very hard.

But he lost; and Lexboro', without saying much, which is the Yorkshire way, gritted its teeth and made a vow that, some time or other, it would produce a man who would gain the title in spite of all chance of accidents.

The village had liked the boxing game well enough before; after that accident it became really enthusiastic.

A few years back the village really believed it had accomplished its ambition. It turned out a boxer of the right size, with the requisite strength and endurance, a terrific hitter, and owning plenty of skill. He was indifferent to punishment; he could stay for a week, and his pluck was beyond all question.

But, alas! for the hopes of the Lexboro' experts. They had made no mistake; their man was all they claimed him to be; but he had one defect—he would not train seriously. And in these days of fast boxing over twenty three-minute rounds, the man who won't train suffi-

ciently and conscientiously is an ultimate loser.

So Lexboro' found out. But enthusiasm hardly weakened in spite of the disappointment. Lexboro' has gone on trying to produce the unbeatable boxer. Boys take to the game before they're well into their teens; the likeliest ones get all the encouragement and teaching that can be obtained for them. Frequent competitions amongst themselves, and arranged with neighbouring villages, make clear those whom it is worth while taking trouble with.

So Harry Rhodes, to whom the liking for the game, and a very distinct proficiency at it came natural, found himself in good company.

Coached and tutored by his uncle, making a bout with the gloves a daily exercise, he had reached a high degree of excellence. There were half a dozen little boxing meetings—every day in the week—in the village, and at one or other of them he was frequently to be seen.

But the expert local interest had not as yet been given him. The explanation was that he had not appeared in any of the before-mentioned competitions. And,

although it was admitted that Harry Rhodes was a really fine sparrer, that in practice-bouts he could hold his own with anybody within a stone of his weight, local opinion thought no more of him.

Practice, or exhibition sparring, is not quite the same thing as boxing in dead earnest; and it was generally felt that the lad's absence from the competitions indicated some deficiency or other so far as the serious side of the game was concerned.

The true reason for Harry's non-appearance in the competitions was his uncle's objection against his entering.

"You're good enough to win, my boy," he had said, "but I'd rather you didn't go in for competitive work."

And Harry, recollecting the time and trouble his relative took over his boxing education, loyally respected his wish, though more than once his own desire was contrary to it.

This morning, following upon Joshua Martin's departure, the customary three-minute rounds were gone through as usual, and Harry felt this desire to test his skill against an opponent in a serious bout rising strongly within him.

"Think I'm getting on, uncle?" he asked, unloosing the tapes of his gloves.

"Al, my boy!" replied James Rhodes heartily. "Your judgment of distance is getting better every week!"

"And my hitting?"

"Hard enough to stop anything near your own weight. You've given me one or two this morning that I'm feeling yet!"

"What about defence, uncle?"

"First-class! Your footwork is really good, and that means a lot!"

"But it's not everything—I've heard you say so!"

"So you have, my boy. And it isn't! The brainiest boxers are the ones who vary their defence according to the kind of fellow they find themselves up against. The best defence against the rushing, headlong chap, who wants to get in close and do his fighting, oughtn't to be the same as you'd use against the cunning, shifty boxer, or the man who scores all his points at arm's length."

"Yes; but how are you going to learn the various ways of defence unless you're frequently coming up against different kinds of boxers?"

"You can't, Harry!" his relative replied promptly. "There are no two boxers whose methods are exactly the same, and a chap to do any good has to get used to meeting all kinds. Now, if you meet a—a—"

James Rhodes realised the trap into which he had fallen, and he stopped suddenly. His eagerness died away, and an unhappy expression came into his eyes.

"I know what you're driving at, lad," he said slowly. "Boxing wi' me day after day, month in an' month out, you're getting into a mechanical way that isn't good for you. Well, I guess you're right. And yet, I've been thinking I was doing my best for you."

"And so you have, uncle!" cried Harry enthusiastically. "You've taken no end of pains—"

"Yes; and I've prevented you from learning anything more than just what I can teach. Yes, I see it, Harry. I've done my best to stop you from getting that variety which I've told you is of such importance. I've been wrong. I haven't been fair to you, my boy. I've been selfish. Well, it isn't too late to make good the harm done. You've wanted to

enter for some of these competitions they get up here?"

"Well, uncle. I should like it!" Harry said, hesitatingly.

