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The

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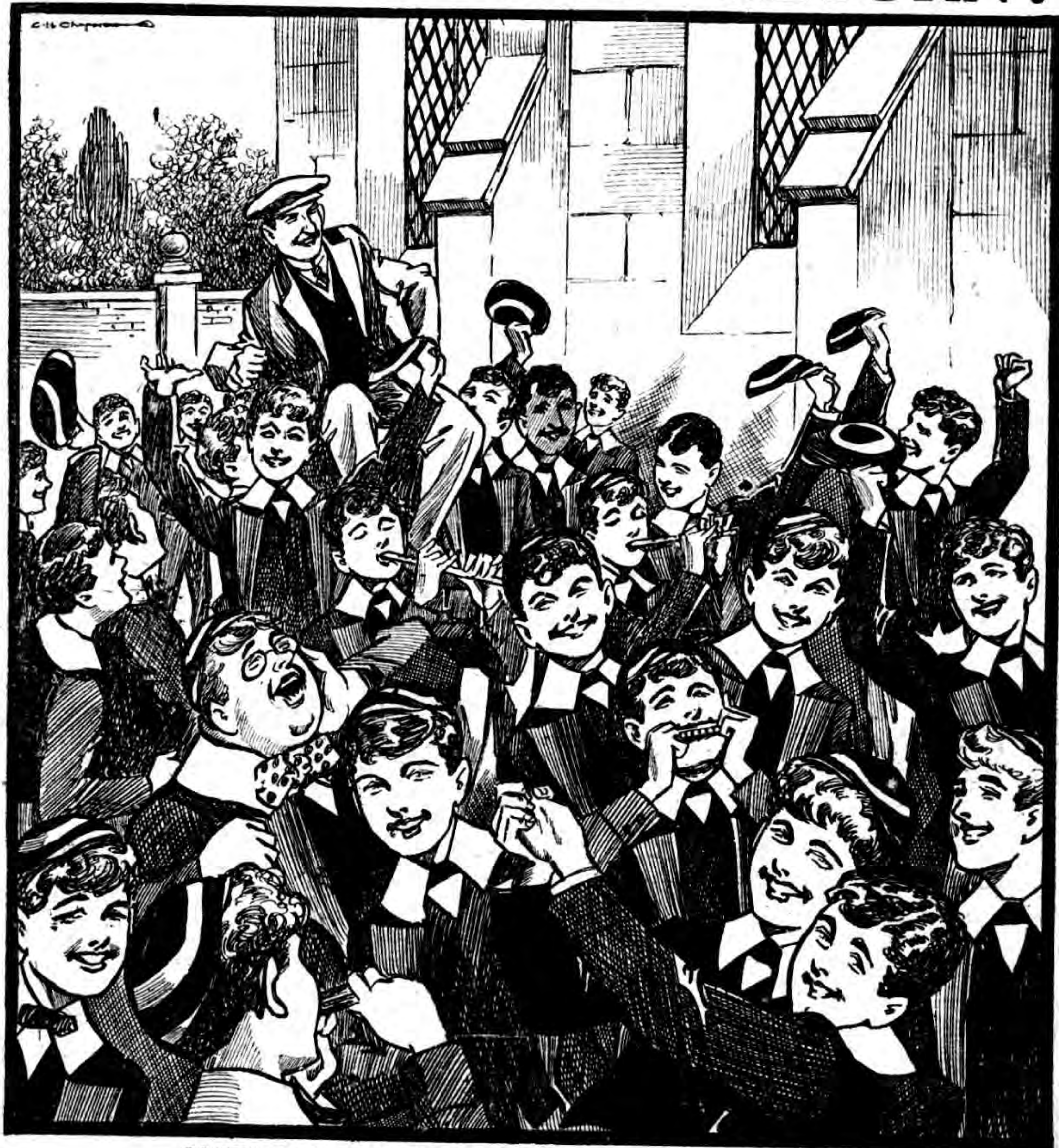
Library

20 PAGES.

January 24th
1920.



VERNON-SMITH'S RETURN!



WELCOMING THE "BOUNDER!"

(An Exciting Scene in the Magnificent Long, Complete School Tale of the Chums of Grayfriars.)



"MICK OF THE MOVIES."

There is novelty as well as captivating interest in the new serial in the "Penny Popular." I hope none of my chums will miss this splendid story. It is the work of a past-master of the art of weaving gripping plots, and, moreover, it has real, deep human interest.

Mick will be heard of a good deal before we have done with him, for he and his mongrel, Chappie, have a very special appeal. The inner world of the cinema is attractive in the extreme, and in this powerful yarn the reader is introduced to the real romance of the film; for there is a romance, though not, of course, always in the way of vast fortunes quickly and easily amassed by new-comers who enrol themselves in the profession.

Well, I hope you will all of you make sure of the "P.P." these days. There will be an increasing run on the paper. You will appreciate the natural side of the story, the quaintness, and the rare sympathy of it, for Mick is by way of being a hero, and he does well, to say nothing of the dog.

WHERE THE CHOICE LAY.

A pleasing little bit of intelligence reached me the other day concerning a school where a literary composition was set by the master. The boys were told to write something about their favourite literature, and the teacher wisely allowed them full latitude. "Just write about the stories you prefer," he said. And half the class described the MAGNET!

Yes, it is so, not forgetting Billy Bunter and Harry Wharton. I am much obliged to my chums of the school in question for their action in the matter. What is more, I am pretty sure that the learned master approved, for it comes natural to fellows to describe what they know, and the splendid school stories with their wit, their happy atmosphere, and also that underlying thought you find in them of what life is really meant for—namely, to stand by and help—would, I am fairly convinced, have a supporter in him for the future.

ANOTHER BARRING-OUT.

Every week requests reach me for another series of stories describing a barring-out at Greyfriars, and I feel that the demand should be met. It is some time since Mr. Frank Richards wrote those famous five stories dealing with the last rising.

It is a curious thing—I dare say you have noticed it ere now—that matters must not be too smooth if there is to be the deepest interest. There have to be disputes and differences of feeling. This point is overlooked by some of my friends who write and ask for the complete reformation of some character who has been

kicking over the traces. They want the wrongdoer to come back repentant and never make any more mistakes.

But it would not do. The story-writer who presented all his characters as perfect would be voted dull. People want to read about the world as it is, with all its many difficulties, its backslidings, and bad tempers. When possible I intend to introduce another barring-out.

A LETTER FROM A BARGE.

I have received the following interesting note from a sailing-barge at Millwall:

"Dear Editor.—I have been a pretty regular reader of the Companion Papers for about four years. We sail the Thames and Medway, and your books are very eagerly sought for. It is nothing to see half a dozen barge-mates changing books with one another. But about the best time we had was in Calais, where we did not expect to see them, but some of the mates happened to get a stock of back numbers. I suppose there are some of your readers who do not care for your sea serial, but our enjoyment when we read it knows no bounds, because, you see, that's our own line. There is one thing I would like to suggest, that is, if you do not think me impertinent—why not have the son of a sailor in the Companion Papers?"

Many thanks to this correspondent for his communication. I am glad to have his suggestion. By the way, it's cheery to learn that the Companion Papers are often distributed by the workers belonging to the Mission for Seamen. I hope my chum will pass many more pleasant hours in company with the stories, and that he will drop me another line ere long.

BUNTER ON THE BOARDS.

Among my letters is one from Bray, referring to the really splendid story about "Bunter on the Boards." It was a good subject, and I was sure the yarn would be popular. The plain fact is, that if Bunter could be spared from Greyfriars—though, of course, he cannot—there would be a most prosperous career for him on the stage. I do not fancy, either, that the porpoise would be a victim to stage fright when it came to the point. Of course, you would hardly want to see Bunter as Hamlet or Romeo, both these distinguished gentlemen being slender in figure, and W. G. B. would scarcely make a satisfactory Ruy Blas or, say, a Society gentleman one sees in the plays.

But for all that there are numerous parts in which William George would excel. You know how popular the reasonably plump party is, and not merely on the stage. He rolls on and puts other folks at their ease, makes them

more pleased with themselves, and with life generally. That is where Bunter would come in. The stout individual suggests good temper, how not to be yappy though harried, and all that kind of thing. Personally, I always prefer a farce which has a fat man in it. Then you know there will be some fun.

Now, I know as a fact that the first impression lots of folks had of Bunter from the pictures, Bunter saying, "Oh, really, Wharton!" Bunter with his eyes twinkling behind his specs, was that the scion of the house of Bunter was quite an erudite chap, with a lot of classics in his mental portmanteau, and heaps of good temper to boot. Well, Bunter has plenty of placidity, but not half as much learning as he ought to possess, considering that he has been in and out of Greyfriars for a tale of years.

A STUPID HOAX.

The following letter has reached me, and I can assure my correspondent of my profound regret for the annoyance she has been caused. The sense of humour possessed by the perpetrator of the sorry farce seems to be just nil:

"To the Editor of the 'Magnet' Library. Sir,—Having been overwhelmed with letters from readers, I learn that my name and address has been forwarded to you for insertion. I have done a roaring trade! Over two hundred letters have reached me within a week, and I would ask you to insert a small paragraph on my behalf tendering my sincere apologies to your readers who so readily responded to the advertisement. Evidently someone had a humorous, insane attack when thinking of me, and hit upon this idea as a practical joke. I would, therefore, appeal to you to explain the joke.—Yours faithfully,

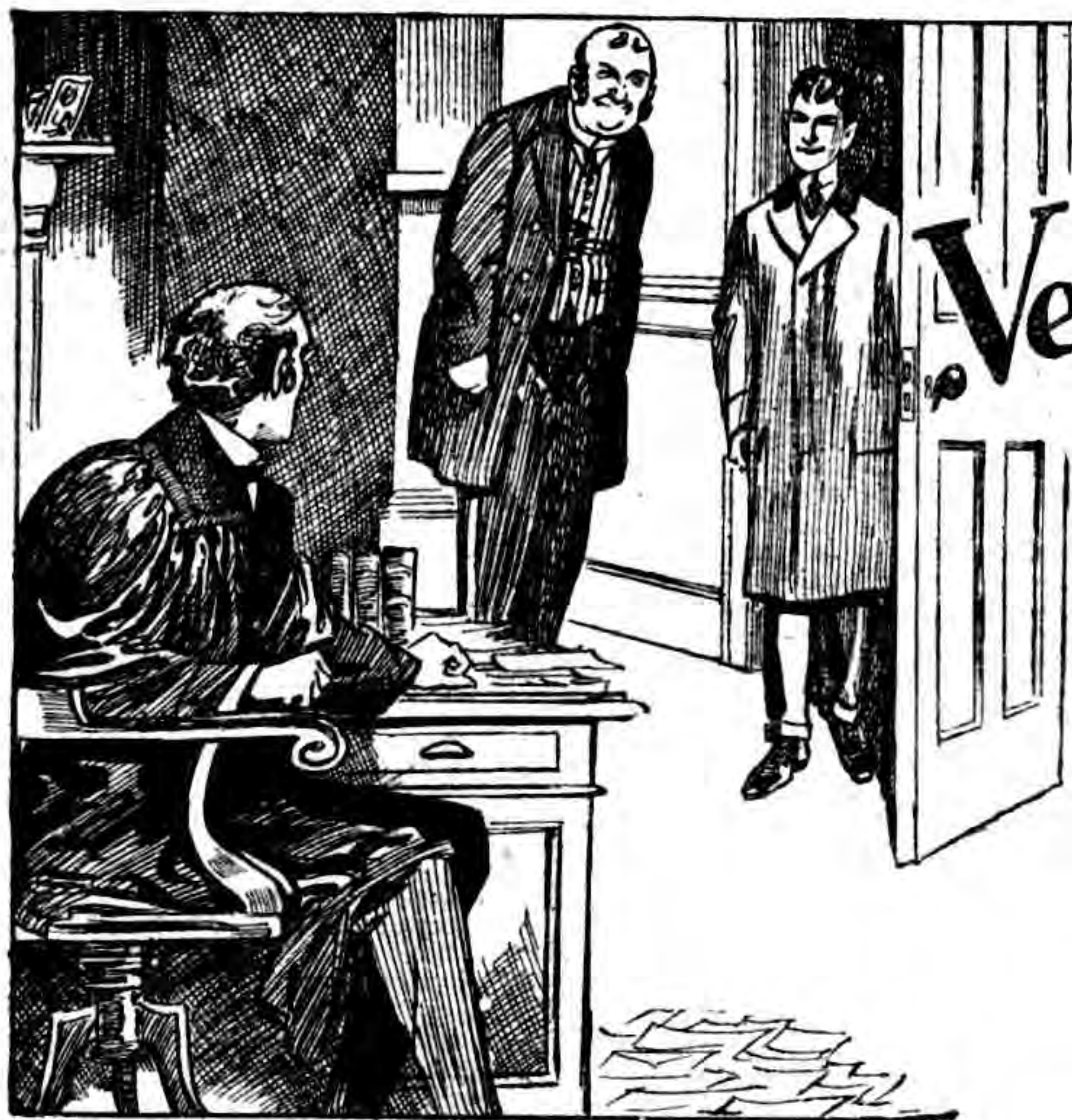
"(Signed) IVY M. LAWRENCE."

I am much obliged to my correspondent for the generous manner in which she takes the whole matter. But why will some folks try to be funny? All they are able to achieve is an exhibition of glaring bad taste.

THE SEASON'S GREETINGS.

It is rather late in the day, perhaps, to speak of such things, but it is never too late to express thanks. I want to tell all my myriad friends all over the world how grateful I am to them for the innumerable, beautiful cards they have sent me. My one regret is that it is impossible for me to thank them all individually for their kindness, but I know they will take this acknowledgment of my appreciation.

Your Editor



Vernon-Smith's Return!

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

... BY ...
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Told on the Telephone!

TING-A-LING-A-LING!

Vernon-Smith, late of the Greyfriars Remove, opened his eyes and blinked drowsily around him.

He was still heavy with sleep, and but for the persistent ringing of a bell close at hand he would have slept on.

The Bouncer stirred restlessly in his chair. He was hovering between slumber and wakefulness.

"Wish that confounded row would shut up!" he muttered. For he was very warm and comfortable in his chair before the blazing fire.

Some weeks had elapsed since Vernon-Smith had been withdrawn from Greyfriars, at the express request of his father, and ordered to earn his own living.

After a vain search for employment, he had struck lucky. He had obtained a job at the Wessex Institute for the After-Care of Discharged Convicts, and the principal, Mr. Locke—a cousin of the headmaster of Greyfriars—was so impressed by the Bouncer's energy and ability that he had given him a secretarial post in the office.

So far so good.

Vernon-Smith, however, had not been so lucky in the matter of lodgings.

Only the night before, owing to the wiles of an unscrupulous rascal named Bodger, he had been ejected from the room he had rented.

Having no funds wherewith to procure fresh lodgings, the Bouncer had spent half the night in the waiting-room at Waterloo Station, and the remaining half in tramping the streets. He had turned up at the office, tired and exhausted, early in the morning, and had settled down to sleep in a chair in front of the blazing fire.

And now the incessant clanging of a bell was disturbing his repose.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

"My hat! Is it never going to stop?" muttered Vernon-Smith irritably.

The cause of the clanging did not occur to him for some time.

At first he imagined it might be the rising-bell at Greyfriars. Then he realised that this could not possibly be the case, since he was in a London office, many miles from his old school—many miles from the chums who were longing to see him again.

Ting-a-ling-ling! Buzz-z-z-z!

The Bouncer realised at last what was happening.

It was that hated instrument, the telephone, that had so rudely disturbed his slumber.

Rising to his feet—although he was still scarcely more than half awake—Vernon-Smith crossed over to the telephone and placed the receiver to his ear.

"Hallo!" he growled.

There was a quick response from the operator:

"Oh, you're awake at last, are you? I've been trying to get you for over ten minutes!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"There's a trunk call through. Will you take it?"

"Oh, all right!"

The Bouncer yawned and waited, with the receiver pressed to his ear.

Presently he heard a voice which seemed strangely, curiously familiar:

"Is that the Wessex Institute, London?"

"Yes."

"I wish to speak to Mr. Locke."

"Who are you, please?"

"I am Mr. Quelch, of Greyfriars."

Vernon-Smith was so startled that he nearly dropped the receiver.

Was this a dream? Or was he actually in communication with Mr. Quelch, his late Form-master?

Mr. Quelch continued to speak, and the Bouncer no longer entertained any doubts on the subject.

"I am speaking on behalf of Dr. Locke. A terrible state of affairs has arisen at this school! Dr. Locke is almost distracted! He wishes to speak to Mr. Locke without delay. Pray put me through to him!"

