

THE WAYWARDNESS OF WIBLEY!

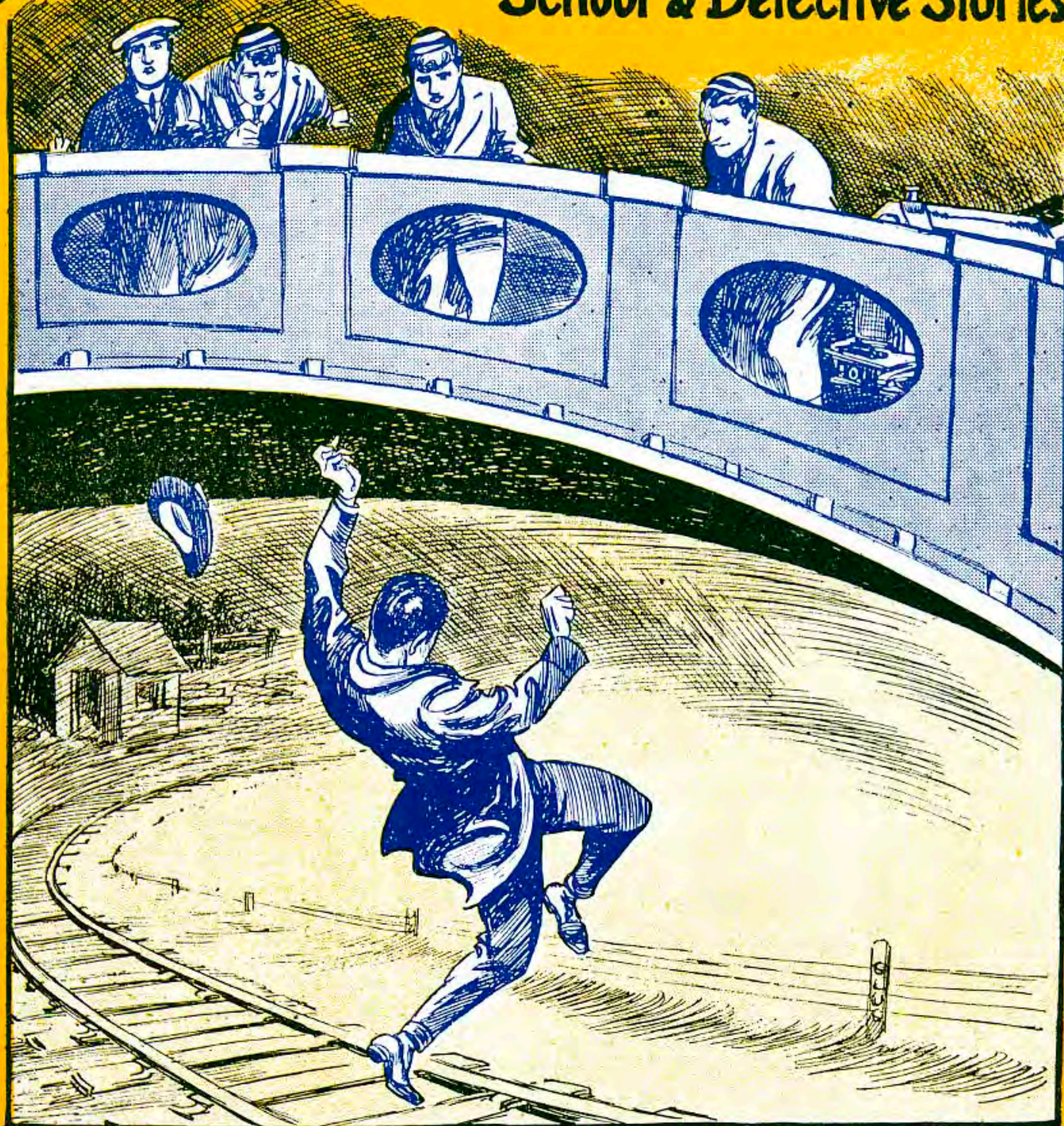
This week's grand stage and school story of Harry Wharton & Co.

No. 832. Vol. XXV.

Week ending January 19th, 1924.

The Magnet 2^d Library of School & Detective Stories.

EVERY
MONDAY.

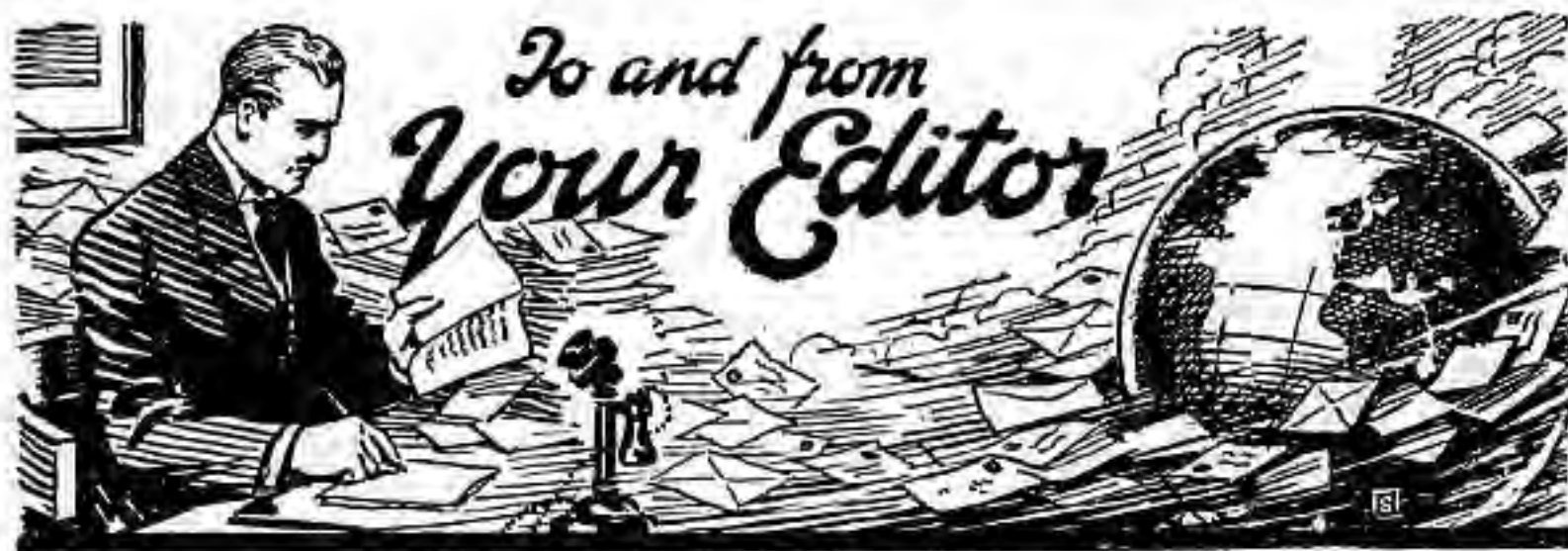


A DESPERATE LEAP TO SAFETY!

Harry Wharton & Co. lose their quarry at the moment when his capture seems certain. (A sensational incident from this week's long complete story of Greyfriars.)

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"THE GREYFRIARS FLOOD!"

NEXT week's yarn is simply terrific. It depicts a state of things at the old school such as never could have been dreamed of by anyone. The plain fact is: Greyfriars is in liquidation! But, let there be no mistake, the famous establishment is not in low water. The water is deep—very deep—and the story consequently touches a proportionately high-water mark. As everybody will admit, the MAGNET never prints a dry story, and next week it remains true to its policy. It is not for me, in a few anticipatory lines, to sketch the plot. Of course this swims along. We see Greyfriars under thoroughly novel conditions, with some of the fellows taking the alarming state of things as a joke, and showing that they are true aquatic sportsmen.

UNDER WATER!

The explanation for the strange happening is simple. Thanks to a hasty thaw after a record snowstorm, Greyfriars becomes flooded out. Lord Mauleverer maintains his serenity. He is perfectly satisfied so long as he is made snug and comfortable in a big bath-tub, which is poled about by hard-working juniors. Bunter takes less kindly to the discomforts of the flood. He proves somewhat heavy cargo for his tub, and it is to be regretted that the porpoise fails to act up to his name. What really might have been feared by some outsiders was that good old Greyfriars might have become a school of porpoises! Make sure, anyhow, of next week's issue of the MAGNET. You will laugh over the shifts to which the victims are driven by being submerged. The Remove fellows do try and make the best of it, and

they were always excellent at laps; but you can have too much of a good thing!

A "FLOOD" SUPPLEMENT.

Anything more thoroughly in keeping with the long story of Greyfriars than the Supplement could not have been devised. Next Monday you will find an issue of the "Greyfriars Herald," which bobs along as merrily as a cork on the tide. We get a glimpse of the flotation at Greyfriars which makes for mirth. The great thing to do in matters of this sort is to look at what is happening from all angles. If the flood had lasted there would have been anglers as well, with good sport in the corridors fishing for tiddlers, and herrings swimming in from Pegg to disport themselves in the classrooms. Mr. Quelch has, without a doubt, made a few notes of the historic event for his History of Greyfriars, and he will most likely file a copy of the Flood Supplement as a reminder. The whole subject gets well reviewed by Harry Wharton and his subs; but, of course, Mr. Quelch will be able one of these days to touch on the period when the Greyfriars fellows were hard put to it to keep their heads above water. There is no reference here to the stony days of the Famous Five. The whole matter is too serious. Look out for Monday's number. It will damp nobody's spirits.