"But you haven't because I said 'I didn't want you. Well, you've been a good lad, Harry, and I won't try to keep you out of 'em any longer. It isn't fair to you. When is there a competition coming off?"

"There's one due to-night, down at Ben Moseley's place, uncle."

"Then you enter for it, and I'll come down myself to see how you get on."

"You mean it?" cried Harry delightedly. "Oh, that's fine! That is jolly good of you, uncle! But it's a bit late before it begins—not until twelve o'clock—so as the night shift sha'n't lose their share of the fun."

"Never mind! Won't be the first time, my boy, I've been in a boxing-show at midnight," replied Rhodes. "And now you're going for your run. Cut it short to-day, Harry, so's you can put in a good whack of sleep before to-night!"

It was good advice, and Harry followed it, waking up when his uncle called him a little before eleven o'clock, feeling as fresh as a daisy.

The place where Ben Moseley ran a small gymnasium, and occasionally an impromptu boxing competition, was no great size—just a biggish room, wide enough to accommodate a twelve-foot square ring, and leave a gangway just sufficient for a man to pass along between the ropes and the walls. On the other two sides of the ring the spectators packed themselves ten deep. All had to stand; they had little room for their elbows, and were mightily uncomfortable; but this they didn't mind. They were enthusiasts, and they were well aware that in so small a ring, where there was no space for a boxer to run away, they were bound to see that which they loved—a good fight!

A smaller room served as a dressing-room for the competitors.

Harry's appearance was hailed with a good deal of rough chaff, in which the Tykes are never backward; one burly young man of some eighteen years of age going the length of asking him how he had come to screw up his courage to the extent of entering a competition.

As it fell out, that burly youth and Harry were the first pair called into the ring, and, half-way through the second round, the former was dazedly wondering how it was he and his mates could have come to the conclusion that, though he was admittedly a good sparrer, Harry Rhodes wasn't to be taken seriously when it came to downright fighting.

Tom Boughen, the burly one, was a fighter pure and simple, and, having the better of the weights by a good twenty pounds, set to work to demolish his antagonist off-hand. When he found that every blow he struck landed on nothing more solid than the air, while every time he rushed and hit he was brought up short by a stinging drive in the face, he began to think his idea of young Rhodes was a mistaken one.

Before a minute of the third round had passed he was sitting on the floor, trying to collect his wits. The timekeeper had already counted him out.

"Coom out, tha big loomp! We're wantin' t' get on to second bout!" the promoter was shouting to him.

But before he left the ring Boughen, having gained his feet, staggered across to Harry.

"Put it theer, lad," he said thickly, holding out his right glove. "We all thowt tha couldn't knock a dent in a pat

o' butter, but theer's one here knows better."

There were three who were aware of the fact before the night's sport was over, and the other competitors were quite willing to take it on trust. With an ease truly ludicrous, Harry Rhodes finished off his opponents and won the competition, winning the applause of the delighted onlookers and a hearty word of commendation from Moseley himself.

But the spectators weren't so satisfied, and they said so very emphatically. They had come prepared for at least two hours of good sport, and they felt themselves defrauded because they hadn't had it. Thanks largely to Harry Rhodes' generosity in handing out knock-out punches, the night's amusement had been cut short by fully one half.

"Has tha finished a'ready, Ben?" shouted a six-foot miner of the name of Tom Dobson. "Why, 'tis nobbut one o'clock yet."

"Th' comp. is ended, lads," Moseley was obliged to admit.

"Then 'tis a swindle," Dobson asserted emphatically. "We paid for two hours' sport, an' tha's puttin' us off wi' one!"

"Eigh! Thats t' way t' talk!" was bellowed from the other end of the room. "Get on wi' it, Ben."

"Happen tha won't find tha ring nor gymnasium neither, Ben, to-morrow mornin' if tha don't!"

Lexborough folk are rough and ready in their ways, as Ben Moseley knew well enough; they were quite capable of demolishing the whole building did they get it into their heads they hadn't had their full money's worth. But what to do to pacify them he hadn't an idea. With the loud and angry voices ringing in his ears he gazed around helplessly. The spectators were getting more inflamed every moment, and, mingled with the clamour against Ben, were ugly words connected with Harry Rhodes.

It seemed as though the shouters regarded the successful boxer as a spoil-sport.