Before the Bouncer could reply there

was a terrible buzzing on the line which pretty nearly deafened him.

"Oh crumbs!" he gasped.

Then, pulling himself together, he said:

"I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Locke isn't in."

"What?"

"He hasn't arrived at the office yet, sir."

"I can't hear you!"

Vernon-Smith raised his voice.

"Mr. Locke hasn't turned up yet!" he shouted.

"It's no use!" came the reply. "I can't hear a word you say. Speak slowly and distinctly!"

The Bouncer looked exasperated.

"This telephone is the giddy limit!" he muttered.

Then, speaking close to the mouthpiece, he said:

"Mr. Locke—"

"Eh? What sort of a lock?"

"Mr. Locke—"

"Yes, I know you've missed a lock. You've already said so. What sort of a lock have you missed?"

Vernon-Smith groaned audibly. He was longing to get back to his chair by the fire; but if the present rate of progress continued he was likely to be at the telephone all the morning.

"If you've missed a lock we will endeavour to trace it," came a voice over the wires. "But you really must explain what sort of a lock you've missed!"

"Oh help! Who—who are you?" faltered the Bouncer.

"This is New Scotland Yard—lost property office!" came the startling reply.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth with annoyance.

"Get off the line!" he snapped.

And his tone was not tempered with that respect which is due to the Scotland Yard officials.

The man at the other end replaced the receiver with a snap, and Vernon-Smith shouted for the operator. That young lady answered him at length.

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"Hallo! Anything wrong, sir?"

"I should jolly well say so! I was taking a trunk call from Friardale, and you cut us off and put me on to New Scotland Yard, of all places! For goodness' sake, give me Friardale again!"

"Don't get excited," said the operator soothingly. "These little mistakes will happen on the best-regulated exchanges. Hang on a minute, sir, and I'll try and get the gentleman you were speaking to before."

"Good! But do buck up!"

Vernon-Smith was not so sleepy now. He realised that his conversation with Mr. Quelch had not been a dream, but an actual fact.

Mr. Quelch had said that a terrible state of affairs had arisen at Greyfriars. What did that mean?

Had the school got out of hand?

Was anything in the nature of a revolution or a barring-out in progress?

The Bounder's curiosity was on edge. And he was very anxious to find out what was wrong at Greyfriars.

After a long delay the familiar voice of the Remove-master again sounded over the wire.

"Is that the Wessex Institute?"

"Yes, sir. We were cut off before. Operator doesn't know her job. I was about to tell you, sir, that Mr. Locke hasn't yet arrived at the office."

"Dear me, that is unfortunate! What time do you expect him?"

"About ten o'clock, sir."

"Bless my soul! And it is scarcely time yet!"

"Did you wish to speak to Mr. Locke very urgently, sir?" asked Vernon-Smith.

He was not speaking in his natural voice, as he did not wish Mr. Quelch to discover his identity.

"Of course!" replied the Remove-master. "Dr. Locke, here, is in a state of distraction, and he wishes to speak to his cousin without delay!"

"I hope nothing serious has happened at the school, sir?" said Vernon-Smith, in the hope of gleaming some information.

But Mr. Quelch evidently had no intention of satisfying the curiosity of a mere clerk.

"Something of an alarming nature has certainly happened," he said; "but I do not desire to discuss the matter with you. Kindly inform Mr. Locke the moment he arrives that the headmaster of Greyfriars wishes to speak to him!"

"Very good, sir!"

Vernon-Smith hung the receiver on its hooks, and went back to his chair in front of the fire.

He was wide awake now, and very excited into the bargain.

"By Jove! I'd give the world to know what's happening at Greyfriars!" he exclaimed. "Quelch didn't seem to relish the idea of shouting the odds to a common or garden clerk. Wonder what he would have thought if he had known he was speaking to one of his old pupils?"

The Bounder remained in deep reflection for some moments. Then the door of the office burst open, and Cox, the irrepressible office-boy, came in.

"Good-morning, Harper!" he said cheerfully.

Vernon-Smith returned the salutation. He had given the name of Jack Harper on being engaged at the Wessex Institute; and by that name he was known both to Mr. Locke and to the clerks, who little suspected that he was an ex-public schoolboy earning his own living in order to satisfy the curious whim of his millionaire father.

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Cox hung up his hat and coat, and regarded the Bounder curiously.

"By Jove! You look quite fagged out!" he said. "Been awake all night with toothache?"

"No; but I didn't get much sleep."

Vernon-Smith did not mention that he had been turned out of his lodgings—that he had spent part of the night in a chilly waiting-room, and the other part in tramping the streets.

"I suppose you were excited at having been appointed secretary to Mr. Locke?" said Cox. "Some fellows get all the luck! You've climbed the ladder of success in a single day, by Jove!"

And Cox burst into song as follows:

"As junior clerk I made such a name
That a secretary I soon became.
I wore clean collars and a brand-new suit,
And I toiled for Mr. Locke at the Institute!"

"Stow it!" said Vernon-Smith, laughing. "We don't want any Gilbert and Sullivan touches here!"

"I only wish," said Cox, with a sigh, "that I had half your luck. I'm a dab at shorthand and typewriting and office routine; but instead of jumping into fame and fortune, like you've done, I remain a humble office-boy. And I shall be an office-boy, I expect, till the end of the giddy chapter!"

"Rats! There's no earthly reason why you shouldn't become secretary to Mr. Locke. I don't suppose I shall have the job long!"

Cox stared.

"You're not thinking of leaving, surely?"

"Not immediately. All the same, I'm not going to stay in an office for ever. This sort of life's all right for a time, but I dare say it would bore me stiff in the long run. And now, what about starting the day's work?"

"Say but the word," said Cox, "and I'll pile in like a merry Trojan!"

Vernon-Smith laughed, and allotted a job to the office-boy. Then he sat down at his own desk, and the next moment his nimble fingers were racing over the keys of the typewriter.

A few weeks ago the Bounder had been a member of the Greyfriars Remove. Now he was one of the world's workers. He was earning his own living by the sweat of his brow, so to speak, and every now and then he paused and wondered how long this new life was going to last.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Snowed Up!

"THIS is indeed appalling!"

It was Mr. Quelch, the master of the Greyfriars Remove, who made that ejaculation.

Mr. Quelch stood in the Head's study with an exasperated frown on his face and the telephone-receiver in his hand.

Over an hour had elapsed since he had telephoned to London; but, so far, no message had come through from Mr. Locke.

"Hallo! Are you there?"

In parrot-like fashion Mr. Quelch repeated these words; but he could get no satisfaction.

Either the operators were asleep or the occupants of Mr. Locke's office were. Anyway, no reply came.

Finally, Mr. Quelch replaced the receiver with a snort of annoyance.

"Have you succeeded in getting through to London, Quelch?"

Dr. Locke asked the question as he came into his study.

The Head of Greyfriars was looking extremely ruffled. There was a harassed, careworn expression on his scholarly face.

As a rule Dr. Locke was a quiet, dignified gentleman. But he did not look it at that moment. His hair was rumpled, and he paced to and fro in his study in a state of profound distraction.

"No, sir," said Mr. Quelch, in response to the Head's question. "I have made numerous and repeated efforts to get on to Mr. Locke's office, but without success."

"Dear me! This is too bad! Have you asked the operator what is the reason for the delay?"

Mr. Quelch made a hopeless gesture.

"I cannot even get on to the operator!" he said. "I can only conclude that these telephone-workers are deaf to the call of duty. I have shouted 'Operator' into the instrument until I am husky!"

"And there is no response?"

"None whatever, sir!"

Dr. Locke ceased pacing to and fro, and sank wearily into his chair.

He glanced at his desk, the disordered state of which almost turned him dizzy.

Letters were strewn in wild profusion about the desk—unanswered letters, mostly from parents and guardians of the Greyfriars fellows. Moreover, those letters were likely to remain unanswered for some time to come.

"I really must get clerical assistance, and the sooner the better!" murmured the Head. "Every time I look at this confused heap of correspondence, Quelch, I feel appalled! I have always had a fair amount of work to do, as you know. But this is far more than I can manage single-handed. Unless I can obtain the services of a temporary clerk I tremble to think what will happen!"

Mr. Quelch nodded.

"I regard it as a great shame, sir," he said. "that all this extra work should be thrown upon your shoulders. I would willingly assist you, but, of course, I have my class to attend to."

"Yes, yes! Of course!"

"How did all this trouble arise, sir?" asked Mr. Quelch. "I am rather in the dark as to what has happened."

"Then I will explain. I would have done so before, but I have been so distracted. At the last meeting of the governors, Sir Hilton Popper caused great alarm by drawing attention to the amount of infectious disease that at present prevails in the country. He insisted that precautions should be taken to keep the infection away from Greyfriars. The rest of the governors agreed with him, and instructed me to write to all the parents and guardians inquiring into the past medical history of all the boys."

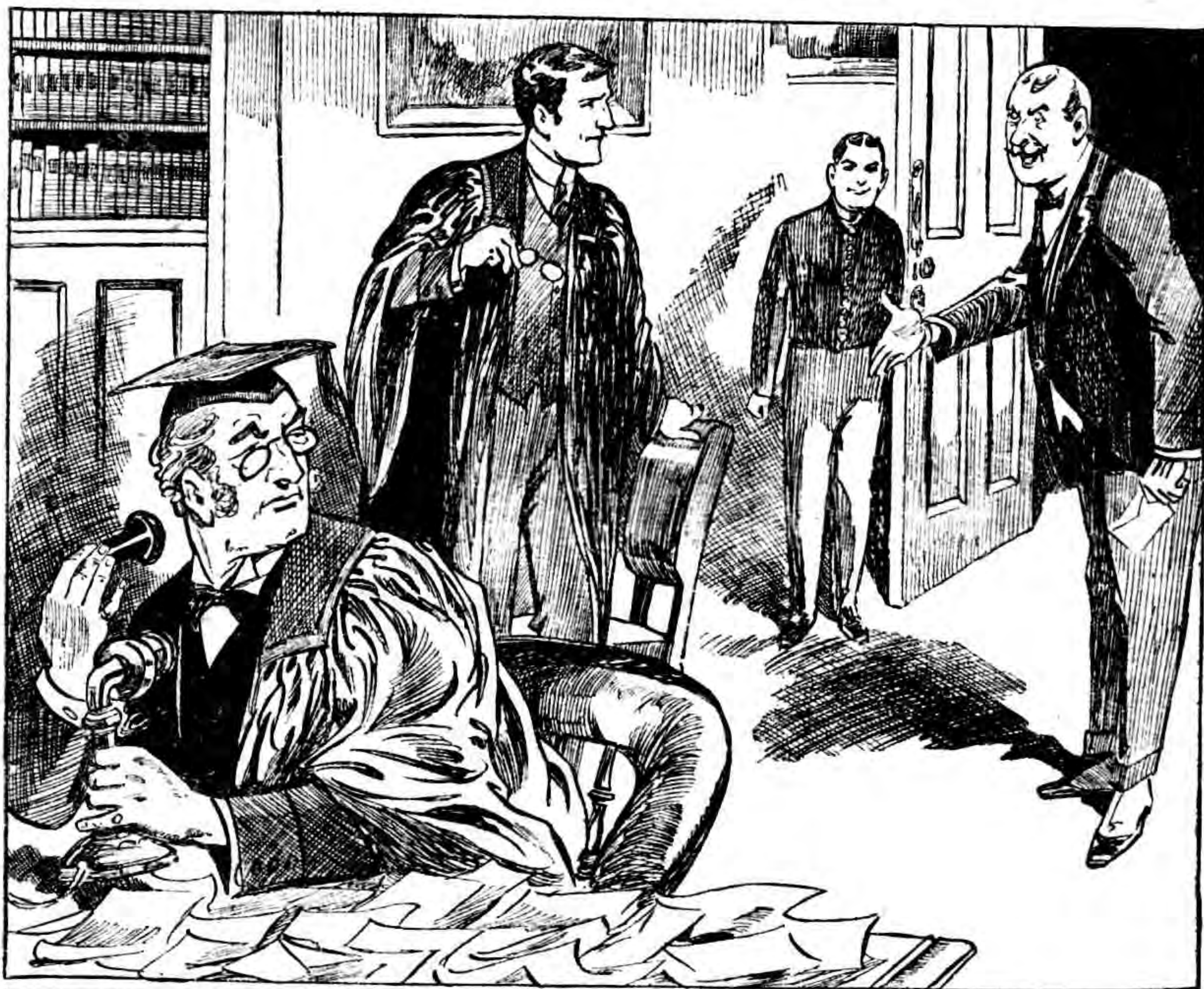
"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"What a colossal task!"

"Colossal" is just the word for it, Quelch. Well, I wrote all the letters—about three hundred in number—and the task occupied me some days. Owing to the extreme urgency of the matter, from the governors' point of view, I had no time in which to write a long and courteous letter to each parent. In fact, I am afraid I wrote rather a short and curt one, with the result that a flood of indignant letters is pouring in by every post. I will take one up at random and read it to you."

And Dr. Locke did so. He recited a letter from Mr. Skinner, the father of Skinner of the Remove:

"Sir,—In reply to your letter of recent date, asking for the past medical



"Ask Major Cherry if he will be good enough to wait a moment——" began Dr. Locke. There was a sudden snorting sound, and a fiery-looking gentleman of military bearing stamped into the study. "No, sir, I will not be good enough to wait!" he exclaimed. (See Chapter 2.)

history of my son Harold, I wish to say that I regard your request as impertinent.

"Are you suggesting that there is anything amiss with my boy's constitution? If so, let me assure you that he has never had a day's illness in his life. He is a strong, healthy, robust boy; and I should like to know what you mean, sir, by insinuating otherwise."

"I shall expect a letter from you by return."

"Yours truly,
HENRY SKINNER."

"Mr. Skinner appears to be—er—slightly annoyed!" remarked Mr. Quelch.

The Head nodded gloomily.

"He is only one of many," he said. "Most of the parents flatly refuse to divulge the medical history of their sons, and, like Mr. Skinner, they demand an explanation. But how can I possibly reply to all these letters? There are dozens and dozens of them! And I have to take the Sixth Form at Greek. Really, Quelch, I am overwhelmed!"

"But your cousin in London will help you, will he not?"

"I am hoping so. He has a certain amount of influence, and he may be able to supply me with a clerk at once. I have no time to advertise for clerical assistance. These letters must be answered with as little delay as possible!"

Dr. Locke rose to his feet, and crossed over to the telephone.

He took off the receiver, with the intention of giving the operator a piece of his mind, when a soft, almost cooing voice said to him.

"You are wanted, sir. London are ringing you."

"Thank goodness!" said Dr. Locke fervently.

The next instant the familiar voice of his cousin hailed him over the wires.

"Is that you, Herbert?"

"Yes, Ralph. I have been endeavouring to get you all the morning!"

"My clerk tells me that you are in trouble of some sort. Can I be of any assistance?"

"That is precisely why I was seeking you," said the Head of Greyfriars. "The fact is, I am snowed up with work."

"What sort of work, Herbert?"

"Clerical work. I require the immediate assistance of a qualified stenographer. And I thought that you, Ralph, would be good enough to recommend somebody to me, some capable clerk, and despatch him to Greyfriars as soon as practicable."

There was a pause. The Head waited hopefully for his cousin's reply.

Presently it came.

"I am sorry, Herbert, very sorry, but I know of nobody outside my own office who would suit your requirements."

"Oh!"

The Head's jaw dropped. Evidently there was no help forthcoming from his cousin.

"However," continued Mr. Ralph Locke, "I could lend you the services of my own secretary for a limited period."

"That would be splendid!"

"He is only a youngster of fifteen or so, Herbert, but he is an expert shorthand-typist, and shows plenty of common-sense. He can be relied upon to help you out in an emergency. His name is Harper—Jack Harper. I can ill afford to spare him, but your need appears to be greater than mine!"

"I am indeed grateful to you, Ralph," said the Head, in tones of relief. "It is most generous of you to make such an offer. If you will lend me Harper I will see that he is sent back to you as soon as the abnormal pressure of work here has been relieved."

"I will pack Harper off at once," promised Mr. Locke. "He is not looking very grand to-day, and I am afraid the London air doesn't agree with him. He will find it very beneficial to his health to get into the country for a bit."

Dr. Locke was about to continue the conversation when Trotter, the school page, came into the study.

"Which Major Cherry is 'ere to see you, sir!" he said.

The Head groaned.

He had had a few interviews with Bob

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Cherry's father in the past, and they had not been pleasant ones. A weather expert would have described them as "storms locally, with occasional thunder."