"A MARKED MAN!"

Another gripping instalment of our serial will appear next week. Jim Blakey and Ferrers Locke figure in a highly-dramatic situation. We hear more, too, of Tiger Sleek, that giant in inches and in intellect, though the mischief is that he puts his powerful mentality to quite wrong uses.

A TREAT IN STORE.

It is good news that I have secured a specially powerful serial to follow the one now running. Everything has to come to an end some time or another, but it is always refreshing to think that there is a special treat as a follow-on. And our next serial will be the work of Hedley Scott, an author who has made a deep study of the stage. He has selected as his theme a detective mystery of the theatre world. It is a fine yarn, as you will all declare.

"FOOTBALLERS' NAMES" COMPETITION!

Note.—All those of our readers who took part in this great picture-puzzle competition will be glad to know that the time for sending in entries was extended by three days after the closing date previously announced.

Towards the last so huge was the demand for the MAGNET that many readers were late in obtaining their copy, and to give all our friends an equal chance of entering the competition we accepted efforts up to the first post on Friday, December 21st.

We are now grappling with the adjudication, and are making every effort to give you the result at an early date.

LIFE IN THE OPEN.

This is what my correspondent, Len. R. Taylor, of Winnipeg, prefers. He tells me he has been having a grand jaunt through Manitoba. It was a grand life on the lakes and rivers—camping, shooting, fishing and swimming, and sleeping on the way. At Hill River the party ran out of provisions for a couple of weeks, and lived on fish and some stuff the Indians call coffee. They struck an Indian camp. "Talk of profiteers! Just try to argue with an Indian when he knows he has what you want!" It was altogether a wonderful experience. My correspondent says he intends to join the Canadian Mounted Police. He says the outdoor is a swell life. He has been missing the Companion Papers, but intends to get them all, for the school stories are like Nature, very alluring. I should like to hear more of those Sioux Indians whom he struck on the trail.

Your Editor.

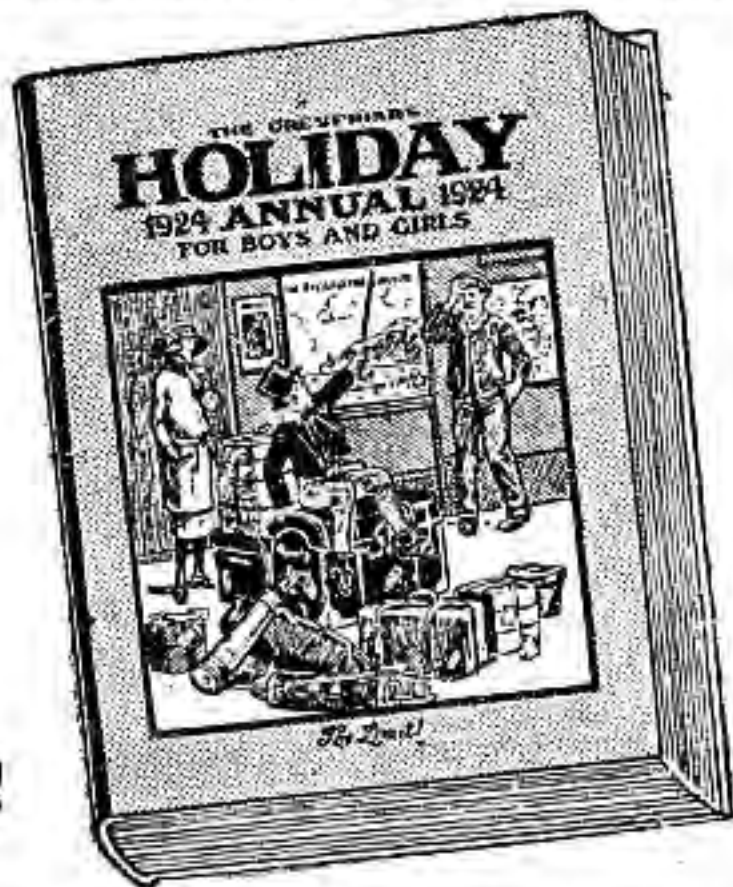
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ANSWERS

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It has long been William Wibley's ambition to "shine" upon the professional stage, and he gets his chance at last. His subsequent adventures, however, are out of all keeping with his rosy dreams, and their effect is to cure temporarily Wibley's stage mania. The stage is set, the beginners of the first act are in their places. Ring up the curtain!



The Waywardness of Wibley!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, with William Wibley in the limelight. Told by FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Left in the Lurch!

"WIB! Where's that fathead Wib?"

Harry Wharton of the Remove spoke in exasperated tones.

The Rag was crowded with Removites dressed in highly-coloured costumes. Anyone who did not know what was "in the wind," so to speak, would have received a decided shock on entering the Rag at Greyfriars that Wednesday afternoon.

Most of the juniors were dressed in picturesque pirate costume, and a fearsome and cut-throat assembly they looked! Harry Wharton himself made a splendid sea captain of the Spanish Main, whilst Bob Cherry and Tom Brown appeared to be well suited to their roles of merchants.

Practically every fellow in the Remove was there that half-holiday. Even Billy Bunter, dressed as a ship's cook, was prominent in the crowd. Even Alonzo Todd, the Duffer of Greyfriars, was there, although his features were somewhat unrecognisable under the bushy whiskers and beard that adorned them.

Harry Wharton and Wibley of the Remove had written a pirate play, called "Captain Skidd's Revenge," which, in three weeks' time, was going to be produced at the Grand Hall, in Friardale—the proceeds of the entertainment to be devoted to the funds of the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society.

This was the first dress rehearsal of the piece, and Harry Wharton, who was co-manager and producer with Wibley, had sent forth the fiat to all members of the cast to turn up in full costume at half-past two in the Rag.

All were there, and everybody was ready for the rehearsal—with one exception. And that exception happened to be the principal character in the piece, the sinister Captain Skidd himself.

William Wibley, who was taking the part of Captain Skidd, and who was the best actor and the veritable backbone of the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society, was conspicuous by his absence!

"The fathead!" exclaimed Harry Wharton crossly. "He knows that rehearsal starts at half-past two. He knows we can't rehearse without him. The blithering clump! I wonder where he is?"

"Perhaps he's got into a row with Quelchy over something," remarked Bob Cherry. "Or, maybe, he's only just hanging about, putting the finishing touches to his make-up. You know how particular Wib always is to have his make-up just so."

"Oh, piffle!" snapped Harry Wharton. "Wib's a silly ass to keep us waiting! It's a long piece, and rehearsals always take twice as long as the ordinary straightforward run of the play. I'm going down to rake out Wibley!"

Harry Wharton strode out of the Rag, frowning, and made his way along to the Remove passage.

He halted outside the door of Study No. 6, and then his look of exasperation changed to one of astonishment. Voices were coming from within the room, and one was a man's—a stranger's.

Harry Wharton tapped at the door. The conversation inside broke off, and then Wibley's voice sounded.

"Run away, whoever you are! I'm busy!"

Harry Wharton gasped. "My hat!" he exclaimed. "I—I—Why, the cheeky ass! Wib! I say, Wibley!"

Rap, rap, rap! Wharton beat his knuckles sharply on the door.

"Hallo! Is that you, Wharton?" called Wibley from within. "Run away, there's a good chap!"

"Run away!" Harry Wharton could hardly believe his ears. "Look here, Wib, you're wanted to—"

"Don't bother! Call another time!"

"Another time! Wibley, you awful ass, have you forgotten the rehearsal?" demanded Wharton sulphurously through the keyhole.

He heard Wibley give a gasp. "Oh, crumbs! I had forgotten that! You—you'd better come in, Wharton."

Harry Wharton opened the door and walked into Study No. 6.

He stopped almost immediately and gave a violent cough. The air was thick with tobacco-smoke, which got up into the Remove captain's nostrils, and down his throat, and into his eyes, causing a nasty, irritating sensation in each of those organs.

Blinking through the blue haze, he saw William Wibley, still dressed in his ordinary Etons, standing by the window. And, reclining in an ungraceful but evidently comfortable attitude in the armchair, was a big seedy-looking man with long hair, heavy features, and bleary eyes, dressed in a shabby fur coat, striped trousers, a pair of old boots and spats.

This gentleman held a fat, vile-smelling cigar between his stubby fingers, and he was puffing away prodigiously at it.

"Groooooogh! Ah-ti-shoo!" said Harry Wharton, applying his handkerchief to his nose.

"Close the door behind you, Wharton!" said Wibley, rather hastily. "If Loder or any of the masters come along and smell the smoke, there'll be the dickens of a shindy. Thanks! Now I'll introduce you to my friend, Mr. Cornelius Mummer."

The seedy-looking gentleman arose from the armchair and, thrusting his cigar into a corner of his mouth, he extended a fat and grubby hand towards the captain of the Remove.

"Mr. Cornelius Mummer—Harry Wharton!" said Wibley.