The fact was that Harry's showing had completely upset the local judgment as to his merits as a fighter. Worse, Harry's easy victory was the cause of several being "out of pocket."

Things began to look decidedly serious.

Suddenly the cause of all the uproar left the doorway leading into the dressing-room, where he had been standing, and forced his way inside the ring. Seeing him, the clamourers redoubled their yelling.

Harry, cool and unmoved, waited until there was a chance of being heard. Then:

"Lads," he called, "you seem to think you haven't had all the boxing you should, and that it's my fault. Well, if there's anyone here would care to put on the gloves with me for three rounds, I'm willing."

It was a challenge that took them all by surprise. For twenty seconds there was dead silence in the room. And then, before any of the disgusted ones who might have felt inclined to accept could get out the words, an answer came from a dark-faced young man standing close against the ropes.

"Blow me, but I'll have a cut at the chap!" And, without wasting any time, the speaker ducked inside the ring.

(There will be another splendid instalment of this grand new, boxing story in next Monday's issue of the MAGNET. Order your copy in advance.)

THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

THE COMPANION PAPERS ARE:

THE MAGNET.
Every Monday.

THE BOYS' FRIEND.
Every Monday.

THE GEM.
Every Wednesday.

THE PENNY POPULAR.
Every Friday.

CHUCKLES.
Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

THREE CHEERS!

By this time you will have given them, no doubt, for as you will have discovered by the time you are reading this page the MAGNET has this week been increased in size by four pages.

This week, and in future, the MAGNET will contain twenty pages—truly a sure sign that things are again returning to the normal.

The first instalment of a grand new serial story appears in this week's issue, entitled: "The Miners' Champion." This is a splendid boxing serial, which has been specially written for the MAGNET by Percy Longhurst, the famous amateur boxer and wrestling champion.

Do not, on any account, miss the first chapters. If you read them I know you will read the rest of the story, for you are bound to like it.

THE "GREYFRIARS HERALD."

I have to announce this week the postponement of the appearance of No. 1 of the "Greyfriars Herald." It will be on sale on October 28th, and not the 21st, as previously stated.

I am very sorry, but it is only a week longer to look forward to the first number of this great school journal.

It's like this, you see. There is such a tremendous demand for copies of No. 1 that the printers simply cannot turn out enough by October 21st; so there was nothing for it but to postpone the date of its appearance for just one week, in order to give them time to cope with the enormous rush.

Have you ordered your copy of No. 1 yet? If not, you had better do so at once, for it is the only way of making sure that you get it. It is going to be the finest thing of its kind ever published, and No. 1 will contain particulars of a great Tuck Hamper Competition.

You will have a chance of winning one of these coveted prizes, so don't let the opportunity slip by, but make up your mind to enter for the competition. YOU may be one of the winners!

The "Greyfriars Herald" will be crammed full of screamingly funny contributions by famous characters of Greyfriars School, among many other brilliant features.

Every reader will have an opportunity to become a contributor by a novel photographic scheme which is explained in the first number.

Now, don't forget the date—October 28th, certain! Order No. 1 at once.

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL."

In a week from now this great book for boys and girls will be on sale. October 15th is the precise date, and this wonderful volume is another production which is going to sell out almost immediately it is published.

I have been telling you for weeks past about the splendid features of this "Holiday Annual"—the magnificent, long, complete stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's, and Rookwood; the "Greyfriars Herald" and "Tom Merry's Weekly" supplement; the interesting and helpful

articles; the grand play for amateur actors; the portrait gallery; the "Who's Who"; the beautiful coloured plates and splendid art photogravures; the puzzles, tricks, and pictures by the score; and the dozens of other grand features.

You don't want to miss this great Annual, do you? Of course not! The only way to make sure that you don't is to order a copy NOW!

The price of this wonderful book is five shillings—and cheap, too. You may never have another opportunity of procuring such a feast of splendid literature for such a small sum.

Tell your mother and father about the "Holiday Annual," and get them to order a copy for you.

October 15th is the date!

GOSSIP FROM GUISBOROUGH.

A cheery correspondent, writing from Guisborough, tells me the country is admirable—a fact I can well believe. There is always "that something" about the big and generous county of the wolds—a something which gets one, so to speak.

I was very glad to have my friend's letter because it had the real ring in it. He is interested through and through, and there is nothing like being interested, whether it is a case of yarns or anything else which calls for attention. Enthusiasm as what they would call a pivotal sort of word, and enthusiasm wins the race, hits the target—is there when it is wanted, if you take me.