With the receiver still at his ear, Dr. Locke turned to Trotter.

"Ask Major Cherry if he will be good enough to wait a moment," he began.

There was a sudden snorting sound, and a fiery-looking gentleman, of military bearing, stamped into the study.

"No, sir, I will not be good enough to wait!" he exclaimed. "I demand to know, Dr. Locke, why you have sent me this letter—this insulting missive—"

The Head nearly tore his hair. He wanted to speak to his cousin and to Major Cherry at the same time, a feat which was impossible of achievement.

"I—I really must ask you to excuse me a moment, major," he stammered. "My cousin is on the telephone—"

"Confound your cousin, sir!" snorted the major. "I have not come here to discuss your relatives. I am here to demand an explanation—"

Ignoring the irate major for a moment, the Head spoke into the transmitter.

"Pray excuse me, Ralph! I have just received a visitor, to whom I must attend at once!"

"I quite understand, Herbert," said Mr. Locke. "And I will send Harper to Greyfriars at once. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

The Head replaced the receiver, and turned to Major Cherry.

"Pray be seated, major!"

"I prefer to stand, sir! I prefer, in fact, to walk about! I cannot remain motionless and say all that I wish to say!"

Evidently the major had a considerable amount of steam to let off.

The Head regarded him with some uneasiness, and so did Mr. Quelch.

"I trust you are not offended, Major Cherry?" murmured Dr. Locke.

"Offended? Oh, no, sir! Not a bit!" said the major, with crushing sarcasm. "I am as meek and mild as a lamb! At the same time I demand to know, Dr. Locke, why you sent me this scurrilous epistle concerning my son Robert—"

"My dear major," interposed the Head, "I had no intention whatever of causing you annoyance. I admit that the letter in question was worded in rather a curt manner. But I had to write two hundred and ninety-nine similar letters, so you will readily understand—"

"I understand nothing, sir, save that your letter savours of impertinence! You ask me—command me, by Jove!—to supply the past medical history of my son, and I flatly decline to do so! Dash it all, sir, what's it got to do with you?"

"The governors—"

"What's it got to do with the governors? Of what interest is it to them to know that my son Robert suffered from an attack of whooping-cough at the age of three? I regard the whole thing, sir, as farcical, and downright rude into the bargain!"

The Head sighed, and said nothing.

Smoothing the major's ruffled feathers was a task beyond his powers.

Mr. Quelch, however, was quick to take up the cudgels.

"I assure you, Major Cherry," he said, "that Dr. Locke is in no way to blame for what has happened. A certain governor of the school, alarmed by the amount of infectious diseases in this country at the present time, gave orders that the medical histories of all the boys should be obtained from their parents and guardians. Dr. Locke did not consider the step necessary, and it threw a tremendous burden of work on his shoulders, but he was compelled to observe the wishes of the governors."

"Then all I can say is, sir, that the governors are a set of idiots in their dotage! I have not the slightest intention of yielding to their absurd demands!"

The incensed major flourished his letter in Dr. Locke's face.

"Do you hear me, sir?" he roared.

"Yes, yes!" said the Head, putting his hands to his ears. "I hear you only too well. I wish you would not cause a scene in this study. I have a great deal of work to cope with, and—"

"Very well, sir!" barked the major, turning to the door. "But I want you clearly to understand that I refuse. I flatly and finally refuse, to supply any information concerning my son's infantile ailments! I regard the whole thing with contempt and derision, sir! The collection of the medical histories of healthy boys is an utterly absurd scheme, worthy of the imbeciles who designed it! That is my opinion, Dr. Locke, expressed in my usual manner—straight from the shoulder!"

And, with a defiant glare at the Head and Mr. Quelch, Major Cherry stamped out of the study, and went in search of

Bob, with whom he intended to spend an hour or two before quitting the school.

When the major had gone, the Head sank limply into his chair, dabbing his perspiring brow with a handkerchief.

"Dear me, Quelch, what an ordeal!" he gasped. "Major Cherry is a most—er—boisterous individual!"

"He certainly has some cause for complaint, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "But, of course, the governors are responsible, not you. Do I understand that you have succeeded in obtaining clerical assistance?"

The Head nodded.

"My cousin in London has very kindly promised to loan his secretary to me."

"That is splendid news, sir," said the Remove-master. "With the aid of a secretary you will soon be able to create order out of chaos."

And Mr. Quelch left the study, little dreaming of the surprise that was in store for Greyfriars!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Startling News!

VERNON-SMITH worked like a nigger that morning.

Even his worst enemy could not have accused the Bounder of being a slacker. He was never happy unless he was up and doing; and he found plenty of scope for his energies at the Wessex Institute.

Cox worked hard, too; but, unlike Vernon-Smith, he did his work by fits and starts.

After typing about a dozen letters at express speed, he adjourned to the pastry-cook's shop near by, and returned to the office munching doughnuts.

"I always believe in plenty of nourishment," he said. "Napoleon said that an army marches on its stomach, and so does an office-boy, for that matter. Will you have a doughnut, Harper?"

Vernon-Smith was very hungry, but he eyed the doughnuts rather suspiciously.

"Are they all right?" he asked.

"Jolly fine!" said Cox, starting on his fourth. "There's real jam inside 'em, too—and that's more than you can say for most doughnuts!"

"All serene! I'll tackle one. But if it gives me a pain I'll do the same to you!"

Cox grinned, and handed over the bag containing the greasy comestibles.

Vernon-Smith was half-way through his doughnut when the principal's bell rang.

"Dash it!" he mumbled.

"Shall I tell Mr. Locke that you're engaged for the moment?" asked Cox.

"No, you ass!"

The Bounder bolted the remainder of his doughnut, snatched up his notebook and pencil, and hurried into the principal's room.

Mr. Locke looked up with a smile.

"Are you nearly through with the work I have given you, Harper?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's splendid! You see, I want to get things straight before sending you away."

Vernon-Smith gave a gasp.

"You—you're thinking of sending me away, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; only for a short period, though. It appears that my cousin—Dr. Locke, of Greyfriars—is congested with work. He hardly knows which way to turn. He applied to me in his extremity, and I promised to lend him my secretary until such time as he straightened things out. I shall want you to catch the two-thirty

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Bob Cherry seized Billy Bunter by the collar as if he were a fat rat, and shook him. "Now, let's have the plain truth!" said Bob. "Do you honestly mean to say that Smithy's coming back into the Remove?" "Yow-ow-ow! Leggo, you beast!" (See Chapter 5.)

train from Charing Cross to Friardale, Harper."

Vernon-Smith's brain was in a whirl.

He realised at once the full significance of the principal's words.

He was going back to Greyfriars!

His prophetic words to Harry Wharton & Co.—"I shall return!"—were about to come true.

Not as a scholar was he going back to the famous Kentish school, but as temporary secretary to the Head!

What a sensation his reappearance would cause in the ranks of the Remove—and not in the Remove only, but throughout all Greyfriars!

"You appear to be both excited and elated, Harper," remarked Mr. Locke. "You are keen, I suppose, on going into the country for a change?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Very well! All that remains for you to do here is to complete the work I gave you this morning. I will pay you a week's salary at once, and whilst you are at Greyfriars your salary will be paid by Dr. Locke."

Vernon-Smith was immensely relieved on being handed a week's money. He had been practically "stony," and the payment came as a godsend.

After a further brief discussion on the subject of his departure, the Bounder rejoined Cox in the outer office.

"Hallo!" ejaculated the office boy. "You look jolly backed with life."

Harper! Has the guv'nor patted you on the back, or given you a rise—or both?"

Vernon-Smith, in his elation, waltzed round the office before replying. Then he embraced Cox, and the couple waltzed round together.

Cox entered into the spirit of the thing, though he couldn't quite understand it.

"Does this mean," he panted, as soon as Vernon-Smith released him, "that you've been given permission to attend the funeral of an imaginary grandmother?"

"It means, my son," replied the Bounder, "that I'm going!"

"Where—to the footer-match at Stamford Bridge?"

"Bust the footer-match at Stamford Bridge! I'm going into the country for a spell!"

And Vernon-Smith proceeded to explain the circumstances.

"Lucky dog!" said Cox, when he had finished.

"So are you!"

"How do you make that out?"

"You were saying this morning that you'd never rise to be anything higher than an office-boy. But now that I'm going you'll step into my shoes for a cert!"

Cox stared.

"But you're not going for good, surely?"

"Well, Mr. Locke doesn't intend me to go for good, but I rather think I shall."

I've a rooted notion that I shall never come back to this show."

"In that case," said Cox, "I'm both sorry and glad. I'm sorry you're going, of course; but I'm glad if it's going to mean advancement for me. Like Brutus, I'm ambitious, and I don't want to mark time all my life. How backed my pater will be when I tell him that Cox the office-boy has blossomed into Cox the private secretary! He'll buy me a motor-bike on the strength of it!"

"Good!" said Vernon-Smith, laughing. "Now I've got to pile in and do some clearing-up work."

"I'll give you a hand," said Cox.

For an hour the two worked hard. Then Vernon-Smith invited Cox to lunch. He would have done so before, but funds had not permitted.

"As this is an extra-special occasion," said the Bounder, "we'll go to an extra-special restaurant."

And they did. They patronised one of the best-known places in the West End, where the bill of fare was in French, and where all sorts of tempting dishes were served.

"This is prime!" said Cox, his eyes sparkling. "A fellow would need an income of a thousand a year to come here every day, though!"

A steady drizzle was descending on the London streets, but inside the restaurant all was merry and bright. So much so

that the Bounder quite forgot the passage of time. He reclined on the comfortable settee, taking his ease after a strenuous morning, and when his eyes accidentally lighted on his wrist-watch, he was astonished to find it was two o'clock.

"Jove, I must hustle!" he exclaimed. "My train goes in half an hour!"

"I'll come and see you off!" said Cox. The bill was settled, and the couple proceeded by Tube to Charing Cross.

The Friardale train was in, and a thrill ran through the Bounder as he caught sight of it.

In another two hours he would be at Greyfriars!

"Good-bye, kid!" he said, turning to Cox. "I'm sorry you're not coming with me. We should run well in double harness. Still, life is full of partings, as the hairdresser said!"

Cox took Vernon-Smith's hand in a tight grip.

"Good-bye, Harper!" he said. "I don't want to lose you, but Locke thinks you ought to go, so I suppose we must bow our nappers to the inevitable. Sure you're not coming back?"

"Pretty certain."

"Well, jolly good luck to you! Don't forget to drop me a line from Greyfriars!"

"I'll send you a bulletin once a week," promised Vernon-Smith.

And the next moment he was gone—swallowed up in the crowd that hustled and jostled towards the barrier.

He felt, as he went, that his brief career in London was over.

Exactly what would happen to him at Greyfriars he didn't know; but he had an inborn feeling that he would never return to the City in the role of private secretary.

Vernon-Smith boarded the train, which was already packed with passengers, and soon he was being whirled away through the dismal south-eastern district of London.

His heart was light—lighter than it had been for many days past.

He was going to rejoin his chums, the fellows who had stood by him in those dark days when his withdrawal from Greyfriars had been ordered by his father.

True, he would not return to his study or to his old place in the Remove Form-room. But he would at least have the satisfaction of seeing and conversing with Harry Wharton & Co.

Yes. He was returning to Greyfriars, not as scholar, but as secretary. And he felt, as the train sped on through the pleasant meadows of Kent, that it was good to be alive.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Back Again!

AFTERNOON classes were in progress at Greyfriars when the station hack rolled up to the school gates, and a boy—not attired in Etons, but in ordinary civilian clothes—alighted.

Gosling, the crusty old porter, came shuffling out of his lodge, and he stared at Vernon-Smith in astonishment.

Indeed, so great was Gosling's astonishment that he began to wonder if he had been imbibing too freely of the juice of the juniper, and was "seeing double" in consequence.

"My heye!" he gasped. "Master Smith!"

Vernon-Smith grinned.

"You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick, old sport," he said. "My name's Harper!"

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"My heye!" said Gosling again. He felt almost confident by this time that he had not diluted his gin with a sufficient quantity of water.

And yet, surely this must be Vernon-Smith, late of the Greyfriars Remove? If not, then the Bounder possessed a very remarkable double.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," said Gosling. "If you ain't Master Vernon-Smith I'll eat my 'at!"

"Then I hope you get chronic indigestion!" said the Bounder. "Will you take me along to the Head's study?"

Gosling eyed the speaker with suspicion.

"Wot do you want with the 'Ead?" he asked.

"Oh, I just want to see how the old boy's getting along! We're old college chums, you know!"

Gosling snorted, and led the way to the Head's study.

No. 33.—PATRICK GWYNNE.



Irish, and a real good sort. A prefect, and a close chum of Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars. A splendid specimen of a public school fellow, and just what he should be—straight-forward, thoroughly decent, and kind and sympathetic towards the juniors of the school. Altogether, one of the leading lights of the Sixth.

"Wot name shall I give?" he asked, pausing outside the door.

"Harper, of course!"

Gosling gave another snort, not quite so loud this time. Then he tapped on the door of the study.

The Head's voice wearily bade him enter.

"Master 'Arper, sir!" announced Gosling. "Though wot I says is this 'ere! His name ain't no more 'Arper than mine is. It's Smith, sir—Master Vernon-Smith!"

"Bless my soul! Pray ask him to come in, Gosling!"

The next moment Vernon-Smith stepped into the study. His eyes met those of the Head unflinchingly.

No word was spoken until Gosling had withdrawn.

Dr. Locke was the first to break the rather dramatic silence which prevailed.

"Vernon-Smith! What does this mean? What brings you here?"

"Mr. Locke sent me, sir. I under-

stand I am to help you with your correspondence."

"But you have given your name as Harper! What is the meaning of this deception?"

Vernon-Smith flashed.

"I didn't mean to be deceitful, sir. When Mr. Locke was good enough to give me a job at the Convict Association I decided to give an assumed name, because I didn't want my father to know my whereabouts until the end of the month."

Dr. Locke's face cleared a little.

"This is indeed a staggering surprise, Vernon Smith!" he exclaimed. "When my cousin was telling me this morning about his secretary I had no idea that you were the person in question. Sit down, my boy, and relate to me your experiences since leaving Greyfriars."

The Bounder dropped into a chair, and told his story.

"I went first of all to my father, sir. He told me that he had withdrawn me from Greyfriars because I was wasting my time there. He said I was far too keen on sport—"

"Yes, yes. I am aware of that Vernon-Smith."

"And he also rubbed it in that when he was my age he was earning his own living. He ordered me to do the same. 'Report to me in a month's time,' he said, 'and tell me what progress you have made!'"

"What did you do then?"

"I went in search of a job, sir, and had no luck." Vernon-Smith smiled grimly at the recollection of his bitter experiences. "I tramped practically from end to end of London, and there was nothing doing. Hundreds of fellows—men of education and polish, who had given up their jobs to go to the war—were at the same game. It was awful!"

Dr. Locke nodded sympathetically.

"I had got pretty desperate, sir, when one day I met a gentleman who seemed impressed by the plight I was in, and gave me an introduction to Mr. Locke. I was given a job—an ordinary clerk's job—and then, when Mr. Locke's secretary left, I took his place."

"You have made excellent progress, Vernon-Smith! Have you acquainted your father with your success?"

"Not yet, sir."

The Head was silent for a moment.

"How did you fare in the matter of lodgings?" he asked, at length.

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"I had a pretty rotten experience, sir. I rented a room at Waterloo, and an ex-convict, who had a grudge against me, got me turned out."

"How?"

"He persuaded the landlady that I was a dangerous cracksmen, sir."

"Bless my soul! That was most unfortunate. You appear to have passed through a very trying time, my boy."

When he had finished recounting his London experiences, Vernon-Smith indicated the disordered mass of correspondence on the Head's desk.

"You wish me to help with this, sir?" he asked.

The Head looked thoughtful.

"I am not certain whether I ought to engage you, Vernon-Smith," he said. "Your father has withdrawn you from the school, and I fear he would resent my—"

"He withdrew me from being a scholar, sir," interrupted Vernon-Smith. "But I don't think he'd object to my being at Greyfriars as a wage-earner."

"Perhaps you are right," said the

Head. "I will discuss the matter with Mr. Quelch, and ascertain his opinion."

The Remove-master was astonished when, on entering the Head's study a few moments later, his eyes lighted upon Vernon-Smith.

Dr. Locke explained all the circumstances, and then asked Mr. Quelch whether he thought it advisable to employ Vernon-Smith.