"Groooooogh! Pleased to—yerroogh!—meet you, Mr. Mummer!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Pray don't mention the honour, my young friend!" said the other, in lofty tones, waving his disengaged hand with a sweeping and dramatic gesture. "You know who I am, of course! You have no doubt heard of Cornelius Mummer, the pre-eminent tragedian of his time! But"—here the seedy face of Mr. Mummer assumed a sorrowful expression, and a tear dropped from his bleary eye—"but perhaps the days when the great Mummer dominated the Thespian halls of the land were before your time."

"Gaze on me, my young friend! Here

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you see but the ruined roof and branch of the once transcendent Mummer, the spoilt child of fortune, the whilom idol of the play-going public! Mummer was once a Triton among the minnows, a dominant figure among the exponents of the histrionic art! Time was when the name of Mummer was a name to conjure with, when Mummer was sought after by the managers, and the public clamoured for him from the housetops. Nobility regarded it an honour for Mummer to visit their ancestral halls, the beauty of the land worshipped humbly at the shrine of Mummer!

"But look at Mummer now! Gaze on the fitful spark that now remains of the once dazzling brilliance of a theatrical star, and weep with me at the pernicious vagaries of Fate! Misfortune has dogged the footsteps of Mummer; he has rolled the stone of Sisyphus! Sic transit gloria mundi! Thus have the mighty fallen!"

Mr. Cornelius Mummer gave a sigh, smote his breast, and sat down, his bleary eyes raised piously to the ceiling.

Harry Wharton looked from Mr. Cornelius Mummer to Wibley, and then back again at Mr. Mummer.

Wib's visitor was a typical specimen of an actor who had seen better days—and seen the last of them. Like most gentlemen of his profession, he was most loquacious concerning himself, and greatly addicted to "swank." Mr. Cornelius Mummer was a pathetic and amusing figure, and Harry Wharton had to grin, in spite of himself.

"I'm sorry to hear of your—er—misfortune, Mr. Mummer," he said.

"Call me Cornie!" said Mr. Mummer. "The name of Mummer has lost its old significance, but I am known affectionately to all my friends as Cornie. To you, my young friend, I raise the imaginary glass of sparkling wine in greeting—the imaginary glass!"

Here Mr. Mummer gave a sigh of real regret.

"Cornie is an old acquaintance of mine, Wharton," said Wibley. "He is an actor, you know. His visit this afternoon is an unexpected pleasure. He came to—er—discuss business matters with me."

"What about the rehearsal?" demanded Harry Wharton warmly. "We're all waiting for you, Wib. We ought to have started ten minutes ago, and—"

"I'm afraid you'll have to carry on without me this afternoon," said Wibley. "I shall be otherwise engaged."

"Otherwise engaged!" ejaculated Wharton. "Why, you—you— Look here, Wib, you can't leave us in the lurch like this! Yours is the principal part, and you've got to come to rehearsal!"

Wibley shook his head.

"Imposs!" he said decisively. "Quite imposs! Cornie and I have business to attend to—important business. I'm sorry, Wharton, but it can't be helped."

Harry Wharton gazed at Wibley in mingled indignation and dismay.

It was quite true that without Wibley in the cast the rehearsal would fall flat. William Wibley of the Remove always took the most important parts in the Dramatic Society plays, because he was the best actor in the school. Wib was a born actor, and whatever his other faults, nobody denied that Wib could act.

"Look here, Wib, your business with Mr. Mummer—"

"Cornie!" said that worthy magnanimously.

"Ahem! Can't your business with Cornie wait till after the rehearsal?" demanded Wharton.

"No, I'm afraid it can't!" said

Wibley. "It's most important business. As a matter of fact, Cornie and I are just going out."

"My hat!" exclaimed Wharton.

Cornie arose from the armchair and took up a battered felt hat. Wibley reached for his cap.

"Wib, you—you bounder!" gasped the Remove captain. "You've got to come to rehearsal! We'll make you!"

"Oh, bosh!" retorted Wib. "Come on, Cornie; I'm ready!"

"Lead on, McDuff!" said Cornie dramatically.

Wibley led the way from the study, and Cornie followed, walking rather unsteadily. As he passed Harry Wharton a cheery whiff of rum reached the Remove captain's nostrils. The Fallen Star of the theatrical firmament was evidently somewhat under the influence of potent liquor.

Harry Wharton's lip curled contemptuously, and he hurried along the Remove passage and made his way back to the Rag.

The Removites were waiting there impatiently.

"Where's Wib?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"He's gone out," said Harry.

"What!" yelled a score of amazed voices.

"Wib's gone out with a seedy, squiffy bounder called Mummer—a disreputable old actor!" said Harry Wharton. "Wib says they've got business to attend to. Look here, you chaps, we're not going to let Wib leave us in the lurch like this for the sake of a beery old humbug like Mummer. We'll go and fetch him here and make him rehearse. They can't have gone farther than the quad yet."

"Right-ho, Harry!"

"We'll yankfully grab the ludicrous Wib, and teach him the errorfulness of his ways!" said Hurree Singh, in his weird English.

The Removites, with the Famous Five at their head, dashed from the Rag. A horde of pirates, seamen, and slaves poured down the stairs and out into the quadrangle.

Wibley and Cornie were walking across the quadrangle to the gates of Greyfriars, the latter holding Wib affectionately by the arm in order to steady his faltering footsteps.

"Come on!" said Bob Cherry. "There they are! Grab Wib and drag him back!"

Wibley and his companion turned on hearing hurried footsteps in their rear.

"Oh, jenny!" gasped Wib. "The rotters are after us!"

The bleary eyes of Cornie opened wide on seeing those pirates and seamen.

"Heigho!" roared the Fallen Star, striking a dramatic attitude. "What do my aged eyes behold? Is it the avengers on our track? Avaunt, there, villains! By my halidom, thou shalt not reach yon slender youth except across my dead body! By the pink-toed prophet, I—Yarooogh! Yah! Help! O-o-o-o-p!"

Cornie went staggering back as a number of ferocious-looking pirates assaulted him. He waved his arms wildly in the air, and then his legs gave way beneath him, and the great Mummer fell to earth with a roar.

"Grab Wib!" panted Harry Wharton. "Don't let him go! I— Oh! Wow!"

Wibley struck out, and planted a terrific right-hander on Wharton's nose. The Remove captain fell back with a yell.

Wib, more by luck than good management, got clear of his Form-fellows and ran to the gates, leaving the luckless Cornie lying recumbent on the ground, moaning and declaiming the Removites in thrilling tones.

"After him!" shrieked Frank Nugent. "He's getting away!"

Wibley did not wait to go to Cornie's aid, realising that if he did so he would undoubtedly be caught. So he sprinted for the gates and disappeared through them, dashing up the Friardale Lane for all he was worth.

He disappeared round the bend, and Harry Wharton & Co. halted in the gateway.

"He's gone—the bounder!" gasped Squiff.

"Yes, and we dare not follow—dressed up in these things!" said Bob Cherry wrathfully. "People in the lane would laugh at us. We shall have to let Wib go now. But wait till the blighter comes back! We'll rag him bald-headed!"

They returned to where Cornie was struggling to his feet.

The Fallen Star rammed his battered trilby on his straggly locks, and looked round ferociously.

"Scorpions!" he hissed. "Villains and scorpions! Know you that you have assaulted Mummer—the great Mummer? You shall rue the day! Gr-o-o-gh! Yow! I am going, rascals—I say I am going! Ow-wow! I shake the dust of this place from my feet for ever! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"You'd better shake some of the dust from your coat and trousers first, old chap! But must you go, Mr. Mummer? Don't let us part like this, Bill!"

"Enough!" thundered Cornie, waving his arms dramatically. "I spurn your honeyed words! I am going! Wow-wow! I am going!"

Mr. Mummer went, walking very unsteadily, and looking rather the worse for wear.

The Removites roared with laughter as the Fallen Star staggered through the gateway and disappeared. Then they turned and went back to the Rag.

The rehearsal of "Captain Skidd's Revenge" commenced without Wibley, and Harry Wharton & Co. vowed vengeance swift and sudden on Wibley when they caught him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Very Strange Behaviour!

WIBLEY returned to Greyfriars after tea, when the dark shadows of evening had already fallen. He looked tired, but very cheerful.

Bolsover major met him in the Hall, and gave him a grim look.

"So you've returned, you blighter!" growled Bolsover. "After mucking up our rehearsal! Where have you been?"

"There and back again!" replied Wib blandly.

Bolsover glared.

"None of your cheek, young Wibley!" he said. "I asked you where you've been?"

"Well, there's no law against asking," grinned Wibley. "You can ask me again, if you like."

Bolsover clenched his fists. Then he beckoned to Trevor and Ogilvy, who were standing by the letter-rack.

"Nab this rotter now he's come back," he said. "We'll take him up to the Common Room and make him give an account of himself."

"What-ho!" said the others readily.

They gathered round Wibley, and the amateur actor of the Remove gave an alarmed gasp.

"Let me go, you rotters! I—Yah! Yaro-o-o-gh! Hands off! Ow-wow!"

Wib was grasped in many hands, and whirled up the stairs, struggling.

Harry Wharton & Co. and most of the

Remove were in the Common Room when Bolsover, Trevor, and Ogilvy dragged Wibley in.