There was another point about the letter to which I am referring which held me—namely, the wish of the writer to see Jack, Sam, and Pete, and a celebrated detective, whose initials are S. B. (Who can it be?) introduced at St. Jim's. Frankly, I do not consider this desirable. Anything of the kind would furnish material for a gripping yarn, not a doubt of it, but I happen to know that the majority of my readers want to hear about the school, about the trials and problems which confront the fellows, and so forth.

There is really enough in school life to supply all the needful interest and excitement. The kind of tale that is most appreciated is the one which shows what goes on in the heart of a fellow who is hard driven, and who fights through difficulties which seem insuperable, and wins hands down by sheer pluck and grit.

A FATHER OF CUMBERLAND BOYS.

It was a privilege to read a note sent to me by a reader from the first, who tells me he is the father of three fine, strapping Cumberland "boys." There was something in his communication which made one think of some of Tennyson's magnificent lines about a father whom he had seen who wore his manhood hale and green, a sober man amongst his boys—and, incidentally, just the sort of grand fellow on whom this old country relies.

It was especially good to see that my correspondent has stood by the Com-

panion Papers right away from the beginning. He is not a man for half-measures. The Companion Papers stand in his view for manly England, and for all the Britains, and, as such, he deems them worthy of their task of helping to uphold the best principles of our day. We want no priggishness, but we do want fellows to play the game. I only wish my Cumberland letter had been a bit longer. Between the lines one can see so much—so much that is good for everybody to know, and, personally, I am very much obliged to the writer. Of course, I get other opinions. One is to the effect that there is no good in Tom Merry. That idea comes from Ayrshire. Well, I shall leave it alone. Tom Merry can stand on his own.

FROM GRAVE TO GAY.

Sincere thanks to "Katherine." She is a literary personage, and has read a legion of books. "I can say of your stories," she writes, "that age cannot wither, nor custom stale their infinite variety. I think they are the finest yet written, which is saying a good deal. They seem to bring you face to face with Nature. The very smell of the heather permeates their pages, whilst the characters become intimate friends. I have taken your papers from the start, and have followed the vicissitudes of Harry Wharton since his first stormy interview with his uncle."

Thanks again! Very much on the same lines comes a handsome tribute from "An African Girl" at Kimberley, who says the best stories she has read are "A Son's Sacrifice," by Martin Clifford, and "A Very Gallant Gentleman," by Frank Richards. Actually I have received more letters about the last-named tale than any other I remember. It was a great story, just such a one I like to publish now and again, for it went deep into the mysteries of life, though, of course, the yarns must in the main show the lighter side of the world.

ALAS, POOR DORIS!

Perhaps you will have noticed the amazing variety of opinions there are as to what a girl should be like, and, maybe, it is just as well, for there are many girls, and it would never do for them to be all similar.

A correspondent from Greenwich praises Alice Brown, the Land Girl in a recent yarn. "She seems," writes my friend, "to be a plucky, strong, self-reliant specimen of girlhood, a striking contrast to the weak, tearful, Doris Levison."

So much for Miss Doris! And yet the latter has distinguished herself by quiet pluck on many occasions.

Your Editor

GOGGS, GRAMMARIAN.

OUR MAGNIFICENT SERIAL STORY.

By RICHARD RANDOLPH.

A Black Outlook.

"That's the beginning and end of the game!" said Larking gruffly. "We mean to take you down a peg or two. It isn't a matter of ransom, or any rot of that sort!"

"And you consider it worth while to take all this trouble for that?" queried Goggs.

"Oh, we didn't take all the trouble!" sneered Snipe. "Perhaps you didn't twig the fact that Cutts of St. Jim's was in this little game? He made all the arrangements."

"Shut up!" muttered Larking.

"And very kind of Cutts, I'm sure," Goggs said. "Having made all the arrangements—no doubt with some ulterior motive of his own—he has now, I take it, gone away to enjoy his holidays, leaving me to the tender mercies of you two?"

"Guessed it in once!" said Snipe gloatingly.