"Most emphatically I do, sir!" said Mr. Quelch. "The sooner you get to grips with that vast amount of correspondence the better. Vernon-Smith's work, as your secretary, would be of a confidential nature, but I feel sure he can be trusted not to divulge any information to the boys."

"Yes, yes. But his father——"

"His father could raise no objection. After all, Vernon-Smith is carrying out his father's wishes, and earning his own living."

Dr. Locke hesitated for some time, as if unable to make up his mind.

"Of course, sir," said the Bounder, "if I'm not wanted I'll go back to London at once!"

The Head glanced at the untidy heap of letters awaiting replies, and in that instant his mind was made up.

There was really no time to engage another clerk in preference to Vernon-Smith.

As Mr. Quelch said, the sooner the Head got to grips with his correspondence the better.

Besides, Mr. Locke, in London, might be offended if his cousin sent the Bounder back, saying that he had no use for his services.

"I will engage you, Vernon-Smith," said the Head, at length. "It is most unusual—in fact, it is without parallel—for an old boy of Greyfriars to be employed at the school in a secretarial capacity. But the circumstances are exceptional, and there is much work waiting to be done. I should like you to start your duties to-morrow morning."

"Very good, sir."

The Bounder could not conceal his delight. He smiled, and the Head and Mr. Quelch returned his smile.

"What about digs, sir?" he inquired.

"Digs!" gasped the Head.

"Ahem! Lodgings, sir?"

"Dear me! That is a matter which will have to be settled without delay. It is impossible, at the present time, to accommodate you in the school. I think, therefore, that quarters had better be found for you in the village. I am going into Friardale very shortly, and if you will accompany me I will see that a suitable place is found for you."

"Thank you very much, sir!"

Vernon-Smith found it difficult to convince himself that he was not dreaming.

He, a recent member of the Greyfriars Remove, was now the Head's secretary!

It seemed almost too good to be true.

Fate had played a good many strange tricks on the Bounder since he had been withdrawn from the school. But this was by far the strangest trick of all, and the most welcome.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's News!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

Billy Bunter of the Remove burst into Study No. 1 like a cyclone.

The Famous Five were preparing tea, and they could not be bothered with Bunter.

"Travel!" said Wharton curtly.

"Oh, really——"

"Scat!" roared Bob Cherry.

But Billy Bunter remained where he was. He was quivering from head to foot with excitement, and his little round eyes were glittering behind his spectacles.

"I've got news, you fellows," he said. "Amazing news! Wonderful news—news that will fairly take your breath away!"

Harry Wharton & Co regarded the fat junior in surprise.

It was nothing new for Billy Bunter to be in possession of news. He gleaned quite a fund of information by listening at keyholes. But he had seldom been so wildly excited as on this occasion.

"Is it good news, or bad?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Good!"

"Then I suppose they've decided to send you to Colney Hatch?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All right, you cackling beasts!" said Billy Bunter. "I sha'n't tell you all about old Smithy now."

"Eh? What's the matter with Smithy?" exclaimed Wharton sharply.

No. 34.—MONTAGUE NEWLAND.



Of the race of Israel, and a credit to it. A generous and plucky young fellow, rather more thoughtful than most, but able to use his hands effectively as well as his brains. Shares Study No. 9 with Penfold, Trevor, and Treluce. Gets on very well with all of them, as a rule, though Trevor and Treluce are not quite so reliable as they might be. (Remove.)

"I refuse to tell you!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I refuse to breathe a word about Smithy's return!"

"My hat!"

"You—you mean to say that Smithy's here?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"I decline to satisfy your rotten curiosity, Bull!"

And the Owl of the Remove turned to the door.

"Perhaps a slice of cake——" began Frank Nugent.

The word cake had a magical effect.

Billy Bunter whisked round, and advanced towards the table.

"Well, I don't mind a slice of cake, Nugent, since you press me," he said.

For the space of two minutes there was no sound in Study No. 1 save the champing of Billy Bunter's jaws. The Famous Five were waiting, with more or less patience, for the fat junior to divulge his breathless and staggering news.

"Well," said Johnny Bull at length,

when the champing had ceased, "what's this about Smithy?"

"He's back!"

"Gammon!"

"Another of Bunter's flights of the imagination!" said Bob Cherry.

"If this is a leg-pulling stunt, you fat worm——" began Wharton.

"It isn't!" said Bunter indignantly.

"It's a fact! Smithy's back!"

"Have you seen him in the flesh?" demanded Nugent.

"No."

"Then how the thump do you know he's back?"

"Ahem! I happened to be passing Quelch's study just now, and the door was wide open——"

"Same as your ears?" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wish you fellows wouldn't keep interrupting! The door was wide open, and I couldn't help hearing what Quelch was saying to Prout. He said that Smithy had arrived this afternoon, and was going to remain at the school."

"Great Scott!"

"If Bunter's telling the truth, this is the finest piece of news we've heard for whole terms!" said Wharton.

"Absolutely!"

Bob Cherry seized Billy Bunter by the collar as if he were a fat rat, and shook him.

"Now, let's have the plain truth!" said Bob. "Do you honestly mean to say that Smithy's coming back into the Remove?"

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo, you beast! If you shake me like that you'll bust my glasses, and then you'll have to pay for them!"

"Answer my question!" growled Bob.

"Ow! I didn't say Smithy was coming back to the Remove! I said he was coming back—or, rather, he's come back already—to Greyfriars!"

"Well, that's the same thing, isn't it, you ass?"

"No. He's not coming back as a scholar."

"Then what the merry dickens——"

"He's got a job here!" explained Bunter, speaking more freely now that Bob Cherry had released him.

"A job?" echoed Johnny Bull.

"What sort of a job?"

"He's going to be the bootboy."

Five separate and distinct glares were fixed upon Billy Bunter. And he was extremely fortunate that five hefty boots did not clump together on his fat person.

"Smithy as bootboy!" gasped Frank Nugent. "Well, of all the silly rot——"

"I'm only repeating what Quelch told Prout!" said Bunter. "I heard him say that Smithy had had a rotten time in London. He tramped for miles, trying to get work, but there was nothing doing. At last, when he was at the door of starvation, he wrote to the Head, and begged for a job. So the Head fixed him up as a bootboy, and he starts to-morrow."

"What an awful whopper!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Smithy's got far too much pride to come to Greyfriars as a bootboy."

"This is another of Bunter's romances!" growled Johnny Bull. "Sling him out!"

In vain Billy Bunter protested. The Famous Five moved towards him as one man, and in spite of his heavy bulk, they sent him spinning through the doorway.

"Yaroooooh!"

The fat junior landed in the passage with a bump and a yell. The study door was slammed after him, and the Famous Five resumed their task of preparing the tea.

"Of course, there's nothing in what Bunter says!" said Johnny Bull.

"Of course not!" said Harry Wharton; but there was an element of doubt in his tone.

Bunter's story, he reflected, might not be wholly untrue. There was possibly something in it.

The next moment the study door opened, and Bob Cherry's hand strayed towards a cricket-stump. He was expecting to see Billy Bunter again.

It was not Bunter who entered, however. It was Peter Todd, and Peter's countenance glowed with excitement.

"Smithy's back, you fellows!" he exclaimed.

"Rats!"

"You mean to say you swallowed Bunter's silly fable, Toddy?" said Wharton.

"There's no fable about it," was the reply. "I've just seen Smithy with my own eyes!"

"My hat!"

"Where?"

"He's just come out of the Head's study, and the Head's taking him in tow," explained Peter Todd.

The Famous Five asked no more questions.

With one accord they dashed out of the study and along the passage.

When they emerged into the Close they found it thronged with a crowd of excited fellows, and saw that Peter Todd had spoken truly.

Dr. Locke was making his way towards the school gates. And with him was Vernon-Smith!

Harry Wharton & Co. stood rooted to the ground in astonishment.

What did it all mean?

Had the Bunder indeed returned to Greyfriars? Or had he returned merely to vanish again?

Once Vernon-Smith glanced back over his shoulder, and smiled at his former schoolfellows.

"Good old Smithy!" murmured Bob Cherry. "But—but where on earth is the Head taking him?"

"Give it up!" said Harry Wharton. "The whole thing's a giddy mystery. Why did Smithy come back? And does it mean that he's back for good, or that the Head's marching him off again?"

"I don't think there's any trouble," said Nugent. "The Head seems to be quite friendly with Smithy. He's jawing to him like an affectionate uncle!"

Impelled by curiosity, the Famous Five went down to the gates, and the rest of the crowd followed.

By this time the Head and Vernon-Smith were proceeding along the road to Friardale.

Gosling was standing in the doorway of his lodge. Bob Cherry tackled him at once.

"What's going on, Gossy?" he inquired. "Has Vernon-Smith come back?"

Gosling nodded.

"But why has he just gone off with the Head?"

"Couldn't say, Master Cherry. All I knows is that Master Smith's come back, an' that he's got to report to the Head at nine o'clock to-morrow mornin'."

"My hat!"

"We'll meet him to-morrow, when he comes in," said Harry Wharton.

"Yes, rather!"

"We'll come down to the gates just before nine and give him a reception. We couldn't very well do it just now, while the Head was with him."

The juniors were wildly excited at the reappearance of Vernon-Smith.

On his departure from Greyfriars the

Bunder's parting words had been "I shall return!"

Those words had taken the form of a vow, and the vow had been fulfilled!

Would Vernon-Smith take his place in the Remove Form-room next morning?

Would he figure in the Remove football team on the next half-holiday?

Would he occupy his old study, and resume the school career which had been so rudely interrupted by his father?

These questions were on everybody's lips.

But, although there were plenty of vague rumours flying about that evening, Harry Wharton & Co. realised that they would have to wait until the morning before they knew the full facts concerning Vernon-Smith's dramatic re-appearance at Greyfriars.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Vernon-Smith—Secretary!

AFTER breakfast next morning the Remove flocked in a body to the school gates.

The excitement of the previous evening had not died down. It was, in fact, greater than ever.

Everybody was keen to welcome Vernon-Smith back to the fold, and the juniors had decided to give him a handsome ovation.

Mouth-organs and tin whistles were in evidence, but most of the fellows were content to rely on their lung-power.

Harry Wharton turned to the clamorous crowd.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, in ringing tones, "we are gathered together to give a fitting welcome to our old pal Smithy—"

"Hear, hear!"

"It looks as if Smithy's pater had relented, and decided to let him come back to Greyfriars," continued the captain of the Remove. "Well, I can only say that it's high time the silly old buffer came to his senses!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Smithy may not turn up until after nine," Wharton went on, "and at nine o'clock we ought to be in the Form-room, ready for morning lessons. If there is anybody who doesn't care to risk a row with Quelch, he can clear off."

But nobody budged.

The fellows realised that there was safety in numbers, and that Mr. Quelch could hardly cane the whole Form for being late for lessons.

Harry Wharton continued his oration.

"When I call for three cheers," he said, "I shall expect to hear the windows of Gossy's lodge rattle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The mouth-organists and the tin-whistlers will provide the accompaniment. Don't forget, you fellows. Let it rip!"

Presently there was a shout from Dick Penfold, who had been scanning the long stretch of roadway.

"Here he comes!"

"Good!"

"Clear your throats for action, you fellows!"

Just as nine o'clock boomed out from the old clock-tower Vernon-Smith arrived at the school gateway.

The Bunder had not expected anything in the nature of an ovation, and he nearly fell down when he caught sight of the entire Form.

"What the thump—" he began.

But his words were drowned by Harry Wharton's ringing shout:

"Three cheers for Smithy!"

The scene that followed beggared description.

Not content with cheering Vernon-Smith to the full extent of their lung-power, the fellows seized him, and swept him off his feet and on to their shoulders.

"Steady on, you duffers!" said the Bunder, laughing.

But his protest went unheeded in the general uproar.

Amid a deafening clamour, to which the mouth-organs and tin whistles contributed their full share, Vernon-Smith was marched in triumph towards the building.

"Hurrah!"

"Smithy's back!"

"And he's come to stay!"

"Hip, hip, hip—"

"Hurrah!"

The window of the Head's study was suddenly opened, and Dr. Locke gazed out in astonishment at the clamorous throng.

"Boys," he exclaimed, "cease this din and disorder at once!"

But it was not until everybody had caught sight of the Head that the tumult subsided.

"Wharton! Cherry!" rapped out the Head, when some semblance of order had been restored. "Lower Vernon-Smith to the ground at once!"

It was not exactly an angry command, but it was one which the juniors dared not disobey.

Vernon-Smith was promptly lowered, and the crowd was now silent.

Everybody was waiting to hear what further comments the Head had to make.

"I wish you clearly to understand, my boys," said Dr. Locke, "that Vernon-Smith has not returned to his former place in the Remove Form."

A murmur of mingled dismay and astonishment arose.

"Oh, help!" gasped Bob Cherry. "What's going to happen, then?"

"Smithy's going into the Upper Fourth, I expect!" muttered Peter Todd.

"In that case, the Remove's loss will be the Upper Fourth's gain," said Harry Wharton.

"I was quite right, you fellows," murmured Billy Bunter, in tones of triumph. "Smithy's going to be the bootboy!"

But the Head's next words showed that Bunter was quite wrong.

"I have engaged Vernon-Smith," announced Dr. Locke, "as my secretary. The post is a temporary one, and when I have no further use for Smith's services he will return to London."

Another murmur went up from the crowd, and the astonishment was greater than before.

"Secretary to the Head!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Well, I'm beat!"

This news was totally unexpected. Vernon-Smith's old chums knew him as a capable typist, but it had never occurred to them that he was sufficient of an expert to undertake the duties of a secretary.

"Fancy the Head having a giddy secretary!" exclaimed Squiff. "Quelch will be having one next! Wonder what sort of a screw Smithy will get?"

"Tuppence a week and all found!" suggested Bolsover major.

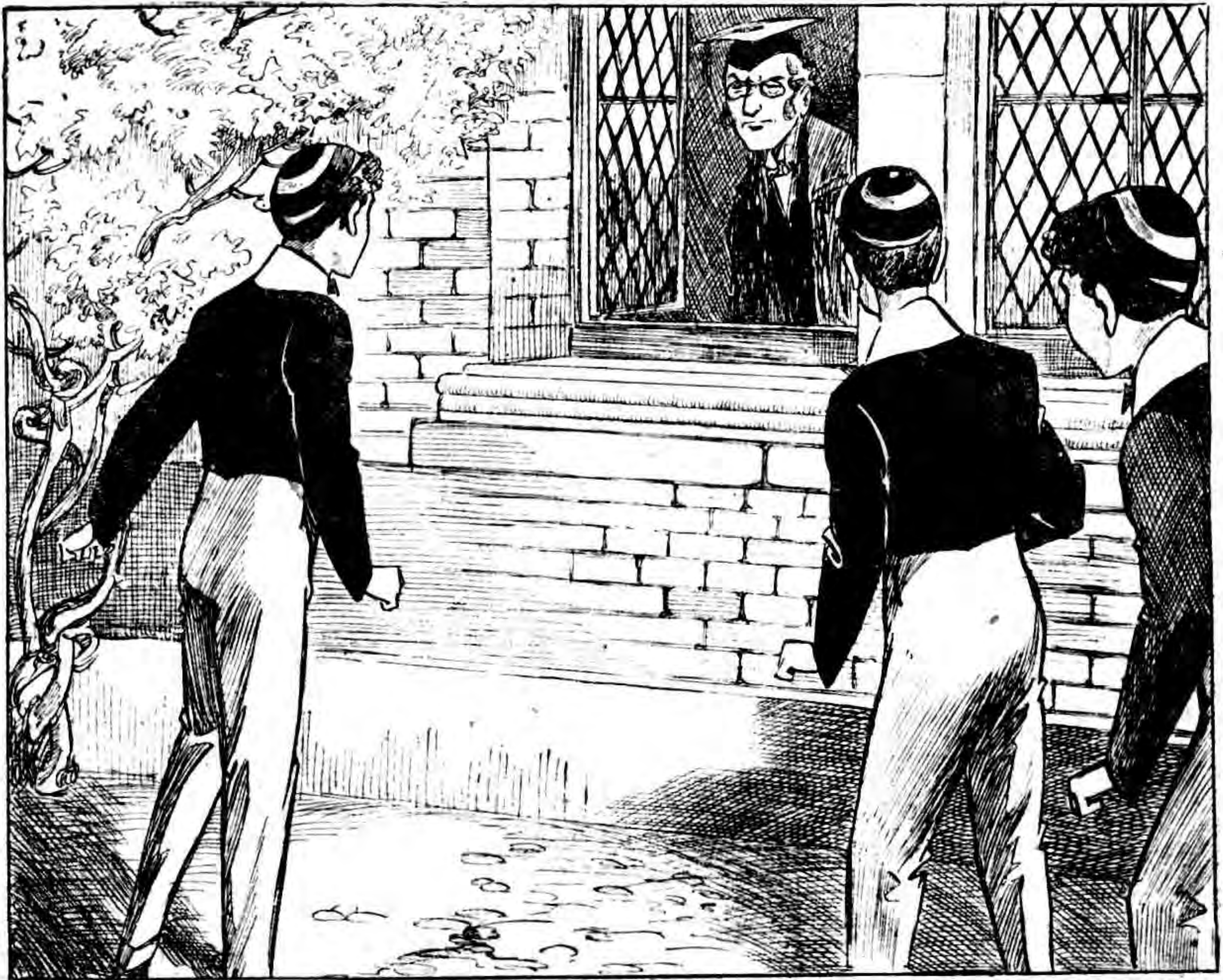
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" rapped out the Head. "As Vernon-Smith is now employed by the school authorities, he will have nothing in common with his old Form-fellows."