Immediately a howl arose.

"There he is!"

"Wib's back!"

"Rag him!"

"Spificate the blighter!"

Harry Wharton & Co. ran over and relieved Bolsover & Co. of their prisoner.

Bump!

Wibley smote the floor with a hard concussion.

"Now, Wib, you scallywag, you've got to tell us where you've been to with that humbug this afternoon!" said Harry Wharton sharply. "What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing!" roared Wib. "Lemme gerup! Yow! O-o-o-o-p!"

"Bump him!" exclaimed Wharton. "We'll knock the information out of him!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

The form of William Wibley rose and fell, and he yelled fiendishly every time he smote the cold, hard, unsympathetic floor.

"Y-o-o-p! Yah! W-o-o-gh!"

"Where have you been?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Wow-wow! Mind your own business! Yar-o-o-o-gh!"

Bump! Bump!

"Tell us what you've been up to!"

"Rats! Yah! Wow! Y-o-o-o-p!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

The door opened while the bumping operation was in progress, and Wingate of the Sixth looked in grimly.

"Stop this commotion at once, you little sweeps!" he rapped. "Do you hear?"

The Removites allowed Wibley to drop with a bump to the floor. There he lay, moaning dismally.

"Enough of this horseplay!" said the captain of Greyfriars sternly. "It's time you kids were in your studies doing prep. Cut off, now, all of you, else there'll be trouble!"

"Yes, Wingate!"

The Removites dispersed meekly and went along to their studies for prep.

Wibley limped into Study No. 6, and sat dolefully in the armchair.

Rake, Morgan, and Micky Desmond, his study-mates, looked grimly at him when they came in. They did not say anything, but took out their books, and went on with their preparation.

Wibley sat sullenly in the armchair for a little while gasping, and then he pulled a large and somewhat ragged wad of typewritten sheets of paper from his pocket, and commenced to study them.

Rake glanced at him curiously.

"Aren't you going to get on with your prep, Wib?" he asked.

No reply.

"Wib!" exclaimed Rake, raising his voice. "What about your prep?"

"Eh? Prep?" asked Wibley, looking up with a start. "Oh, blow prep!"

"But you've got to do your prep!" said Morgan. "Quelch will go for you in the morning, whatever!"

"Bother Quelch!" snapped Wibley, not deigning to look up from the papers he was reading.

"Better get on with your prep and chuck reading, old chap!" said Rake good-humouredly.

Wibley did not even seem to hear.

He knitted his brows over the typewritten pages, and appeared to be deeply absorbed in them.

Half an hour passed, and Rake looked round again.

Wib was still engrossed in studying the papers.

"Wib! I say, Wib! What about prep?" demanded Rake.



"Mr. Cornelius Mummer—Harry Wharton!" said Wibley. The seedy-looking gentleman, a cheap cigar in his mouth, extended a fat and grubby hand towards the captain of the Remove. "Pleased to—groough—meet you," gasped Wharton, who was in pirate costume. "Pray don't mention the honour, my young friend," said Mummer in lofty tones. (See Chapter 1.)

"Oh, don't bother!" said Wibley.

"Look here, Quelch—"

"Shurrup!" exclaimed Wibley, beginning to get cross. "How can a chap concentrate when a silly cuckoo keeps on gassing?"

"Faith, an' it'll be Quelch who will concentrate on you, Wibley, in the mornin', if you don't do your prep!" said Micky Desmond.

"Rats!"

Wib's study-mates exchanged glances.

"What are you so deeply interested in, anyway?" inquired Rake.

"Nothing much!"

"Why don't you chuck it and get on with your prep? You know what Quelch is on Thursday mornings; he expects us to have done an extra swot because of the half-holiday, and—"

"Will you ring off?" howled Wibley wrathfully. "Can't you hold your row about prep? Bother prep! I'm not going to do any prep! I've got this to study, and—ahem!—I'm not doing my prep, anyway!"

"Silly ass!" said Richard Rake. "You must be off your rocker, Wib, to carry on like this. You'll be sorry that you didn't listen to our advice when Quelch gets on your track in the morning. He—"

"Oh, hang you, and hang prep, and hang Quelch!" exclaimed Wibley, jumping up from the armchair in great wrath. "You can't leave a fellow alone when he wants to be quiet, can you? You silly, burbling cuckoos get on my nerves! I'm

fed up! If I can't get peace and quiet here, I'll find it elsewhere!"

"Look here, Wib!" exclaimed Rake, as Wibley tucked the bundle of papers under his arm and strode for the door. "Hold on a minute, I—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Wibley left the study and slammed the door behind him.

He left his study-mates blinking at each other in astonishment, wondering what was the matter with Wibley.

Wibley, looking very cross and exasperated, went along to the Remove Form-room. The room was deserted, so he sat down at a desk in front and was soon deeply absorbed once more in that wad of typewritten sheets.

Anyone looking into the Form-room and seeing Wibley sitting there would very likely have doubted that youth's sanity, for he muttered to himself as he pored over the pages, and several times made wild gesticulations with his hands.

And the Remove saw no more of William Wibley until bedtime.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Wibley Cuts Loose!

MR. QUELCH wore a grim look next morning. The weather was damp and dismal, and Mr. Quelch suffered from rheumatism, which malady was always worse in damp weather. As Squiff remarked, over the breakfast-table that morning, Mr. Quelch had a bad attack

of the "screws," and the Remove would be well advised to "look out for squalls."

Morning lessons commenced, and it was not long before Mr. Quelch discovered that William Wibley was not paying attention. Indeed, Wib was looking quite vacantly before him, with an air of abstraction, and he did not hear Mr. Quelch's first summons to him.

"Wibley!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "You are day-dreaming, boy! Wake up, do you hear?"

"Oh! Er—er—did you speak, sir?" said Wibley, giving a sudden start.

The Remove tittered, and thunder-clouds settled on the brow of Mr. Horace Quelch.

"Yes, Wibley, I did speak!" he rapped. "You are inattentive! Stand up, boy, and continue to construe from the point where Mauleverer left off!"

Wibley stood up and looked blankly at his book.

"Go on, Wibley!" said Mr. Quelch, between his teeth.

"Ahem! Where did Mauleverer leave off, sir?" asked Wibley, in dismay.

"Wibley! You have not been paying attention to the lesson!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "Take five hundred lines!"

"Oh!—Ye-es, sir!" gasped Wibley.

"Now proceed from paragraph four on page forty-nine!" rapped the Remove master.

Wibley made a heroic effort to construe, but it was a hopeless failure. Mr. Quelch's eyes glittered at him, and the Remove began to tremble for Wib's safety.

"Wibley, did you do any preparation last night?" demanded Mr. Quelch.

"N-no, sir!" gasped Wibley.

"Why not, Wibley, pray?"

"I—I had other matters to attend to, sir!" stammered Wib.

The Remove looked appalled. Mr. Quelch grasped the blackboard for support, otherwise he might have fallen down with amazement.

"Wibley! How dare you! What other matters more important than your school work did you have to attend to I should be interested to know?"

"I—I was reading, sir!" gasped Wib.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Quelch harshly. "Wibley, your excuses quite fail to impress me. Kindly step out here!"

Wib put down his book and stepped to the front. Mr. Quelch selected his stoutest ashplant, and commanded the junior to hold out his hand.

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

Wibley received two cuts on each hand—and they were "stingers." He returned to his desk with his hands tucked tightly under his armpits, gasping in a pathetic manner.

"Cease those ridiculous noises, Wibley!" said Mr. Quelch in a harsh voice. "In addition to the five hundred lines I have already given you, you will be detained on Saturday afternoon next, in order to do the work you neglected yesterday!"

Wibley gave a start.

"Oh, I can't stop in on Saturday afternoon, sir!" he cried. "I've got to go out! I—"

"How dare you argue with me, Wibley!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "What have your arrangements to do with me? I order you to be detained, and I shall see that you are detained!"

"But, sir—"

"Not another word, Wibley! Skinner, kindly construe."

Wibley wriggled in his desk for the rest of the lesson, but his mind did not again wander—Mr. Quelch saw to that!

The Removites looked curiously at him

in the passage outside when the class had been dismissed.

"Silly ass!" said Bob Cherry. "Fancy talking to Quelch in such a cheeky manner, Wib! I expected him to swoop down and devour you!"

"Now, what did I tell you last night, Wib?" demanded Richard Rake warmly. "Didn't I warn you that—"

"Oh, bow-wow!" growled Wibley.

He walked away, rubbing his hands.

Wibley kept himself very much to himself during the two days that followed. He seemed to shun everybody, and several fellows reported that they had seen him sitting in quiet corners, deeply absorbed in his bundle of typewritten papers.

Saturday dawned, and Wibley seemed to rouse himself from his subdued, lethargic state into one of tense alertness and expectancy.

"No holiday for you this afternoon, Wib!" said Rake in the study that morning. "It's hard lines for you, but really it was your own fault. We're going over with Wharton and the rest to see that ripping pirate play at the Courtfield Grand Theatre—'Pirate Gold,' I think it's called."

Wibley's eyes gleamed.

"Then a party of you are going over to the Grand Theatre at Courtfield this afternoon?" he said.