"I shall not forget Cutts' kindness," Goggs replied. "But I really do not see that you two can do very much. You have not the pluck to come up and interview me; at least, I shall be very much surprised if you display so much courage. You are giving up part of your own holiday—"

"Wrong there!" sneered Snipe. "This is the sort of holiday we prefer to any other." "The taste is a curious one," Goggs answered. "Larking, by the way, looks as if he did not altogether share it."

Goggs was right there. Already Larking had begun to wonder whether the game was worth the candle. But he bucked up at that speech. He had always hated Goggs' coolness. "Don't you believe it!" he said roughly. "I've got my knife into you just as much as Snipe has!"

"I cannot say that I am grieved to hear that. Will you be good enough to inform me what happened in the wood this morning? I should have kept an appointment there with my friend Binks; but circumstances—ugly circumstances, in the shape of you two, Cutts, and your poacher confederates—made it impossible for me to do so."

Larking and Snipe looked at one another; and somehow Goggs guessed that they had not had the nerve to appear on the scene of the intended fight.

"Don't invent anything," Goggs said. "I shall not believe it. I suppose it has not occurred to you that the search sure to be made for me may interfere with your pleasant little plans of starvation and all that kind of thing?"

"There won't be any search for you!" replied Snipe, leering.

"Indeed? How is that?"

"Because they all think that you've done a bunk by the first train—that's how it is!"

Goggs would not answer that—would not ask why they all thought so.

He could guess that in some way or another Snipe had contrived to make it appear that he had gone. For a moment, plucky as he was, his heart sank.

But that mood did not last. At worst he could endure whatever was coming to him in this place. He did not believe they could hold him long there; and he did not quite believe that anything would convince the faithful three who had come with him from Frankingham that he had "done a bunk."

"That's got you!" sneered Snipe.

"Oh no!" replied Goggs. "Even without help from outside I do not propose to remain here, you know. Perhaps you have observed that I am already some distance on the way to freedom."

"We'll see about that," Larking retorted roughly. "When those two blackguards come back—Ah, here they are!"

Messrs. Black and Brown appeared at the open door.

Within half an hour Goggs' quarters had been shifted to the scullery, where there was a stone floor, a window, so small that it was impossible he should get out of it, an outside door strongly fastened, and an inner door secured with lock and bolts.

But Larking and Snipe had had to shell out pretty heavily again, and Black and Brown went off to Wayland at once to spend some of the cash.

Perhaps that was why Goggs got nothing more to eat that day. Or it may have been that Messrs. Black and Brown had been specially paid to keep him short.

He had heard Larking grumble that they had not vacated the cottage, as had been arranged with Cutts. But the poachers denied having made any such arrangement, and inquired with a touch of pathos where else they were expected to go.

They left the dogs at home, and Goggs found the dogs company of a sort, though he could not see them. They would come and sniff at the scullery door, and answer by whines when he spoke to them.

He turned over in his mind many plans. Could he use his ventriloquial powers to get free?

The chance might come, but he hardly saw how it should come.

Could he prise up one of the stone flags and burrow out?

It hardly seemed feasible.

He tried the doors, but could do nothing with them.

So he passed his time between the inner door, for the sake of the dogs' company, and the window, on the off-chance that he might see someone.

But it was very dreary, even for as stout a heart as that of Johnny Goggs. And when darkness fell, and still Black and Brown did not return, Goggs murmured to himself:

"John, my boy, if you had a belt, now would be the time for lightening it! As you have not—non possumus! Rely on Bags, John; rely on Bags and Tricks and Wagtail—also upon the excellent Joyful, the good Gorilla, and the two Woodens. For they were not to depart with the rest, and I think they have some little interest in you, John—I really think they have!"

Bingo on the Track.

BAGS and the rest of them did all that they knew how; but that day came to an end for them with the knowledge that they had accomplished nothing. And the camp that night was not wholly a cheerful place.

"Must do something, Bags!" said Wagtail, when darkness had closed in. "I can't sit here and jaw, and I'm hanged if I can turn in and snooze! Let's go along to the village and see if that chap Bingo has tumbled on a clue."

"He'd have let us know if he had," replied Bags. "All the same, I'm game to go."

Tricks came, too, as a matter of course. But what was less a matter of course was that nearly all the rest went with the three.

Clive, Glynn, and Wootton minor stayed behind as guardians of the camp; but it was quite a small army that sought out Bingo.

They found him easily enough, but he had nothing to tell.