It was not a murmur this time, it was a groan.

Vernon-Smith was back at Greyfriars, true. But what was to be gained by his return if he was not to be allowed to associate with his old chums—with the fellows who had worked and played with him in past days?

"You will proceed to your Form-room



Harry Wharton & Co., came up to the Head's window at the double. "How long ago did Vernon Smith take his departure?" inquired Dr. Locke. "He's only just gone, sir," said Wharton. "Do you think you could follow after him and tell him to return to my study?" asked the Head. "Yes, rather, sir!" (See Chapter 9.)

immediately," said the Head. "Bless my soul! You are already ten minutes late! Let there be no further delay."

Looking very crestfallen, the Removites dispersed.

Vernon-Smith watched them go with a wistful expression on his face. He would rather have gone to the Remove Form-room than to the Head's study.

"Come, Smith!" said the Head, not unkindly.

And the youthful secretary accompanied Dr. Locke to his study.

The Bounder could scarcely repress a grin at the confused state of the Head's desk.

The pile of correspondence had greatly increased since the previous day. Indeed, there were so many letters that the Head had not had time to open them all.

"Now, Smith," said Dr. Locke, "we must set to work! Mr. Quelch has been good enough to lend me his typewriter, and no doubt you are familiar with the working of the machine?"

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder.

He had often used Mr. Quelch's typewriter in the past—with and without permission.

"I have numerous letters for you to reply to," continued the Head, "and I wish all the replies to take the same form. I want you to say that the past medical histories of the boys are no longer required, and that I am sorry the parents

and guardians were troubled in the first instance. Do you think you can write over a hundred letters to that effect, Smith?"

"Of course, sir."

"The governors are anxious to ascertain if all the boys at Greyfriars are in good health," said Dr. Locke. "I originally wrote to all the parents and guardians, asking for details of past illnesses, but I now find that this was a false step. The better plan will be to have all the boys medically examined by a local doctor. Will you write a note to Dr. Short, of Friardale, asking him if he would care to undertake the task?"

"Certainly, sir."

Vernon-Smith was soon knee-deep in work. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that he was up to his eyes in it.

There were dozens and dozens of letters from irate parents, and the writers of them clamoured for an immediate reply.

"How will this do, sir?" inquired the Bounder, passing a sample letter to the Head.

Dr. Locke ran his eye over the letter:

"My Dear Sir,—I much regret that my letter, asking for the past medical history of your son, should have caused you annoyance.

"I now write to say that such details are no longer required.

"With sincere apologies for troubling you in this matter,

"Believe me, yours faithfully,"

"That will answer the purpose admirably," said Dr. Locke, handing the letter back. "How long do you think it will take to answer the whole of that correspondence?"

Vernon-Smith smiled.

"I shall be through by to-night, sir."

The Head stared.

"Are you presuming to jest with me, Vernon-Smith?"

"Not at all, sir. It's quite possible to type a hundred letters in a day—especially when they are short ones."

"Bless my soul! It will be a great load off my mind to know that all this correspondence has been dealt with."

For the next few hours Vernon-Smith worked untiringly.

Never had the keys of Mr. Quelch's typewriter moved so quickly.

The Bounder had a magic touch, and his energy never flagged.

At one o'clock he set out for the village. It had been arranged that he should have all his meals at his lodgings.

The Remove had been dismissed from morning lessons, and as the Bounder made his way towards the village the Famous Five overtook him on their bicycles.

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"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, dismounting from his machine. "At last we've been able to corner you, Smithy! Now, tell your uncles all about it—how you came to be the Head's secretary, and all that."

The Bounder related his London experiences to the Famous Five, and explained how Dr. Locke had applied to his cousin for clerical assistance, with the result that he—Vernon-Smith—had been despatched to Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton & Co. listened in amazement to the story of their chum's adventures in London.

"And how long will your present job last?" asked Wharton.

"Goodness knows! It's only a temporary one, and I may be fired out at any moment."

"Rotten!"

"What does your pater say about it all?" asked Nugent.

"He doesn't know."

"My hat!"

"Will you not returnfully come back to the esteemed Remove?" inquired Hurree Singh.

"It doesn't look like it at present, Inky," said Vernon-Smith. "But I've not given up hope. I've got one foot in at Greyfriars, so to speak, and you can bet I shall make every effort to get back into my old place."

"Good!"

"Where are you going now?" asked Bob Cherry.

"To my digs. The Head's found me some topping digs in the village."

"Is that where he was taking you yesterday?" asked Johnny Bull.

The Bounder nodded.

"From what I can see of it I shall have quite a good time in this new job," he said. "But I'm not supposed to mix with my old pals, and there's the rub. I'd give anything for a game of footer on Little Side."

"Look here," said Harry Wharton, "we've arranged to hold a study feed this afternoon in your honour, and you've simply got to come!"

"Can't be done," said the Bounder, shaking his head.

"Not funky of the Head finding out, are you?" said Nugent.

"No; but the fact is I'm snowed up with work—typing letters by the ream."

"Come along to-morrow afternoon, then," said Wharton.

"All serene!"

The Famous Five, pushing their bicycles, accompanied Vernon-Smith as far as the village.

When they reached Dr. Short's house the Bounder went up to the front door and delivered a letter.

"Anybody ill?" asked Bob Cherry, when he returned.

"No."

"Why leave a note at the doctor's, then?"

Vernon-Smith grinned.

"I can't explain, being a confidential secretary," he said. "But you'll know all about it to-morrow. And now that I've told you all my experiences in London, I want to know what's been happening at Greyfriars since I left."

"Nothing exciting," said Wharton. "We've played a couple of footer matches, and lost 'em both. Your going left a gap in the forward line which we've never been able to fill."

"Then the sooner I get back to the Remove eleven the better."

"Yes, rather!"

"Hope you'll be able to work the oracle soon, Smithy," said Bob Cherry.

The Bounder promised to do his best, and he bade au revoir to the Famous Five on reaching his lodgings.

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He scrambled through his dinner, and was soon back in harness in the Head's study.

All through the afternoon the typewriter clicked and clattered; and at last Vernon-Smith rose to his feet with a sigh of relief.

The Head regarded him in wonder.

"Do you mean to say, Vernon-Smith, that—"

"That I've finished? Yes, sir. If you will sign these letters, I'll see that they're sent off this evening."

Dr. Locke no longer wondered why his cousin had spoken of Vernon-Smith in such glowing terms.

The Bounder was a secretary worth having. And the Head began to feel quite alarmed at the prospect of losing him. How useful it would be, he reflected, to retain Vernon-Smith's services indefinitely!

"You have acquitted yourself exceedingly well, Vernon-Smith," said the Head

duplicate. That is to say, he had visited the domestic regions after the official meal was over, and had represented to the cook that he had had nothing to eat.

The cook was a kindly soul, and Billy Bunter had obtained, by false pretences, a further plate of eggs and bacon, with the result that he was very drowsy in the Form-room.

The fat junior was nodding over his desk when Mr. Quelch called his name.

"Bunter!"

The Owl of the Remove shot up like a fat Jack-in-the-box.

"I have called you twice, you disgustingly lazy boy!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "You have not been paying attention to the history lesson!"

"Oh, really, sir!" protested Bunter. "I—I have been drinking in every word, sir!"

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"I will soon test the truth of that assertion, Bunter," he said drily. "Who was Joan of Arc?"

Billy Bunter dug Skinner in the ribs with a fat elbow.

"Who was he, Skinney?" he muttered, sotto voce.

Skinner made a whispered reply, and Bunter turned to Mr. Quelch.

"I am waiting, Bunter!" said the Form-master grimly. "Who was Joan of Arc?"

"The fellow who floated during the Flood, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was an uncontrollable burst of laughter from the class.

"Silence!" roared Mr. Quelch. "I will preserve order in this class, or know the reason why! Bunter, you utterly stupid boy! Stand out at once!"

Billy Bunter rolled out before the class, looking the picture of perplexity.

"Wasn't my answer right, sir?" he asked.

"No, Bunter, it was not!"

"But—but Skinner assured me that Joan of Arc was the fellow who kept himself afloat while the Flood was on!" said Bunter.

Mr. Quelch turned sharply to Skinner.

"Did you give Bunter that information, Skinner?"

"Ahem! I—I was merely pulling his leg, sir," stammered Skinner.

"Stand out before the class!"

Reluctantly Skinner came out from his place. He anticipated receiving a couple of stinging cuts on each hand; but at that moment there was a dramatic interruption.

The door opened, and Vernon-Smith came into the Form-room.

There was a list in the Bounder's hand, and a faint smile on his features.

"Well, Vernon-Smith?" said Mr. Quelch, rather abruptly.

"I want the following boys, sir," said the Bounder: "Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Bunter, Skinner, and Bolsover major."

The Form-master glared.

"This is sheer impertinence, Vernon-Smith! I am astounded that you should have the audacity to come into the Form-room and request me to deliver up six boys!"

"It's the Head's orders, sir."

"What do you mean, boy?"

"Dr. Short has arrived from Friardale to medically examine every boy in the school, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"And the Head has sent me round with this list. The doctor is dealing with the Remove first, and he will examine them at the rate of six fellows a time. If I leave the list with you, sir, would you be good enough to send the next six to the sanatorium in half an hour?"

No. 35.—SIR JAMES VIVIAN, BART.



From Carker's Rents. Brought up in the slums, rescued thence and sent to Greyfriars by Sir Reginald Brooke, Mauleverer's guardian. Related to both Sir Reginald and Mauly. Quick and really clever, with an honest, loyal heart. Devoted to his two study-mates, Mauly and Delarey—especially to Delarey. (Study No. 12—Remove.)

an hour later, when he had signed all the letters. "I confess I was in a hopeless muddle, and I could see no way out until you came. You will have a much lighter day to-morrow. Indeed, I see no reason why you should not take the afternoon off."

"Thank you, sir!"

Under the early evening stars Vernon-Smith walked back to his lodgings, with the feeling that he had deserved well of his country.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Ordeal for Greyfriars!

"BUNTER!"

The voice of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Greyfriars Remove, resembled the rumble of thunder.

Morning lessons were in progress, and Billy Bunter was not paying attention. He very seldom did, as a matter of fact.

On this particular morning the Owl of the Remove had eaten his breakfast in

"Very well, Vernon-Smith. Though I must say it is most inconsiderate of Dr. Short to come at such an inconvenient time. The six boys whose names were called just now will proceed at once to the sanatorium."

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Bolsover major rose to their feet and moved to the door.

Skinner and Bunter followed, chuckling softly to themselves. The sudden entry of Vernon-Smith had saved their skins.

Out in the passage the six juniors clustered round the Bouncer.

"What's it all about, Smithy?" inquired Bolsover major.

"It's nothing," said Vernon-Smith. "You've simply got to line up in front of Dr. Short, stripped to the waist, and he'll examine you."

"My hat!"

"It's not a bad wheeze, to see that every fellow in the school is fit," said Wharton. "There's a good deal of infectious disease about just now, and although it's not likely that any of our fellows have got measles, or anything like that, it's as well to be on the safe side."

"Buck up!" said Vernon-Smith. "The sooner the doctor examines you the sooner I shall finish work to-day. I've got to record the various diagnoses."

"Well, that's a good word, anyway," said Johnny Bull. "I'll back it both ways."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The six juniors accompanied Vernon-Smith to the sanatorium.

Billy Bunter was quivering like a fat jelly with excitement.

"I know why this medical exam's coming off!" he confided to Skinner.

"Why?" growled Skinner, who was feeling rather sore with the fat junior for having given him away in the Form room.

"So that the fellows who are certified unfit can be sent away for a long holiday!" said Bunter.

"Rats!"

"But it's a fact!" persisted the Owl of the Remove. "Six weeks at home for anyone who isn't in the pink of condition! Just think of it!"

"It's jolly nice to think of," said Skinner, "but it won't come off!"

Billy Bunter, however, persisted in the belief that a long holiday awaited those who were unfit.

Dr. Short was waiting for the juniors when they trooped into the sanatorium.

"Now, my boys," he said briskly, "kindly strip to your waists. I shall not keep you long. Smith, get your notebook ready."

"Very good, doctor."

The juniors removed their jackets and vests, and Dr. Short proceeded to prod them in the back and chest.

"You'll do," he said to Wharton. "Write 'fit' against this boy's name, Smith."

The Bouncer obeyed.

Bob Cherry was the next to be examined.

"Sound as a bell!" was the doctor's verdict.

Nugent came next, and then Bolsover major. Both were certified fit, but Dr. Short hesitated a little when he came to Skinner.

"Your chest is not so well developed as those of your schoolfellows," he said.

"Do you indulge in the pernicious practice of smoking?"

"Oh, no, sir!" said Skinner. "Not at all, sir! I hardly know the difference between a cheroot and a clay pipe, sir!"

"H'm! Let me test your heart."

Skinner's heart was found to be in good

condition, and eventually the word "fit" went down against his name.

Billy Bunter was the last of the six to be examined.

The fat junior was shaking from head to foot, as if with the ague, and he looked the picture of misery.

"Bless my soul! What ever is the matter with you, boy?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Yow! I—I've got one foot in the grave, sir!" moaned Bunter.

"Nonsense! You certainly appear to be flabby and out of condition, but that is a state of affairs that can soon be remedied. Have you ever suffered, since infancy, from any of the following ailments?"

And then the doctor rattled off a whole string of complaints, commencing with mumps and ending with malaria.

"I've suffered from all of them, sir!" said Billy Bunter eagerly. "And a good many more besides. The—the fact is, I

No. 36.—MRS. MIMBLE.



Wife of Joseph Mimble, the gardener. In charge of the tuckshop, and, in consequence, very popular with all the fellows of Greyfriars. Is very smart, and needs to be, having to cope with the wiles and schemes of the great Bunter, who is always ready to descend to anything in his appetite for tuck. Is always sure of the assistance of Harry Wharton & Co. in dealing with such as he.

don't get half enough nourishment, and the result is that I've fallen into a decline."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the rest of the juniors.

The doctor made an impatient gesture.

"I will sound your heart," he said.

"H'm! There is certainly a slight tendency to fatty degeneration, but that is all. Now, say 'ninety-nine'!"

"I—I can't, sir!"

"What?"

"I—I suffer from shortness of breath!" panted Bunter. "I couldn't say 'ninety-nine' to save my life!"

"Ha, ha, ha! You've just said it, you ass!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Silence!" rapped out the doctor.

"Do you allege that you are unfit, Bunter?"

"Yessir!"

"In what way?"

"I have dreadful pains in the chest, sir—"

"That is indigestion, caused by an excessive consumption of indigestible compounds. Anything else?"

"I have shooting, stabbing pains in my spine, sir—"

"Plus a vivid imagination. Anything else?"

"My head seems to spin round and round, sir—"

Dr. Short nodded.

"I have no doubt that there is a slight mental derangement," he said.

"And I often fall down in a dead faint, sir," said Bunter, speaking in feeble tones.

"In fact, I—I fancy I'm going to faint now!"

And the fat junior promptly collapsed on the floor, where he lay perfectly motionless.

The doctor looked grim.

"I happen to know a very effective method of restoring a fainting person," he said.

"A sudden prick with a sharp needle—"

"Hellup!"

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet in a twinkling, and the laughter of his schoolfellows rang through the sanatorium.

"People who can perform acrobatic feats of that sort," said the doctor, "cannot have much the matter with them."

You may mark Bunter down as fit, Smith."

"Very well, sir!"

"I am now ready to receive the next batch of boys," said Dr. Short.

"Would you be good enough, Wharton, to ask Mr. Quelch to send them up to me?"

"Certainly, sir!"