"Yes, rather!" said Rake. "We've heard that it's a topping show! There's nothing like a thrilling pirate play! Besides, it will give us a few wrinkles for our own pirate play—what?"

"I suppose so," replied Wibley quietly.

The Famous Five and Vernon-Smith looked in.

"Hallo, Wib!" said Nugent. "Feeling pretty blue—what?"

"Why should I?"

"Well, you're detained this afternoon, aren't you? Hard cheese, Wib! We wanted you to see 'Pirate Gold' at the Grand Theatre, Courtfield, with us. We're all going this afternoon."

"Don't worry about me," said Wibley. "I shall be all right."

Harry Wharton gave him a quick glance.

"You'll have to stick it out in the Form-room, of course, Wib!" he said.

"Maybe I shall, maybe I sha'n't," replied Wibley enigmatically.

After lessons Mr. Quelch gave Wibley a grim reminder of his detention. And as soon as dinner was over, and the other boys of Greyfriars were free for the rest of the day, the Remove master buttonholed Wibley in the passage and marched him off to the Form-room.

"You will proceed with your Latin study," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "I will lock the door, and look in occasionally to ascertain that you are obeying my orders."

Wibley made no rejoinder.

The door closed, and the key grated in the lock, and then Mr. Quelch's footsteps died away down the passage.

Wibley jumped up. From the window he could see Harry Wharton & Co., Vernon-Smith, Squiff, Bulstrode, Rake, Ogilvy, Hazelden, and a number of other Removites making their way to the gates en route for Courtfield to see "Pirate Gold."

Wibley opened the window. Then he drew out from under his jacket a length of rope. One end of this he tied to a desk, and the other end he threw out of the window. Then he clambered out on the sill, grasped the rope, lowered himself, and commenced to climb down hand over hand.

He was nearing the ground when a yell startled him.

Looking round, he saw Gerald Loder,

the unpopular prefect of the Sixth, dashing towards him in the quadrangle.

"Stop!" shouted Loder. "You little rascal! Stop!"

But Wibley, like Baalam's ass, heeded not. He jumped off the rope and ran swiftly towards the gates.

Loder ran desperately after him, and several fellows in the quadrangle stopped to stare and marvel.

"Wibley! I command you to stop! Do you hear, you little sweep?" shouted Loder, in a royal rage.

"Rats!" retorted Wibley.

He arrived at the gates just as Gosling came rushing out to stop him. He dodged behind the porter and gave him a push that sent him staggering into a heap of gravel.

"Oooogh! My heye! 'Elp!" roared the outraged porter. "Desprit young rip! Ooow! Nice goings hon!"

"Gosling, you fool, you've let him go!" shrieked Loder.

Loder spoke truly. The runaway junior was gone!

In defiance of all rules Wibley had broken detention and bolted.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Trouble Ahead!

"HERE comes the orchestra!" said Bob Cherry.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Nugent.

The Grand Theatre at Courtfield was crowded that afternoon. Saturday afternoon matinees were always popular, but on this occasion the "House full" boards had had to be put up outside. The reason for this was the strong popularity of the piece that was being presented—to wit, "Pirate Gold," a thrilling drama of the Spanish Main.

The Greyfriars Remove were there almost to a man—or, rather, a boy. They occupied most of the front seats in the circle. Down below, in the stalls, could be seen a good sprinkling of the lordly Sixth and Fifth. Temple, Dabney, & Co. of the Upper Fourth had "made a splash," as Bob Cherry put it, and taken a box. This was rather an unfortunate decision on the part of the Upper Fourth-formers, for their position in the box rendered them a fine target for numerous peashooters that the Removites produced. These latter youths whiled away the time while they were waiting for the performance to commence by potting at their rivals in the box—much to the amusement of the rest of the audience in the Grand Theatre, and the great confusion of Temple, Dabney, & Co.

Dicky Nugent & Co. and a horde of fags were in the gallery, and from their lofty position "in the gods" they shouted numerous cheery remarks to the others below. They had evidently supplied themselves with nuts, for several of these comestibles found their way into the circle. Bob Cherry, indeed, caught one on his nose just as the orchestra commenced to play.

"Yow!" gasped Bob. "Hi, you cheeky kids on the top shelf, I'll give you nuts if I come up there!"

"Rats!" roared Dicky Nugent. "We'll throw you down the pit if you show yourself here! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let 'em alone, Bob!" said Frank Nugent, who was an ardent lover of music. "Listen to the orchestra! It's playing 'The Pirates of Penzance.'"

"Sounds as if it's murdering them!" grinned Johnny Bull.

The orchestra played the overture, and then the lights went down, and, amid cheers and tumultuous clapping of hands, the curtain rose.

The first act of "Pirate Gold" commenced.

The audience—and the Greyfriars boys especially—watched the thickening of the plot with bated breath. The play seemed to fairly reek of the sea. The scenery was a trifle lopsided, as Bob Cherry remarked, and the colour scheme of some of it was very lurid indeed, but none could gainsay the fact that it was most effective.

The hero of the piece was a boy who, in running away to sea from a wicked uncle, fell in with a shipload of pirates, and sailed the Spanish Main under the skull and crossbones. His was a most difficult part, and the manner in which he played it evoked loud cheers of admiration from Harry Wharton & Co.

The curtain fell at the end of the first act with the boy hero, Jim Hawkins, holding his own in the powder-hold of the pirates' ship, with a flaming torch ready to plunge into a keg of gunpowder if the cut-throat villains advanced.

"My word!" gasped Bob Cherry, when the cheers and handclapping had subsided. "What a topping play! It's a real thriller, and no mistake! And can't that kid act!"

"Rather!" said Harry Wharton heartily. "He plays his part to perfection. And he's only a boy, too—anyone can see that. Sometimes juvenile roles on the stage are played by grown-ups, but Jim Hawkins in this play is really a boy. All the same, he's a first-rate actor."

Cheers greeted the commencement of Act 2.

This was even more thrilling than Act 1. The adventures of Jim Hawkins among the pirates held the audience spellbound. Then there was a storm and a dramatic shipwreck. Here Jim Hawkins saved the heroine, who had been a captive on the pirate ship, and, after a fight with the pirates in the sea, clung to a spar with the lady he had rescued, and in the last scene they were cast upon a desert island. This proved to be the

treasure island the pirates had been seeking, and the interest of the audience was intense when the curtain dropped.

It seemed ages to them before the curtain rose again for Act 3.

In this act the pirates landed on the treasure island, having captured another ship, which had picked them up after the storm. Then events began to move swiftly and dramatically. The boy hero of the part here displayed his acting powers to their best advantage. The fight in the treasure cave, and the appearance of a "ghost" that turned out to be an old man who had been living for years alone on the island, the removal of the treasure, the escape from the cave, and the eventual blowing up of the pirate captain and his cut-throat crew, all thrilled the audience as never they had been thrilled before.

The play ended with the boy hero, the old hermit, two reformed pirates, and the heroine, sailing away with the treasure to England on the pirates' ship, and one long, lifting roar of cheering broke out when the curtain finally fell.

"Jim Hawkins" and the heroine had to appear before the curtain again and again to answer the incessant encores.

The Greyfriars juniors in the audience shouted louder than any.

They bawled "encores" again and again, and stamped their feet, and clapped noisily, to show their appreciation of the young actor's performance.

"Jolly good show!" said Harry Wharton when at last the juniors filed out of the theatre.

"What-ho!" said Squiff. "Best show I've seen for a long time! It rather puts our own pirate play into the shade, doesn't it?"

"Yes, somewhat!" agreed Harry Wharton, with a laugh. "But ours is only an amateur show, of course. And that reminds me. You remember old Davy Jorrocks in the play—the drunken second mate on the pirate ship?"

His chums nodded.

"That part was taken by Cornelius Mummer, the chap who came to Greyfriars the other day, and enticed Wib away from rehearsal."

"Great pip!"

"I noticed his name on the programme," said Vernon-Smith. "I shouldn't be surprised if Wib hadn't come down here to the theatre last Wednesday afternoon, knowing that Mummer was in the cast of 'Pirate Gold.' You know how mad Wib is on the stage."

"Yes, rather!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry suddenly. "Sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?"

His chums looked, and beheld Loder, his face as ferocious as a tiger's, bearing down on them in the High Street.

"I want you kids!" exclaimed Loder. "Where's Wibley?"

"Wibley!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "As far as I know, he's in the Form-room at the school. Mr. Quelch detained him."

"Yes, I know!" replied Loder, with a savage look. "But Wibley broke detention directly Mr. Quelch had gone, and he ran away from Greyfriars."

"Oh, jeminy!"

The Removites blinked at Loder in astonishment.

The surly prefect of the Sixth looked hard at them.

"Are you sure you don't know where he is?" he rapped. "If you little sweeps try to conceal anything from me, I'll make it hot for you afterwards. Where's Wibley?"

Bob Cherry turned out his pockets.

"Nothing doing; Loder!" he said cheerfully. "Perhaps Inky's got him secreted up his sleeve, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the other Removites.

Loder scowled blankly.

"Mind, if I find out that you have been



"Heigho!" roared Mr. Mummer, as the Removites surged about him. "What do my aged eyes behold? Is it the avengers upon us? Avaunt there, ye villains!" "Grab Wibley!" gasped Wharton. "Don't let him go! I—oh! Wow!" Wibley struck out and planted a terrific right-hander on Wharton's nose. (See Chapter 1.)

implicated with him in breaking detention, I'll give you something!" he hissed.