"I kep' my peepers open," he said, "an' I made a good many inquiries—guarded like; but I had the meat to deliver, an' I wasn't as free for lookin' into the matter as I'd have liked to be. Look 'ere, though. To-morrow's a bit of an off day, an' I'll see whether I can't get leaf to go an' do some 'tec work then."

They thanked him, but they were not much impressed by his promise; though they had no doubt that it was sincere.

It was not detective work that they wanted of Bingo exactly. That they could do for themselves. They realised now that they had been counting—perhaps too much—upon his supposed special knowledge of the district, and the information that he might pick up on his rounds.

But, as Levison pointed out on the way back, Bingo had only been at Rylcombe a short time, and probably he did not really know the neighbourhood as well as they did, since his rounds were hardly likely to take him far off the beaten tracks.

They went away uncomfortable. None of

them gave even a passing thought to Heavins. That sheep-faced youth might not be as big a fool as he looked; but to grant that was not necessarily to grant him any special acumen.

But Bingo waited for Heavins with hope, if not with confidence. He had seen his chum in the dinner-hour, and since then Heavins had been to Wayland. Somehow, Bingo fancied that he might have learned a thing or two in the market town.

The good Eldred came back late and tired out. But he was ready to talk, and he had seen things that mattered.

"I dunno as there's reelly anything in it, Bingo," he said, "but I see two of the Grammar School lot in town to-day as I know don't belong there, an' it made me think a bit."

"Twasn't young Monk or any of them Australians, was it?" asked Bingo.

"No. One of 'em's Larking—not a bad-lookin' chap, but a bit of a wrong 'un, I b'lieve. T'other—no, I can't call 'is name to mind; but he's knock-kneed an' pimply an' leery like, an' I never could bear the sight of 'im. It was them two an' another as was caught out after muckin' up the grub at Mrs. Murphy's a while back."

"Hal-lo!" ejaculated Bingo. "That sounds like a p'int. An' I know t'other bloke. Snipe's 'is name, an' he's a rotter if ever I see one in my natural! An' I remember now that when I fought that chap Cutts them two didn't seem to love our friend Goggs—not much!"

"They're just the sort that couldn't stand 'im, I should fancy," said Eldred. "E's straight, an' that sort don't like each other."

The meaning of Heavins was clear enough, obscure though his way of stating it might be; and Bingo was impressed.

"They might be in it," he said. "Of course, it sounds a bit wild. But someone's done it, an' why not them? What else did you see or 'ear, 'Dred?"

"Dunno as there was much. Oh, I say, you know them two poachin' chaps—Bill Black an' Furry Brown, as they calls him?"

"I know 'em, though not in the way of trade. If they ever buys any butcher's meat 'tain't at our shop."

"I should think as they must have come into a fortune. They was boozin' away at the Goat and Compasses like one o'clock, an' flashin' their money, too."

"Where do them two live?" asked Bingo.

"Over far side of moor somewheres. The cottage they pigs in don't seem to belong to no one in partickler, folks say. They collared it, an' they've been there a goodish time now."

"H'm! That's a rum 'un, too. You didn't see them with Larking an' Snipe, by any chance, 'Dred?"

"No, I didn't. But I did 'ear Bill Black say somethin' about 'young perishers,' an' 'e might 'ave meant them two."

"Might very well, I should say, my boy. Where's this cottage of theirs?"

"Dunno as ever I set eyes on it. But it must be down by the brook, an' if you foller that along from this end you can't be off comin' to it."

"Can you get a day off to-morrow, 'Dred?" Heavins shook his head.

"Got to 'be out an' away afore seven," he said. "Why?"

"Oh, never mind why. I've got somethin' in my 'ead, that's all."

Before he went to bed that night Bingo saw his boss, and insisted upon a day's holiday for the morrow.

"I'll leave if I can't 'ave it," he said, when some difficulty was raised.

"What do you want it for?" demanded the master butcher.

"That's tellin'."

"Oh, you can have it, you young fool! You're the best workman I've ever had, but what with your obstinacy an' your fighting I don't know—"

"I'll leave any time you like," said Bingo sullenly.

"Didn't I say you could have the day?"

"You didn't say it very civil like," replied Bingo.

"I don't want you to leave, Binks."

"Well, an' I don't want to leave, so we shan't quarrel about that."

(There will be another instalment of this grand school story in next Monday's issue of the MAGNET. Order your copy in advance.)