"Beast!" growled Billy Bunter, as the six juniors who had already been examined made their way back to the Remove Form-room.

"He could see that I was doubled up with agony, and yet he passed me as fit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors resumed their places in class, and six more went up to the sanatorium for medical inspection.

The Removites didn't mind a great deal. In fact, it was rather a relief to escape from Mr. Quelch's gimlet eye for a few moments.

But the members of the senior Forms were indignant at having to be overhauled.

"The whole thing's a farce!" declared Wingate of the Sixth. "I've a jolly good mind to give it a miss!"

Nevertheless, the captain of Greyfriars went up to the "sanny" and submitted to the ordeal.

By dinner-time all Greyfriars had been medically examined, with the exception of the fags.

"One more hour after dinner," said the doctor, "and the job will be completed. Do you have dinner in the village, Smith?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Then I will give you a lift in my car."

Vernon-Smith travelled in state to his lodgings, and the doctor's car called for him after dinner and conveyed him back to the school.

The fags were then medically examined, and they regarded the affair as a huge joke.

Sammy Bunter, like his brother Billy, insisted that he was suffering from every known malady under the sun.

He assured the doctor that he was on his last legs; but his assurance counted for nothing. He was duly certified fit.

The doctor gave a sigh of relief when his task was at length completed.

"Not a boy in the school bears the slightest trace of any contagious disease," he confided to Vernon-Smith.

"The examination was, to my mind,

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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

To Go or Not to Go?

"GOOD-MORNING, Smith!"

The Bounder returned the salutation as the Head swept into his study next morning.

"Have you replied to all the letters that were outstanding?" inquired Dr. Locke.

"Yes, sir. And I've taken the liberty of tying all your documents together in bundles to avoid confusion."

The Head smiled.

"You are a very neat and methodical worker, Smith," he said. "I can well understand why my cousin thinks so highly of you. But I feel that I cannot, in fairness to Mr. Locke, retain your services much longer. You have done the work required of you, and you have displayed exceptional industry and ability. I thought, originally, that I should probably need you for several weeks; but you have discharged your duties with such rapidity that I shall be able to send you back to London this afternoon."

Vernon-Smith gave a groan.

He had anticipated a fairly long innings at Greyfriars; but that dream was now ruthlessly shattered.

His career as secretary to Dr. Locke was already drawing to a close.

"Did you speak, Smith?" inquired the Head.

"I merely groaned, sir."

"Bless my soul! I trust you are not ill?"

"I don't like the idea of leaving Greyfriars, sir!" said the Bounder frankly.

The Head looked concerned.

"I am sorry, Smith, but I cannot take advantage of my cousin's generosity. He sent you to me on loan, on the express understanding that I returned you to him as soon as the arrears of work here had been wiped off."

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"I quite see that, sir," he said. "Do you wish me to return to London this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"Very well, sir!"

The Bounder faced the situation pluckily; but his heart was heavy within him.

It was maddening that he should have been allowed another peep at the old school, only to be withdrawn from it a second time.

"I shall insist upon your accepting a week's salary, Smith," said the Head. "I could not have got anybody else who could have completed that colossal task in less than a week."

Vernon-Smith protested, but Dr. Locke overruled his protestations, and handed him a week's salary from the safe.

There was not a great deal of work to do for the remainder of the morning.

For the greater part of the time the Bounder sat with his chin resting in his hands, wondering what the future held in store for him.

It was a bitter blow to have to relinquish his post so soon.

But it was no use repining, and the Bounder pulled himself together, resolved to face the issues manfully.

Dinner-time arrived at length, but Vernon-Smith did not go immediately to his lodgings.

Instead, he went for a stroll in Friar-dale Wood. He wanted to drink in as much of the pure, fresh air as possible, for he would return only too soon to the suffocating atmosphere of the City.

"Wonder if I ought to wire Cox that I'm returning?" he muttered. Then, after a moment's pause, he added:

"No, I don't think I will. Something might happen at the last minute!"

But it seemed that a miracle would have to happen to prevent Vernon-Smith from returning to London.

The Bounder went at length to his lodgings, ate a hearty dinner, and went upstairs to pack his box.

He smiled to himself as he thought of all the adventures that box had been through. It had accompanied him to London—first to his father's house, and then to his lodgings in Waterloo. It had been dumped down on the pavement when Vernon-Smith had been ejected from those lodgings; it had remained for a whole night in the cloak-room at Waterloo Station; and now, after accompanying the Bounder to Greyfriars, it was going back with him to London.

Having packed the box, Vernon-Smith heaved it on to his shoulder, and carried it back to the station, having settled first of all with his landlady.

The box was very weighty, but the Bounder did not indulge in a cab, for the simple reason that he would need every penny of his cash when he reached London. Then he hastened back to the school.

There was a rush of feet to the gates, and the Bounder was bombarded with questions.

"What's the game, Smithy?"

Vernon-Smith smiled ruefully.

"I'm going," he said quietly. "My work here is finished!"

Harry Wharton & Co. surveyed the Bounder in astonishment and dismay.

"You—you don't mean to say the Head's sacked you?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"No, but I've finished his work—broken the back of it, anyway—and he's got no further use for my services."

"Shame!"

"It's not the Head's fault," said Vernon-Smith quickly. "I was only lent to him by his cousin on the understanding that I was sent back to London as soon as the Head could spare me."

"But you haven't been here five minutes!" protested Johnny Bull. "I think it's a downright beastly shame to get rid of you so quickly!"

"What time are you going, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton.

"There's a train leaving Friar-dale in half an hour, and I shall have to look slippy if I want to catch it. Excuse me, you fellows, while I dash in and say good-bye to the Head!"

So saying, Vernon-Smith sped away in the direction of the Head's study.

"This is awful!" groaned Bob Cherry.

"It's a case of here to-day and gone to-morrow!"

"Let's order him a cab!" said Frank Nugent.

"Good wheeze!" said Harry Wharton.

And he hurried away to the telephone in the prefects' room, and made arrangements for the station hack to call at the school immediately.

Meanwhile, Vernon-Smith stood face to face with the kindly old Head for the last time, as he thought.

"I looked in to say good-bye, sir," he said, and there was a suspicion of huskiness in his tone. "I haven't been your secretary long, but I thoroughly enjoyed the work, and I appreciate the considerate way in which you've treated me, sir. I won't attempt to disguise the fact that I'm awfully sorry I'm going."

"I, too, am sorry, Vernon-Smith," said the Head. "During the short time you have been with me in a secretarial capacity you have given complete satisfaction. I account myself fortunate to have obtained your services. Good-bye, and I trust all will go well with you in London!"

The Head shook hands warmly with

quite superfluous. I have finished with you now, Smith. You may go."

Vernon-Smith thanked the doctor, and took his departure.

He was free for the rest of the day. The Head was away, attending a Governors' meeting, and the Bounder decided to make the most of his freedom.

First of all he went to the Head's study, and wrote a letter to Cox, his former colleague in London.

On emerging into the Close to post the letter, Vernon-Smith found himself surrounded by a horde of Removites, who had just been dismissed from afternoon classes.

"Here he is!"

"Good old private secretary!"

"What price a game of footer?"

The Bounder could not resist the temptation. It was a cold, crisp day—ideal for football.

Accordingly, Vernon-Smith accompanied a score of enthusiastic juniors to Little Side.

A scratch game was played between a team captained by Harry Wharton and an eleven captained by the Bounder.

The latter discovered that his hand or, to be more correct, his shooting-boots—had lost much of their cunning. He had had no practice for weeks; and his football had suffered.

At half-time Wharton's side enjoyed a comfortable lead of three clear goals.

Gradually, however, Vernon-Smith struck his old form. He threw himself heart and soul into the game, and scored a couple of grand goals for his side.

Near the finish he added another, and saved the game, which ended in a draw of three goals each.

"Bravo, Smithy!" said Bob Cherry. "Now you're coming along to tea! We've cooked the fatheaded calf, as Inky calls it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In Study No. 1 a right royal spread had been prepared, and the hungry juniors did full justice to it.

And afterwards, by the blazing fire, Vernon-Smith and his chums sat talking until it was time for prep.

"It's awfully decent of you fellows to make such a fuss of me," said the Bounder.

"Rats!" retorted Bob Cherry. "You've had a pretty putrid time in London, and it's only right that we should make it up to you."

"Especially as we may not get another chance," said Harry Wharton. "Your job with the Head is bound to come to a full-stop soon, and then we shall be losing you for good."

"Hope not!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'm not exactly pining to go back to London!"

"It's about time," said Frank Nugent, "that your pater came to his senses, and planked you back into the Remove."

"Hear, hear!"

"When I report progress to him," said the Bounder, "perhaps he'll climb down, and let me carry on with my education. It's jolly nice to be the Head's secretary, but it would be a jolly sight nicer to get back into the Remove!"

"It's a long cloud that has no silver lining," said Hurree Singh, who could seldom render an English proverb correctly. "I hope our esteemed Smithy will soon be back again in the worthy rankfulness of the Remove."

And Hurree Singh's hope found an echo in the hearts of all present.

Vernon-Smith, who turned on his heel and quitted the study.

This, then, was the end.

To-morrow Vernon-Smith would resume work in the dingy office at the Wessex Institute.

When would Fate tire of playing tricks with him?

When would his fortune change, and life be worth living once again?

With his hands plunged deeply into his pockets the Bounder crossed the Close.

A crowd—not a very jubilant crowd—was waiting at the school gates, and shortly afterwards the station hack rumbled up.

"This is good-bye!" thought the Bounder grimly. "There's no au revoir about it this time!"

Then followed a strenuous five minutes, in the course of which Vernon-Smith's hand was seized and shaken like a pump-handle by his numerous friends.

"Good-bye, Smithy!"

"Keep a stiff upper lip!"

"You'll come back to Greyfriars yet!"

But the Bounder didn't think so. Hope was dead in his breast. He considered that he was about to look his last on the old school.

"Good-bye, you fellows!" he said. "Good-bye, Wharton! Good-bye, Bob! I shall never forget the ripping welcome you gave me when I came back. And I'd give the world to be back for good. But there doesn't seem the ghost of a chance of that happening—now."

When his hand had been shaken by everybody present, even including

Skinner and Billy Bunter, Vernon-Smith clambered into the hack which Wharton had thoughtfully provided.

The ancient driver flicked his equally ancient horse into action, and the vehicle rumbled away.

Vernon-Smith waved his hand from the window, received the full benefit of the cheer which rang out, and then he was blotted out from the view of his chums, who turned and trooped slowly back into the building.

The Bounder was gone!

And this time he had not uttered the familiar resolve:

"I shall return!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

In the Nick of Time!

BUZZ-Z-Z!

The sound emanated from the telephone in the Head's study.

Dr. Locke, who disliked the instrument intensely, moved towards it with an exclamation of annoyance.

"Who is that?" he demanded.

"London is ringing you!" came the reply from the operator. "Hang on a minute!"

The Head did so. In fact, he had been hanging on for several minutes before a familiar voice greeted him over the wire.

"That you, Herbert?"

"Yes, Ralph. I trust nothing is wrong?"

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Locke. "I merely wanted to have a chat with you concerning Harper."

"Harper?" echoed the Head in surprise.

And then he remembered that Harper was the name by which Vernon-Smith had been known in London.

"Yes—Harper," said Mr. Locke. "I lent him to you on the understanding that you returned him as soon as your rush of work was over."

"That is so, Ralph." It was extremely good of you. I am sending the boy back to you to-day."

"I don't want him," said Mr. Locke. "What?"

"It is like this, Herbert. I have recently secured the services of a first-rate man, and another boy on my office staff—Cox—has come on remarkably well. Under these circumstances it is not absolutely essential that I should have Harper back. If, therefore, you would care to retain his services at Greyfriars, you have only to say so."

The Head hesitated. He knew Vernon-Smith's sterling worth as a secretary, and he knew also that the Bounder was not keen on returning to London.

If he re-engaged Vernon-Smith, there would be very little work for the latter to do. At the same time, the Head reflected, he would be doing the boy a good turn.

Dr. Locke's hesitation was merely momentary. He turned to the transmitter, and said:

"This is very good of you, Ralph. I shall be only too happy to retain the services of Harper, whose real name, by the way, is Vernon-Smith."



This is a small line drawing of the Plate to be Given Free. Actual size of Plate with engraving is 7½ inches by 10 inches. The title of the picture is "Boy, 1st Class, JOHN TRAVERS CORNWELL, V.C. The Battle of Jutland, May 31st—June 1st, 1916. From the Picture by F. O. Salisbury, painted for the Admiralty on board H.M.S. Chester." The closing date of this offer will be published in this paper in a week or so. No application will be accepted after that date.

MAGNIFICENT COLOURED PICTURE TO BE GIVEN FREE

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO TO SECURE A BEAUTIFUL ART PLATE :: :: ::

We reproduce here a small line drawing of a magnificent coloured plate which every reader of THE MAGNET has an equal chance of securing. All you have to do is to secure the names and addresses of SIX of your friends who are non-readers of THE MAGNET. When you have done this, write them down on a postcard and post them to the Editor of THE MAGNET, Gough House, Gough Square, London, E.C. 4. All postcards should be marked "Free Plate" in the top left-hand corner. Names and addresses of regular or occasional readers must on no account be sent, otherwise your application for a Plate may be rejected. Before sending in your list, make sure that the names are of non-readers.

Only one plate will be sent to any one reader.

"Good gracious! Why did he employ such a deception?"

"It is a long story," said the Head, "and I have no time to tell it now. Smith has already started on his journey, and I must recall him with all speed. You will excuse my abrupt termination of this conversation, Ralph?"

"Certainly!" said Mr. Locke. "Good-bye, Herbert!"

"Good-bye!"

The Head replaced the receiver, and moved to the window. He opened it just in time to see the Famous Five about to enter the building.

"My boys!" he exclaimed.

Harry Wharton & Co. came up to the Head's window at the double.

"How long ago did Vernon-Smith take his departure?" inquired Dr. Locke.

"He's only just gone, sir," said Wharton.

"Do you think you could follow after him, and tell him to return to my study?"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

"Be quick, then! There is no time to lose!"

The Famous Five sped off at once.

The station hack was not a swift vehicle, and it was overtaken before it had got half-way to Friardale.

"Stop!" panted the Famous Five, in chorus.

The driver obeyed, and Vernon-Smith poked his head out of the window in astonishment.

"What the merry Dickens—" he began.

"The Head wants you, Smithy," said Harry Wharton. "We were instructed to tell you to return at once!"

"My hat!"

"About turn, driver!" said Bob Cherry. "If you get back to the school in ten minutes, you shall have a putty medal!"

The driver turned round in the roadway, and the ancient horse went back at a jog-trot.

The Famous Five followed behind on foot. They were just as curious as Vernon-Smith to know the reason for the Head's urgent summons.

"Wonder what's wrong?" murmured Nugent.

"Perhaps the Head's forgotten to pay Smithy his salary," said Johnny Bull.

"Or he may not be going to fire him out, after all," suggested Bob Cherry.

But Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No such luck!" he said.

For once in a way, though, the captain of the Remove was wrong.

The Famous Five re-entered the Close just as Vernon-Smith emerged from the Head's study.

One glance at the Bounder's flushed, excited face told the juniors all that they wished to know.

"You're staying on, Smithy?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

"For good?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"So far as I can see."

And a fresh cheer rang out.

"It appears that they've got a fellow to take my place in the London office," explained Vernon-Smith. "And I'm to stay on at Greyfriars. Goodness knows what I shall do in the way of work! I shall neither toil nor spin. But I'm not going away, and that's all that matters."

Excitement fairly ran riot amongst the juniors.

"Good old Smithy!"

"He's staying at Greyfriars!"

"The Head can't do without him!"

"Hurrah!"

As soon as he could break away from the enthusiastic crowd, Vernon-Smith lavishly paid the driver of the hack.

After which the Bounder accompanied Harry Wharton & Co. into the building.

The crowd surged into the junior Common-room, and there were loud cries of "Speech! Speech!"

Flushed and smiling, Vernon-Smith mounted the table.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows—" he began.

"Hurrah!"

"It is ripping to know that I am to stay on at Greyfriars—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And although I haven't yet got back into my old position in the Remove, I mean to make every effort to do so!"

"Bravo!"

"As I said before, it's jolly nice to be the Head's secretary, but it will be a jolly sight nicer to be back in my own study, and to assist the Remove in their footer matches!"

"Yes, rather!"

"You may not see much of me during the next few days," continued the Bounder, "but you can bet that I shall be trying all I know to get back into the Remove! My body will be in the Head's study, but my spirit will be in my own!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith then stepped down from the table, and, as he did so, cheer after cheer rang out.