"Good-bye, Loder!"

Loder stamped away.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances.

"So Wib broke detention!" exclaimed Nugent. "The silly fathead! Quelch will eat him alive when he gets back!"

"I had an idea, somehow, that it was in Wib's mind to break away," said Harry Wharton quietly. "I wonder where he went to?"

"Perhaps he came to the theatre, to see his pal—what's his name—Mummer," said Johnny Bull in his blunt, matter-of-fact way.

Harry Wharton started.

"Why, yes. Perhaps you're right, Johnny. Let's go round to the stage-door and ask for Mummer. If Wib's there, we can warn him that Loder is after his blood. Come on!"

They retraced their footsteps and went to the Grand Theatre.

Arriving at the stage-door, they were just in time to see Mr. Cornelius Mummer roll forth and stagger down the steps. He was followed next minute by a boy in Etons. It was William Wibley of the Remove.

He gave a start on seeing Harry Wharton & Co.

"Wib!" exclaimed Wharton. "You boulder! So we've found you!"

Wibley looked uneasily from one to the other.

"You—you've found me!" he muttered. "What do you mean—that you've been spying?"

"Spying!" exclaimed Wharton. "You're talking out of the back of your hat, Wib! We guessed you'd be here with Mummer."

"Cornie is ever a haven of refuge to his friends in distress," said Mr. Mummer, with a slight hiccup and a wobble. "They all look to Cornie for advice. The highest in the land have come to Cornie Mummer, the great tragedian, in those days—"

"Look here, Wib, you must have been off your rocker to have bunked from the Form-room!" broke in Harry Wharton. "Loder's in Courtfield looking for you. He's in a raving rage. And as for Quelch—"

"Blow Quelch!" said Wib, clenching his fists. "I don't care for Quelch, or Loder either. I don't care for anybody! Why should I?"

"Ah, why should he?" chuckled Cornie, with a wag of his head. "Why should a coming scion of the Thespian halls be ground down by the rasping regulations of petty pedagogues? I ask you. Behold my young friend Wibley! Look not on me, for my days are run. Cornie has tasted of the sweets of popularity, now he sips the cup of bitterness and—"

"Oh, ring off, Cornie!" said Wibley, with a quick look at Harry Wharton & Co. "I'm going back to Greyfriars now, to face the music. Don't bother about me, Cornie—you understand?"

Cornie gave Wib an artful glance and deposited his right forefinger on the side of his somewhat rubicund nose.

"Yes, my young friend, I understand," he said. "Cornie will not fail you. And now I will away. The Duke of Cornhampton awaits me!"

With an affectionate wave of the hand to the Removites, Mr. Cornelius Mummer walked unsteadily away.

And, as they turned the corner soon afterwards, and made their way along towards the railway station with Wibley, they saw the seedy form of Cornie disappear within the swing-doors of a

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public-house on the opposite side of the road, and Bob Cherry pointed out with a chuckle that the name of that public-house was the Duke of Cornhampton.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Wibley's Resolve!

"COME in!"

Mr. Quelch's grim voice answered Wibley's tap on the door.

Wibley entered the dread presence of the Remove Form master.

Mr. Quelch's eyes glinted at him like points of steel.

"So, Wibley, you have returned!" he exclaimed harshly, rising from his chair.

"Yes, sir," Wibley spoke in a calm, collected voice. "I came straight up to you, sir, to—to face the music."

Mr. Quelch gave him a peculiar look.

"Where have you been, Wibley?"

"I—I went to Courtfield, to see a friend, sir," replied Wib.

Mr. Quelch's brows contracted, and he reached for his cane.

"Wibley, I do not think you quite realise the enormity of the offence you have committed," he said. "I will make an attempt to impress it upon you. Your conduct merits a flogging, but I will administer a severe caning and mete out another form of punishment that will provide you with ample material for reflection. Hold out your hand."

Wibley did so, and Mr. Quelch gave him six strokes of the ashplant, laid on with all the force that he could muster.

The Removite was gasping with pain by the time Mr. Quelch laid down the cane.

"There!" exclaimed the master. "And now, Wibley, you will please to bear in mind that you are detained in Greyfriars for two weeks. I will issue instructions to Gosling and the prefects that you are not allowed to pass out of the school gates until to-day fortnight. On each half-holiday during the term of your detention, moreover, you will be locked in the Form-room under my personal supervision. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Wibley, between his teeth. "I understand."

"Then go!"

Wibley left the study.

Harry Wharton & Co. and a crowd of Removites met him at the end of the passage. All were sympathetic.

"Hard cheese, old chap!" said Bob Cherry. "Quelch's getting quite an athlete with the stick in his old age, isn't he? But it was really your own fault for acting the giddy goat, you know!"

"Oh, rats!" muttered Wibley.

"Leave me alone!"

He walked away, but not to his study.

Wibley went up to the Remove dormitory. He remained there, sitting on his bed, holding his smarting hands, and thinking deeply, until it was quite dark, and he shivered with the cold. Then he stood up, lit a candle, and commenced to sort out his things.

He went down later to his study. The room was dark and empty, and the whole Remove passage was silent.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the Rag, rehearsing their pirate play. They had not asked Wibley to join in, knowing that after the caning he had received from Mr. Quelch he would not be feeling up to acting.

Wibley lit the gas and busied himself in turning out certain of his belongings. His face was grimly set, and his eyes glittered with the fire of resolution.

"Why should I stay here and rot, and

be bullied, and mug rotten lessons?" he muttered fiercely to himself. "What is life at school to a fellow like myself? Up at seven, breakfast at eight, lessons till twelve, dinner, more lessons, tea, prep, and bed at nine-thirty! Same old grind, year in and year out. I'm fed up with it! I'm out for something better and bigger! And now I've got the chance, I'm going to take it. I'm dashed if I'll submit to rotten rules and regulations any longer!"

Wibley took his bag upstairs again, and hid it under his bed.

Then he retired to his study and waited for his study-mates.

They came in just before bedtime, and they all went up to the Remove dormitory together.

Wingate saw lights out, but for some time afterwards the Removites lay awake, discussing their play and the play they had seen at the Grand Theatre, Courtfield, that afternoon.

Wibley lay in bed and listened with gleaming eyes to the conversation.

One by one the Removites dropped off to sleep, until at length Wibley was the only one awake.

"You fellows asleep?" he asked, sitting up in bed.

No sound disturbed the night silence, except the stentorian snoring of Billy Bunter.

Wibley jumped out of bed, dressed himself, and took his bag from under the bed. He tied his boots together by the laces and swung them round his neck. Then, creeping on tip-toe in his socks, he left the dormitory and closed the door quietly behind him.

Eleven o'clock boomed from the clock-tower as he clambered out of the lower box-room window and, having put on his boots, walked quietly in the night shadows across the darkened quadrangle.

Only a few lights gleamed at the windows of Greyfriars. All the boys, and most of the masters, had retired for the night.

Wibley made his way to the old oak standing by the school wall near the cloisters. This tree was always used by juniors in breaking bounds. He gave a last look back at the old school before climbing the tree. There was a little of regret, and a little of bitterness, in Wibley's look.

He flung his bag over the wall and heard the thud as it dropped into the grass on the other side. Then he climbed the tree, swung himself on to the wall and jumped down into the Friardale Lane the other side.

"Free!" he muttered, picking up his bag. "Free at last! They won't get me back! I'm going out to make a living and see life. Why shouldn't I? I've got the ability and the nerve, and that's all a fellow wants."

He ran up the Friardale Lane, keeping well in the shadows. P.-c Tozer was standing by the old stile, and Wibley had to make a detour across the field in order to avoid him.

A quarter-past eleven struck in the distance.

"Cornie will be waiting up for me, so I'd better hurry," murmured the runaway junior. "I—I suppose I shall have to dig in with him to-night; but still, I don't mind that. I shall have diggings of my own to-morrow."

The junior hurried his footsteps and walked in the direction of Courtfield. He did not meet a soul on the way, and arrived at Courtfield, feeling tired but quite cheerful. There he consulted a rather grubby piece of paper which he drew from his pocket. It was an address that Mr. Cornelius Mummer had given him.

He found his way at last to Market

Street and knocked at the door of No. 12a. This was a dirty, tumbledown little house. After a short wait he heard a shuffling of footsteps, the chain on the door rattled, and at length the door opened. In the fitful light of a bare gas burner Wibley saw a lean, slatternly woman, who glared at him as though she would have liked to eat him.

"Ho, and who do you want?" she demanded.

"Is Mr. Mummer at home, ma'am?" asked the runaway Removite, raising his hat. "He was expecting me, I think."

"Ho, yes! Expecting visitors at this time o' night, to be sure!" exclaimed the slatternly woman, with a prolonged sniff. "Wonder wot sort of a place 'e thinks mine is—not a Rowton 'Ouse establishment, I 'opes. But, thank goodness, the old scoundrel goes to-morrow. Let me tell you this much, young sir, Mummer is a rascal—a beery, inhuman rascal! I wouldn't ave 'im in my place again for anythink!"