(Cheer after cheer, until the rafters rang again.)

It was a very happy and elated secretary who made his way to the Head's study some moments later. And it was a very happy crowd that watched him go.

Harry Wharton & Co. eagerly awaited events, and they looked forward with great keenness to the day when Vernon-Smith, secretary, should resume his old position as Vernon-Smith of the Remove!

THE END.

(Another grand, long, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled: "Vernon-Smith's Victory." Order your copy EARLY!)

READERS' NOTICES.

BACK NUMBERS WANTED, ETC.

Jack Graham, 1, South Star Passage, South Quay, Gl. Yarmouth, wants "Lacy of the Grammar School," "The Finger of Scorn," "Sticking It Out," "The Outcast's Luck," "Coker the Joker," "Coker the Rebel," "Coker's Conscript," "William the Warlike," "William the Good," "Billy Bunter's Birthright." Will give 6d. each for same, including postage.

C. Parkin, c.o. the Warneford Hospital, Radford Road, Royal Leamington Spa, has for sale a number of the Companion Papers.

J. Shiel, 19, West Port, Dunbar, wants "Magnet" No. 1, "Greyfriars Herald"—old series—6d. each offered, also "Fig-gins' Fig Pudding." 2d. offered.

B. Hobbs, 11, Ebbw View Terrace, Newbridge, nr. Newport, Mon., has for sale "Magnets" 547-608, "Gems" 547-608, and doz. "Penny Populars"—new series. What offers?

S. Ryan, St. Brendan's, Cross Avenue, Booterstown, co. Dublin, Ireland, wants second-hand copy of the "Holiday Annual"—clean. Write first, stating price.

Herbert Jaques, Fountain Villa, Scalby, Scarborough, wants "Magnets" 1 and 2, and "Bob Cherry's Barring Out." 3d. each offered.

Reginald Lucas, 17, Fazackerley Station, Preston, has for sale 120 "Boys' Friends," and 110 "Nelson Lees." Will sell lot for 12s. 6d.

W. Ross, 12, Elm Row, Galashiels, Scotland, has for sale a number of "Boys' Friends."

L. Cutler, 8, Holmwood Villas, Sander Green Lane, Sutton, Surrey, has for sale a number of "Magnets" and "Gems."

K. Corpe, 1, Shelley Street, Swindon, Wilts., wants No. 1 of the "Boys' Friend."

C. A. Milledge, 27, Tivoli Crescent, Dyke Road, Brighton, has for sale "School and Sport," "Magnets" 378, 453, 532-540, "Gems" 442, 532-540, "Penny Populars" 1-4—new series—also 16 "Greyfriars Herald"—old series. What offers?

B. Sneider, 31, Great Cheetham Street, near Broughton, Manchester, wants "Magnets" 1, 2, 3, "Bob Cherry's Barring Out," and "School and Sport."

Edward Milner, 27, Torrance Street, Montreal, Canada, wants "Magnets" 1-490, also "Sexton Blake Libraries" 1-70. Write first.

J. Shaw, 62, Salisbury Street, Liverpool, has for sale "Magnets" 588-609, "Gems" 589-609, "Penny Populars" 20-37, and "Boys' Friends" 941-957.



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JUGGLING

HOW TO MASTER THE PRINCIPLES OF THE ART.



THE HORIZONTAL PASS.

In this exercise the ball should be thrown from hand to hand in as straight a line as possible (Fig. 6), whilst the beginner must endeavour, by continually increasing the distance between his hands, to maintain a rapid volley.

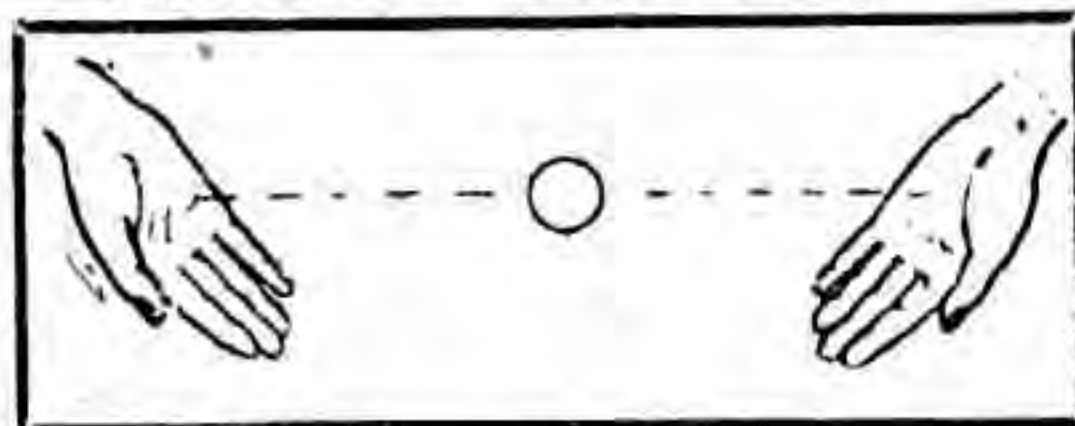


Fig. 6.—The Horizontal Pass.

THE DOUBLE VERTICAL FALL.

This is the first trick requiring two balls, and will need some attention. A ball should be taken in each hand, and the simple vertical fall performed with the right. Before this ball has descended, however, the ball in the left hand must be thrown in the air, as in Fig. 7, so that the two balls are continually in motion. It is at this point that the juggler will find the advantage of being proficient in the use of both hands for the single vertical fall.

A variation of this double fall can be acquired in the following manner:

Both balls should be thrown up at the same time, as in Fig. 8, the hands being kept about two feet apart, care being

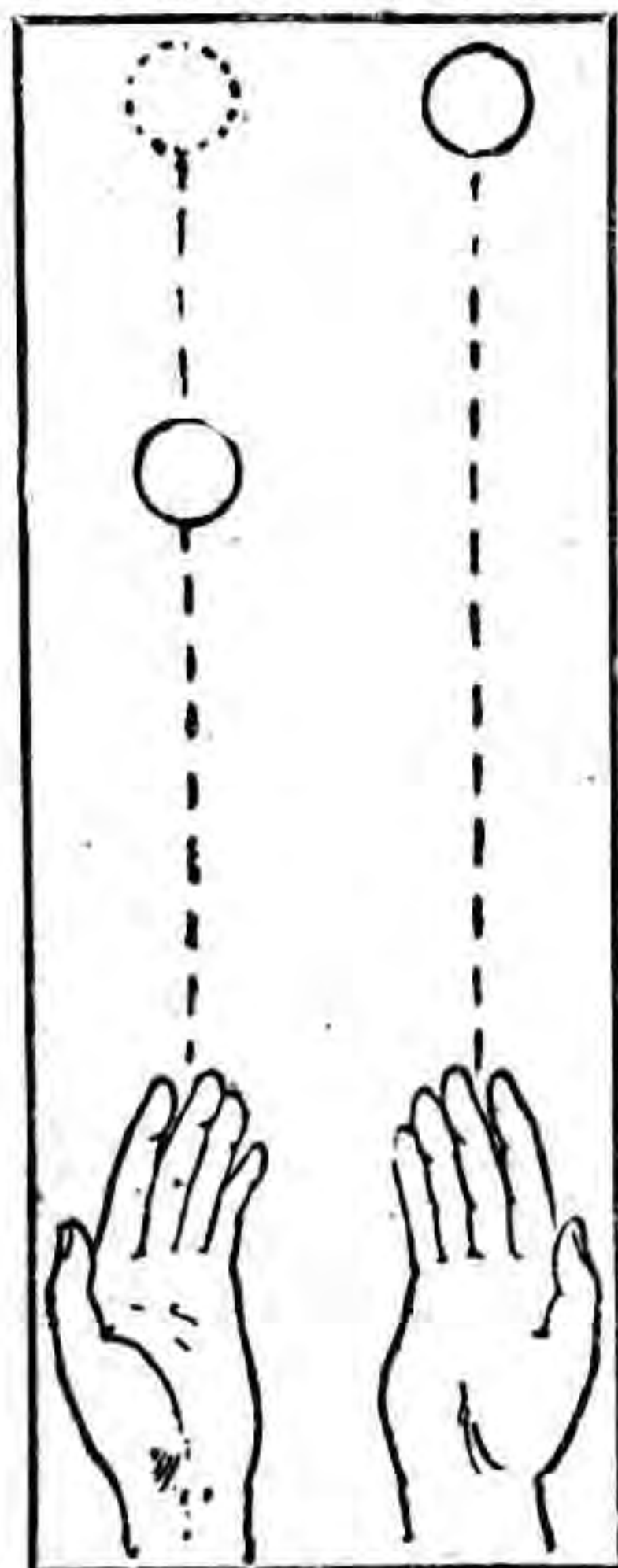


Fig. 7.—The Double Vertical Fall.

taken that neither of the balls is thrown higher than the other.

The beginner must practise these thoroughly until perfectly accustomed to having the two balls in motion simultaneously.

THE DOUBLE INSIDE FALL.

This is a repetition of the outside and inside falls, but performed with two balls at once, and with both hands. The utmost care must be exercised to avoid a collision as they pass one another, and for this reason one ball must be thrown higher than the other, as in Fig. 9. Until proficiency is attained the balls should be

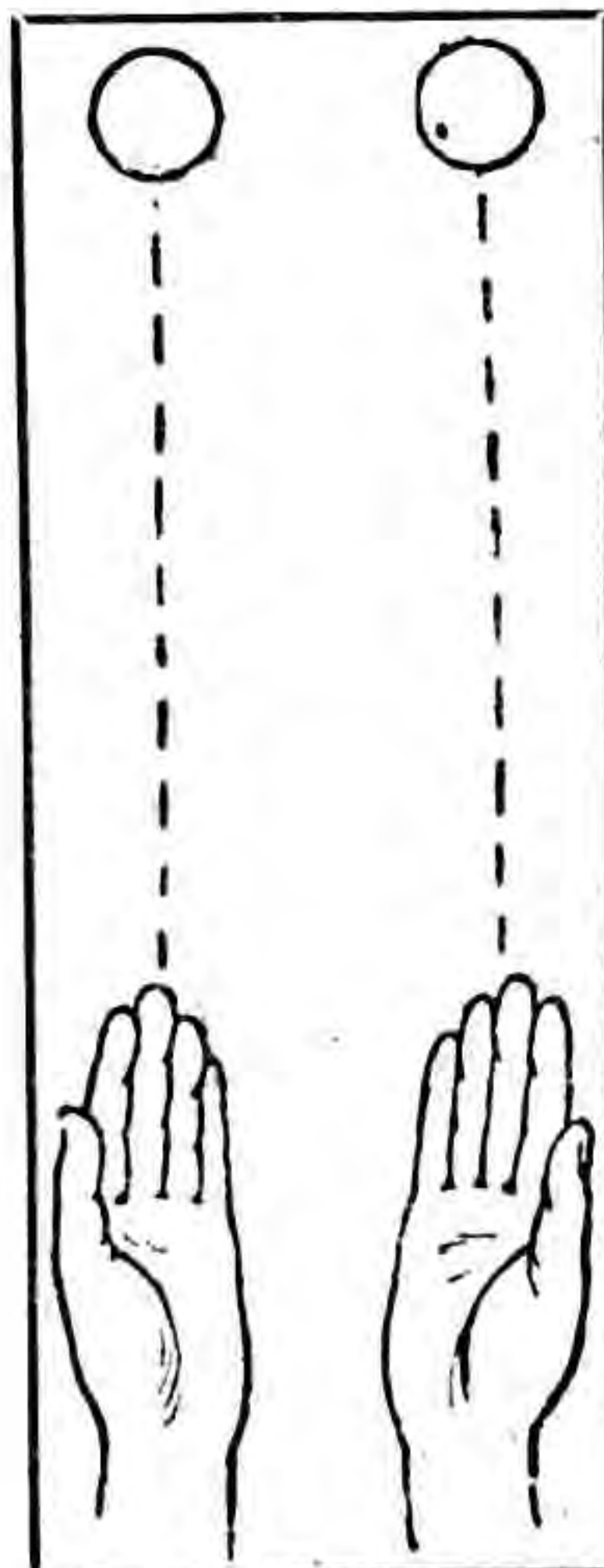


Fig. 8.—Variation of Double Fall.

thrown at various heights, and the hands well apart.

THE TRIPLE PASS.

Having acquired the last trick perfectly, the beginner should now bring into use a third ball. A glance at Fig. 10 will show that the triple pass is nothing but the double inside fall performed with an additional ball.

Two balls are held in the left hand, and one in the right, the former being numbered 1 and 3, and the latter 2. Ball No. 1 is thrown from the left hand, and as soon as it is in the air No. 2 is sent off from the right, after which No. 3 is thrown from the left hand. It will be noticed from Fig. 10 that No. 1 is sent

the highest, and No. 3 the lowest, and by this means a collision can best be avoided. The greatest care must be taken to throw the balls regularly, otherwise confusion will ensue.

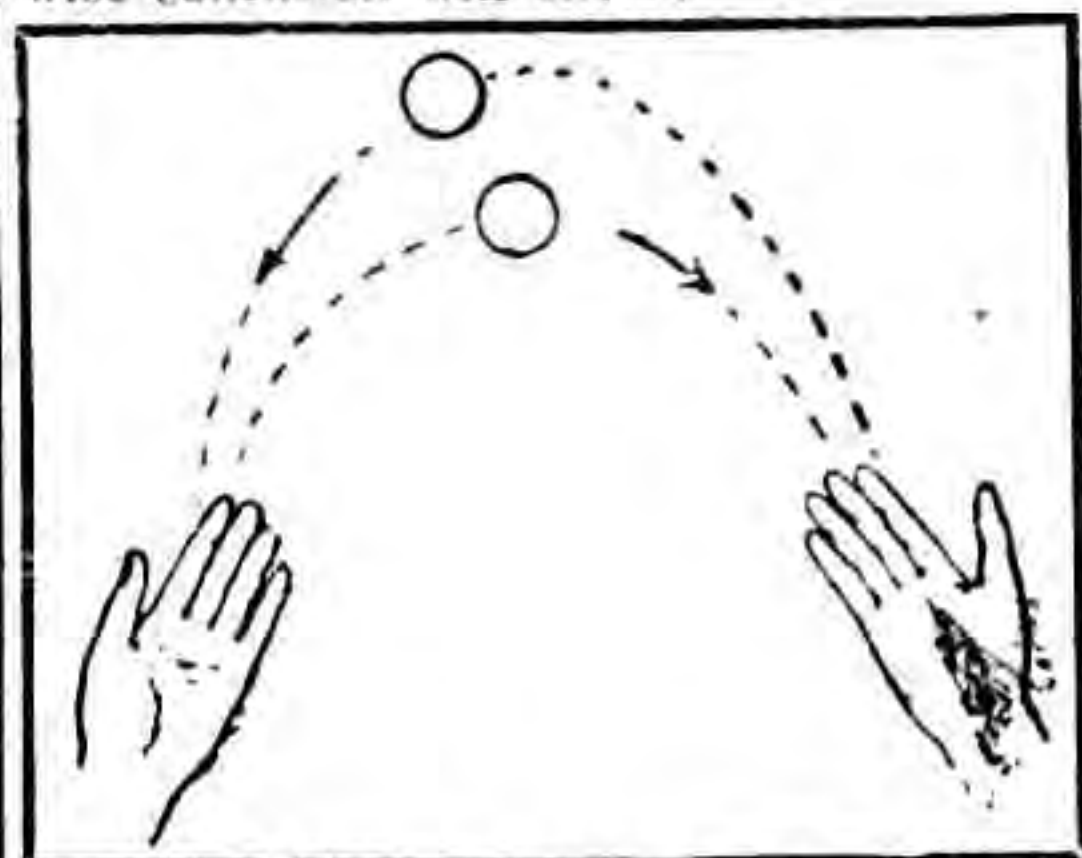


Fig. 9.—The Double Inside Fall.

To keep up the volley, each ball must be sent off again as soon as it has been caught, so that after the first throw neither hand holds more than one ball at a time.