The good lady said this in a loud voice for the benefit of a person who had appeared on the landing above. This person was Cornelius Mummer.

"Come right in and up the stairs, my young friend!" said Cornie, all the pomp and bombast gone from his voice. "First door on the right!"

Wibley entered and walked upstairs. Mr. Mummer admitted him into his room, closed the door, and raised his hands and his eyes towards the cracked ceiling with a look of sorrow.

"That woman, my boy, is no woman—she's a Gorgon!" he said. "One of the species of Lucrezia Borgia, my boy! Such is the lot of a fallen star who has to submit to the tyrannies of landladies. We actors on tour meet 'em—all sorts of landladies. Most of 'em demand payment on the nail, with callous disregard to whatever financial circumstances one happens to be in. To such straits has Mummer fallen, that he has to seek humble lodging such as this, when once he dwelt in marble halls—marble halls, my boy!"

Wibley looked round him.

The room was dirty and very humbly furnished. On the table lay the remains of Mr. Mummer's supper which had consisted of those greasy commodities known as fish and chips. Several empty bottles littered the room.

"Welcome to my humble home, such as it is!" said Cornie. "All my hospitality is yours. Sit down."

There was one rickety chair in the room, and Wibley sat down on that. Cornie sat on the edge of the bed, lit an evil-smelling pipe, and regarded the Greyfriars juniors through the smoke.

"Then you have kept your word! You have sloped!" he said expressively. "Like a bird you have found your freedom! You have thrown off the shackles of bondage. The wide world is open to you, my young friend. To-morrow you join the company of 'Pirate Gold' on tour."

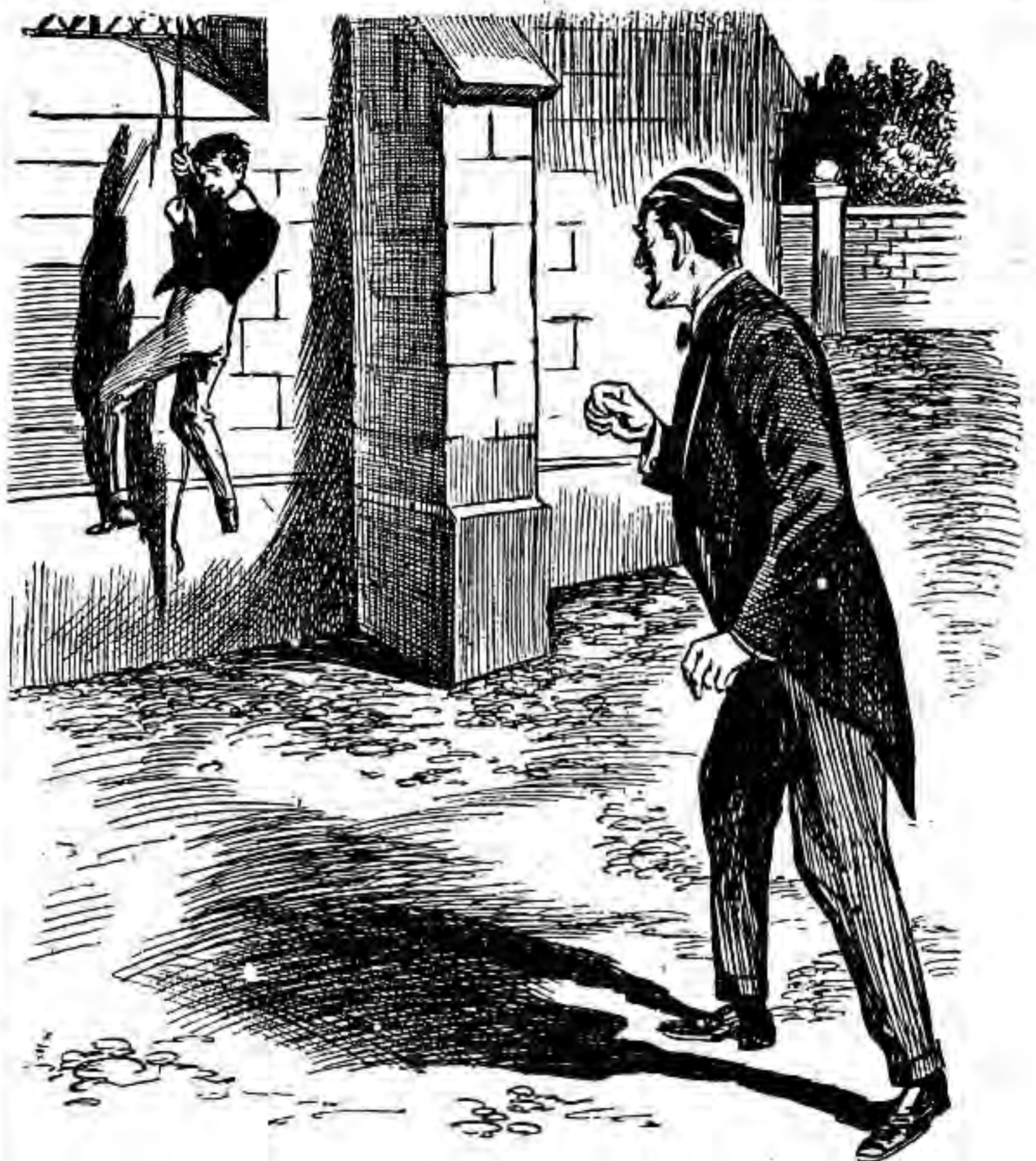
Wibley's eyes danced with pleasure.

"What did Mr. Curfew say this evening?" he asked.

"He said you were a chunk better than Bowcher," replied Cornie. "He watched your performance this afternoon, and he told me he thought you wonderful!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Wibley. "Then I really shall get a regular engagement?"

"At once, sir, to take the part of Jim Hawkins in the cast," replied Cornie emphatically. "Curfew is impressed—greatly impressed. He did not expect you to pick up the part after only three days' study."



Wibley lowered himself over the sill, grasped the rope, and commenced to climb down, hand over hand. He was nearing the ground when a yell startled him. Looking round, he saw Gerald Loder, the unpopular prefect, dashing towards him. "Stop!" shouted Loder. "Stop, you little rascal!" (See Chapter 3.)

Wibley grinned.

"It was jolly good of Mr. Curfew to give me a chance," he said. "Most theatrical managers are pretty conservative, especially with youngsters like me. It was mainly through you, Cornie, that I got my chance. You introduced me to Mr. Curfew last Wednesday afternoon, and told him all about me. He wouldn't believe that I could act until you persuaded him to give me a showing. He was very kind. Not many managers would give a boy a chance to get on the stage straight from school—and in a leading part, too."

Cornie chuckled.

"Curfew knows a good actor when he sees one!" he said. "Mind, I'm not saying he's got no faults. In his treatment of me, for instance, he shows callous indifference and shortsightedness. But the Fates are against me, and I bow to the inevitable. Now, to talk business—this is how the matter stands. Bowcher, the actor, who has so far taken the part of Jim Hawkins in the play, is unreliable, and, in point of fact, he left the cast to-night. That has left the breach open for you to step into. Our manager, Curfew, saw you act last Wednesday afternoon, he gave you the score of the play to study, and told you to learn the part of Jim Hawkins. You did so, and Curfew gave you a trial by putting you on in Bowcher's place this afternoon at the matinee. You succeeded, my boy. Mummer is not the man to grudge honour where honour is due. You literally brought the house down. Curfew was delighted. I told him that you were

joining us in the morning, and that you would be willing to take on the part indefinitely. He was glad, my boy—he was glad."

Wibley's eyes danced.

"That's ripping! Then I've got nothing to worry about!" he exclaimed. "You are leaving Courtfield to-morrow."

"The entire company travels by the morning train to Latcham," replied Cornie, puffing prodigiously at his pipe. "'Pirate Gold' is being presented at the Royalty Theatre, Latcham, for the first half of the week. You will travel with us."

Wibley's face brightened still more.

"My aunt is staying at Latcham next week," he said. "I shall be able to see her, and—explain that I've run away from school to go on the stage. She likes me, and she won't be down on me. I shall need a few things, too, and she will probably let me have the money—she's awfully rich, you know."

Cornie looked hard at Wibley through the haze of tobacco smoke.

"So you've got a rich aunt at Latcham—eh?" he said. "That's useful, my young friend. I've got some grown-up togs here for you. It wouldn't be wise for you to go about in your school togs—what?"

"You're jolly thoughtful, Cornie," said the runaway junior. "Now, what about bed? I'm dog-tired!"

"My humble quarters are entirely at your disposal!" said the late eminent tragedian, with a wave of his hand.

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"You sleep in the bed, and I will seek the arms of Morpheus in the armchair."

"No; I'll have the armchair," said Wibley. "It isn't fair for me to turn you out of your bed."

"I insist that you sleep in the bed!" said Cornie. "Enough! Make yourself at home, my young friend!"

Wibley gave in and went to bed.

Mr. Cornelius Mummer settled himself in the armchair after turning out the gas, and he remained there smoking his pipe and making frequent applications to a certain bottle that he kept in his jacket pocket, and at last dozed off to sleep. He snored loudly, but Cornie's somniferous noises did not disturb Wibley.

The runaway Greyfriars junior was completely tired out after a trying day, and he slept soundly amidst his strange surroundings.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

On Tour!