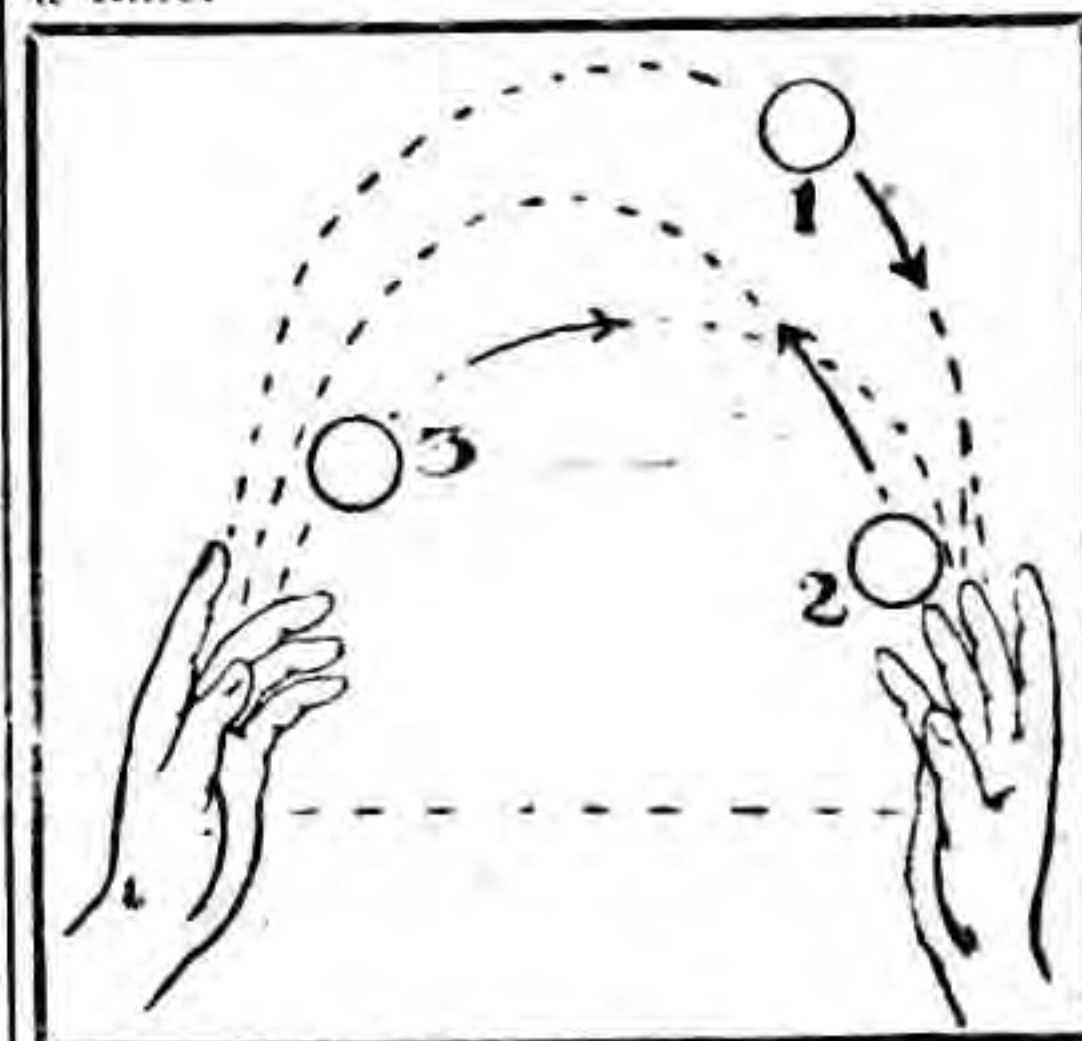


Fig. 10.—The Triple Pass.

SPECIAL NOTICE.

Several letters have come to hand since the publication of the first of this series in which readers say they have tried to perform the tricks, but cannot get on very well with them.

To those readers, and to many others who have found themselves in the same position, I want to offer a word of advice.

The most expert juggler has to practise, even though he has attained perfection. Beginners have to practise harder than the accomplished juggler. Any reader who thinks he can just read over the tricks, and perform before an audience straight away, is setting himself an impossible task.

Practice makes perfect! There is nothing more true than that. It is only by sticking to it that my readers will be able to perform the tricks perfectly.

YOUR EDITOR.

(To be continued next week.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 624.



A Stirring New Tale of the Ring.
By PERCY LONGHURST.

SYNOPSIS.

Harry Rhodes, a miner and amateur boxer, of Lexborough, a mining village, meets Joshua Martin, the manager and principal backer of Anthony Hanna—"Cast-Iron Tony"—a wonderful Scottish light-weight boxer, who had come to Lexborough to train. Harry lives with an uncle, James Rhodes, who has trained him, and who had himself been a boxer years before. He had left the Ring through some tragedy of which Joshua Martin knows the facts, much to James Rhodes' alarm.

Hanna, who is a thorough scoundrel, becomes Harry's sworn enemy.

Bertram Godfrey, a friend of Mr. Durham, the owner of the mine at which Harry worked, interests himself in Harry Rhodes.

Harry learns that James Rhodes is his father, and that he was responsible for the death of a boxer some years previously.

Harry, his father, and Bertram Godfrey go to London, where Harry defeats Jules Meunier, Parisian light-weight champion, in a private contest, which is witnessed by a Royal Prince. An attempt to kidnap the Prince afterwards is frustrated by Harry.

Next day Harry is promised a show at the National Boxing Club.

The kidnappers, including Hanna, decide to have vengeance on Harry for his interference.

(Now read on.)

Planning Against Harry.

WOLFF gave a fairly accurate description of the face and person of Harry Rhodes. The chief looked at his companions.

"It agrees with what Hanna has told us," he said; and they nodded. "You may go, Wolff. You, too, Hanna."

"And Harry Rhodes it is," muttered Hanna. "Am I likely to forget?"

"Then it were well that our comrade Hanna should go forthwith and learn what he can of this boy," the chief said. "We are safe. It is a pity that Vandendyk and Matthew have fallen into the hands of the police, but these will learn nothing of us, even if the two turn traitor and speak. They can tell nothing of us or where we may be found. Of us—we three—the police know nothing; nor of this house, even should we stay here. Our comrades can tell nothing, thanks to our system. We have failed last night. Well, we can but try again; and, maybe, a second time we do not fail. But, by our laws, he who is responsible for failure, who has thwarted our schemes, becomes the object of our immediate vengeance. So we must find and do our duty upon this Harry Rhodes. A prize-fighter, a man who boxes, he is, did not Hanna say?"

The man named Ritz nodded.

"These brutal English and their base sports!" he murmured.

"This Hanna—is he to be trusted?" asked the third man.

"Assuredly!" declared the chief emphatically. "He is of the gipsy blood, even as myself. His father was of Poland, my own country, so he has told me; and those of the gipsy blood trust each other. Therefore I engaged him as my chauffeur. He is desperate. He worships money. Well, the society has plenty of that for those who will do its bidding. And now he has discovered that his own private hatred and the vengeance of the society aim at the same object. But I wish that we had not failed. What a blow for liberty, my comrades, we might have struck last night! Ay, and would have struck but for this meddling youth! It was a chance such as will seldom occur again."

"Think you that Vandendyk or Matthew will open their lips?" asked the moustached man, whose name was Wild-man.

"They may; but what harm can they do us?" was the cool rejoinder. "They can reveal where the society meets. The police go there, and find nothing. Of you, of me, of Ritz—our names, this house, they can reveal nothing, because they know nothing. We are safe, my friends. Let us not think of ourselves, but of the meddler whose interference has postponed indefinitely the blow that would have wounded to the heart the hateful system of monarchy that terrorises the world."

An hour later Tony Hanna, no longer wearing his chauffeur's uniform, was sitting in the private bar of a small hostelry within easy distance of the Strand—a house of refreshment much patronised by the lower grades of professional boxers. Instinct told him that only one likely purpose could have brought Harry Rhodes to London; and if there were any information concerning his enemy to be picked up, the Ship and Dolphin was the likeliest place to obtain it.

There was prompt recognition between the Scotsman and a couple leaning against the bar—one, a stocky, round-shouldered fellow of whom great hopes had been once entertained until his backers, by painful experience, had learned that his disinclination to train seriously was a chronic complaint; the other, an oily-haired, lathy youth from somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood of Houndsditch.

"Why, blow me pink, but it's Tony

Hanna!" exclaimed the former. "Wot yer doin' down 'ere, cully?"

"Just dropped in t' stand you 'n' Slim Ike a drink, old sport," replied Hanna. "What's th' news?"

"That's what yer goin' to tell us, ain't it?" asked "Punch" Neave, with a friendly leer. "Jus' come outer th' Club, ain't you?"

"And why d'ye ask that?" the Scot inquired cautiously.

"Because about 'alf an hour ago we saw that blinkin' Frenchy go in there with that little bloke who's always 'oppin' about like a chestnut on a hot plate—his manager bloke, who won't let him outer his sight. Jules Meunier, I mean."

"Well?"

"Well, ev'ryone knows 'ow blessed keen th' Froggie was to 'ave a cut at you—before yer las' fight, any'ow"—Hanna winced—"an' we s'posed some juggins 'd found out that wot yer did in that las' fight was too bad to be true of yer, 'n' 'd come down with th' pieces to make a match between you an' Meunier. Ain't that right, Tony?"

"Not a bad guess of yours, Punch. Try again," growled Hanna.

The suggestion had touched him on the raw, had forcibly reminded him of the difference between his present status and that of three months ago, when a contest between himself and the all-conquering Meunier would have drawn half London—a difference for which Harry Rhodes was responsible. And the bitter hatred he felt for the lad who had thrown him down from the pedestal he had occupied almost overcame him. He did not—could not—see that for his sudden and overwhelming downfall he had none but himself to blame.

"Old Fizzgig says as 'ow 'e'll take Jules back 'ome again unless some cove comes forward blinkin' quick an' gives 'im a chance t' earn expenses—said so in the Fancy las' week," went on Neave chattily. "Ain't yer goin' t' 'ave a cut in, Tony, for hold Hengland's sake?"

"Cut it out!" returned Hanna crossly. "Know anything about a feller named Rhodes—Harry Rhodes, or some such name—who just come down from th' North—Yorkshire, I think—and means doin' wonders? I heard about him."

Both the others shook their heads. Encouraged, however, by sundry glasses of beer, for which Hanna paid, and the promise of half-crowns, they agreed to let him know anything they might find out concerning the new-comer.

Two hours later the Hebrew youth,

greatly excited, met Hanna near Covent Garden Market.

"That bloke you talked about," he burst out, open-eyed—"Rhodes! Well, th' Club 'ave fixed 'im up with Jules Meunier. Twenty rounds; five hundred quid purse. Fight in a fortnight's time."

"That straight?" asked Hanna suspiciously. "Who told ye?"

"Jimmy—messenger-boy at th' Club. Meunier an' his manager waited an hour for Bowman. In 'e comes, in no end of a hurry, an' Jules tells him that unless 'e gets a fight quick 'e's going home, because th' English are all afraid of 'im. Bowman gets on to the 'phone with Rhodes—Jimmy swears that was the name he heard—and back comes the answer, 'Yes,' before you could wink. It's straight—take me davy it is! Ain't I earned my half-crown?"

The Yiddisher was correct. Half an hour after Bowman's leaving he had called up Harry on the telephone. Would he fix up rightaway to meet Jules Meunier at the Club for the club purse of five hundred pounds?

Harry 'phoned back "Yes."

A Mysterious Follower.

THE gathering at the National Sporting Club for the signing of articles for a contest between Jules Meunier, champion of France, and Harry Rhodes was, so the Press representatives declared in their respective journals, one of the most satisfactory functions of the kind ever held.

Not a hitch occurred to mar the proceedings. There was no squabbling over the few pounds of weight between the two principals. The date suggested by the beaming manager satisfied both. Even over the splitting of the purse they had no difference—or, rather, their managers had not.

Two hundred and fifty pounds a side was to be staked. Godfrey was anxious to find the money for Harry, but when this suggestion had been made James Rhodes demurred.

"No, sir; that's my part," he said firmly. "I'm not a beggar. I've got a bit of money put aside, and I can't do better than use some of it for my boy's first step towards winning the championship."

And Godfrey had admitted his claim. One Pressman buttonholed Harry, remarking upon the coolness he had displayed during the negotiations.

"Here, what's the matter with you?" he asked wonderingly. "Meunier—I say nothing of his manager; he's always as full of fizz and activity as a bottle of champagne—but here's Meunier as excited and nervy and eager as though he were getting the chance of his life, while you, the novice, are as cool and collected as though you were in the habit of fixing up matches at the National once a week. What does it all mean?"

"That I'm not excitable by nature, I suppose," smiled Harry.

He could have explained the yell of delight which had burst from the French champion upon his entry into the room, and the immediate recognition that the opponent who had agreed to meet him was none other than his conqueror of two nights before. But Harry saw no necessity to explain.

He understood Meunier thoroughly. A courageous, high-spirited boxer, Meunier was burning to avenge what he doubtless considered a fluke defeat. His nervousness and excitability were due to some fear that an obstacle might arise



"This is a perfectly square match between Meunier and you? It's not a put-up job—eh?" Harry's face went scarlet; his fists involuntarily clenched, and the Pressman saw that he had gone too far. (See this page.)

to hinder the accomplishment of his eager desire for the chance of proving, to himself as well as to others, that that defeat was a fluke—no true comparison of respective merits.

To have explained his own calmness and readiness to agree to whatever proposals were made by telling the actual truth, which was that he had every confidence of winning—believing that that which he had done once he could do again—would have appeared too greatly like vain boastfulness for it to commend itself to Harry.

"You're so self-possessed one would suppose that you were carrying around in your pocket a written guarantee of victory," continued the mystified journalist. "You do expect to win?" he said, with sudden sharpness.

"Why, certainly! I shouldn't be making the match if I didn't," replied Harry.

"Oh, they all say that!" the man grumbled.

"And I happen to mean it."

"Yet it's your first appearance in London. They grow confidence, evidently, in the part of the world you come from."

"Well, in Yorkshire they have a fairly strong belief in themselves," agreed Harry good-humouredly. "I wasn't born there, but I've lived there all my life."

"I suppose you've already heard of Meunier?" pursued the journalist. "You know the record and the reputation he has?"

"They don't frighten me."

"And yet—Oh, dash it! You'll excuse me! I'm only seeking after the truth, and that commodity doesn't strike me entirely as lying on the surface in this matter. But—but this is a perfectly square match between Meunier and you? It's not a put-up job—eh?"

Harry's face went scarlet. His fists involuntarily clenched, and the Pressman saw he had gone too far. He began to stammer apologies.

"Your question, sir, is one that you haven't hesitated to put because you know that where we are I can't answer it as it deserves," Harry said. "You have asked me, in other words, whether I am not a thief. You are not to be complimented on your methods in trying to get at the truth. Do you really suppose that, if this were a put-up job, I should admit the truth to you, or anybody else?"

"No, Mr. Rhodes; I suppose not."

"Then don't pretend to be a fool!"

The last item settled, Meunier suddenly jumped to his feet, ran around the table, and grasped Harry's hand, shaking it violently.

"Until after the fortnight, monsieur," he cried excitedly, "and then—then we shall see who is the best man!"

"I hope so," answered Harry, with a warm return to the hand-grip. "The best man to win, and no favour, either!"

He genuinely liked the Frenchman.

"If only old Bowman knew!" exclaimed Godfrey more than once as he hurried Harry and his father back to Highgate.

"Of our contest at the hall?" said Harry. "He can't be told, I know; but if he were aware of it, do you think it would make any difference?"

"Only to make him still more pleased," asserted James Rhodes. "If that other scrap hadn't happened, Mr. Godfrey, the Frenchman wouldn't be so keen as he is now."

"Maybe you're right, Rhodes."

"I am right, Mr. Godfrey. And I'll wager this, sir—this second fight's going to be a better one even than the first was. Meunier'll be on his mettle. I only wish I could be sure Harry's shoulder'll be well again in the time."

"I'd forgotten that!" And Godfrey's face clouded. "What'll you do, Harry, if your arm fails you?"

"Do the best I can with the other," laughed Harry.

"That's the old-time spirit, sir!" cried James Rhodes delightedly. "Men fought in the old P.R. with only

one good arm—ay, and won, sometimes!"

"Still, I hope it won't come to that. Meunier's not the sort of chap with whom even Harry can afford to give anything away."

"Harry'll do, sir. Don't you worry," said his father.

But James Rhodes might have felt and spoken a shade less confidently had

he been aware of the identity of the driver of a black limousine that, unobtrusively and unnoticed, had been following the big khaki car from the moment it had turned northward away from the Strand. He had a muffler about the lower part of his face, and the peak of his cap was drawn low down over his brows.

And not only James Rhodes, but those who were with him, would have

been more than interested could some magician have made them acquainted with the aspirations and intentions residing within the occupant of the black car, a bespectacled man, with a sallow face and a bald forehead, who looked like a schoolmaster.

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