MR. CORNELIUS MUMMER and Wibley were up betimes in the morning, and, after a frugal breakfast which consisted of kippers and weak tea, they crept quietly from the house to avoid the landlady's farewell, and made their way to Courtfield railway-station.

"The rest of the company are here, my young friend," said Cornie. "Ah! There is Curfew! He is glad to see you, my boy!"

The theatrical company and Howard Curfew, the manager, were waiting on the platform. They all greeted the runaway Greyfriars junior with smiles.

Curfew was a tall, flashily-dressed man with a sleekness of manner that did not impress Wibley—in fact, it rather grated on him.

"Glad to see you, Wibley!" said Curfew. "Bowcher left the cast last night, and the understudy isn't as good as you. I'll sign you on as soon as we get to the theatre in the morning. We're there only for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, you know, and then we go to Pegg."

"Right-ho!" said Wibley cheerfully. "I—I suppose you couldn't let me have something off my salary in advance, sir? I'm rather short of cash."

Curfew and Ricketts, the stage-manager, exchanged glances.

"I'm afraid not, Wibley," said Curfew, after a pause. "You'll have to manage somehow until the end of the week."

The train came in, and the members of the "Pirate Gold" company went aboard. Wibley and Mummer found seats in a compartment with some of the "supers." They were all friendly, and on the way to Latcham the actors became communicative.

"Say, sonnie, I liked the way you asked Curfew for some salary in advance," said one old actor who looked more shabby even than Mummer. "We've all been asking him for arrears of salary now for weeks; but we can't get it. I don't think he'd pay us anything unless he had to."

"Why is that?" asked Wibley, in surprise. "The piece seems to be popular. He must be making a profit out of it."

"That's what we all say, but Curfew always puts us off with tales about production costs," put in a young lady in the corner seat. "He's full of promises, but none of them materialise. Curfew is a bad egg. Life in this company isn't at all rosy—it's only a third-rate touring company, you know. I'd throw up my job to-morrow, only it's so difficult to get

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a shop in the theatrical profession nowadays, and an artiste has to hang on to what's going. We grin and bear a lot, and trust to Curfew's honour—and providence."

By the time the train arrived at Latcham, Wibley had learned that life with a touring theatrical company was not quite the bed of roses that he had imagined it to be. Curfew appeared to be a shady manager, and neither he nor Ricketts was liked by any of the cast.

"Well, my young friend, how now?" said Cornie, as he and Wibley walked together into the High Street at Latcham. "Why not seek out your devoted aunt and—er—mention that as you are staying here for three days you will be in need of lodging accommodation?"

"That's a good wheeze," replied the runaway junior. "We'll take a tram to her house."

A penny tram-ride brought them to the residential quarter of the town, and Wibley piloted the once eminent tragedian to a large house that stood in its own grounds in a quiet square.

Miss Catherine Wibley was amazed to see her nephew when he presented himself, with Cornie, at the front door.

"Why, Willie! I hardly knew you at first, in those clothes!" exclaimed the tall, handsome lady, whose hair was now white with the advancing years. "Come in! Whatever are you doing here? Why are you not at Greyfriars?"

Seated in the large, sumptuously furnished drawing-room of his aunt's house, Wibley explained everything frankly.

"So, you see, aunt," concluded the junior in a quiet, even voice, "I have run away from school to go on the stage. You know I've always had a craving to go on the stage. I feel that I can make good there, and now I've got the chance I mean to keep to it. I am playing the hero part in 'Pirate Gold.' The piece is on at the Royalty here for three days, and we finish the week at Pegg. The company I'm in is only a third-rate one, but still it may lead to something bigger. The company has just arrived at Latcham, and I came straight here. This is my friend Mr. Cornelius Mummer. He is mainly responsible for my chance of getting on the stage."

Cornie made a sweeping bow, and Miss Wibley smiled benevolently.

"Willie, I am very surprised to hear of your running away from Greyfriars," she said. "I'm afraid your father would not approve of the rash action you have taken, and I'm sure I don't know what the people at Greyfriars must be thinking. But I will not give you away, Willie, and I wish you success. I know you are a good boy, and I trust you implicitly. Of course, you and Mr. Mummer will stay here until you leave Latcham?"

"Thanks awfully, aunt," said the junior gratefully. "You're a brick!"

"To dwell beneath this roof were an honour indeed!" murmured Cornie. "Miss Wibley, my heartfelt thanks! Naturally, I shall insist on paying—I shall insist! It will—ahem!—be a matter of time, however."

Wibley grinned, and Miss Wibley smiled good-naturedly. Then she left the room in order to make arrangements for the accommodation of her two visitors.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

On the Trail of the Runaway!

NO news of Wib? asked Dick Rake glumly, looking into the Common Room at Greyfriars on Monday morning.

The Famous Five and a number of other Removites were there.

Wharton shook his head.

"No, old chap! Wib seems to have disappeared from the face of the earth!" he said. "Quechy's in an awful wax about it, and the Head looks worried to death. Wib's disappearance is an utter mystery."

All Greyfriars was thrilling with the affair of Wibley's absence from school.

The Remove had received a great shock the morning previous to find Wibley missing from the dormitory. Rake had then discovered that Wib's bag and most of his personal belongings were also missing, and it became evident then that the Removite had deliberately run away from school.

Mr. Quech had at once been notified, and then the Form master's "gating" of Wibley had become known. It had generally been supposed that Wibley, determined not to submit to the gating, had absented himself from school for a time to show his defiance, amazing though such an action was for a junior to take. Everyone had expected Wibley to turn up again by the evening.

But now it was Monday morning, and nothing had been seen or heard of the runaway junior.

"I'm blessed if I can make it out," said Dick Rake, frowning. "Wib isn't the sort to make much of a fuss over things. He may have got his rag out over Quech gating him, but—but he surely wouldn't have the nerve to carry things too far. He'll catch it jolly hot when he does come back!"

Rake left the Common Room looking very downcast and gloomy.

He and Wibley, as study-mates, had had their rubs, but a close bond of friendship existed between them. Rake was worried over the absence of Wibley. Most of the fellows at Greyfriars attributed Wibley's escapade to the gating to which his Form-master had sentenced him.

The Famous Five and Squiff were discussing the matter in a corner of the Common Room when Vernon-Smith came up. The Bounder was looking very thoughtful.

"You chaps discussing Wibley?" he asked. "I've been thinking things out, and have come to the conclusion that there's more in this than meets the eye. You remember how thick Wib was with that seedy actor-chap, Mummer? He went to him at the Grand Theatre at Courtfield when he broke detention last Wednesday. Those two seemed to have something up their sleeves then. It's my belief that Wib has gone to Mummer this time, and that he's run away for good!"

Harry Wharton gave a start.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "You're right, Smithy! I had an idea that Wib and the Mummer bird had something on between them. Of course, Wib's run away and joined Mummer! If we can find him, we shall probably find Wib. Mummer is acting in 'Pirate Gold,' and perhaps Wib's got a job in the company. You know how crazy he always was on the stage!"

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"Just what I was thinking," he said.

"Wib's a silly ass!" broke out Bob Cherry. "He wants a jolly good bumping! We've got to find him, chaps, and bring him back. Let's go over to Courtfield to-night, and find out where 'Pirate Gold' has shifted to!"

"That's the idea, Bob!" said Harry Wharton. "We'll cycle over after tea."

The Famous Five and Vernon-Smith took out their cycles after tea that day and rode to Courtfield. Arriving at the Grand Theatre, Harry Wharton and the Bounder went into the vestibule and questioned the commissionaire.

That pompous worthy glared at them. "Which you're the second lot that's been inquiring after the 'Pirate Gold' crowd?" he growled. "Wot's it got to do with you boys, any'ow? Find hout!"

Harry Wharton looked round angrily, and saw two alert-looking men regarding him with great interest.

Realising that no information could be got out of the surly commissionaire, the two Greyfriars juniors left the theatre. They were followed out by the two men that Wharton had noticed.

"Excuse me, young gentlemen," said one of them politely. "But may I ask why you are endeavouring to trace the 'Pirate Gold' company?"

"We want to get hold of one of the actors in the cast, that's all, sir," replied Harry Wharton. "Do you happen to know where the company has gone?"

"I do," replied the other, with a smile. "You will find them all at the Royalty Theatre, Latcham, until Wednesday. Then they go on to Pegg. I am very interested in that company—very interested indeed!"

With a nod the man turned away, and he and his companion walked on up the High Street, followed by looks of astonishment from the Removites.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "I wonder who those merchants are?"

"They look like detectives to me," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "I reckon they're after somebody in the 'Pirate Gold' company for something or other."

"Quite likely," agreed Harry Wharton. "Some of these theatrical chaps are awful rotters. We've been reading a lot about bogus managers lately. But still, that's not our bizney. We're only concerned with finding Wib and making him stop playing the giddy goat. Latcham's rather a long way away. We shall have to leave it till Wednesday afternoon for our visit there, I'm afraid."

"Wednesday will do," said the Bounder quietly. "Unless Wib is found by then we'll go over and rake out Mummer. I'll wager a term's pocket-money that Wib is over there with that theatrical company. If he is, he'll probably have had enough of it by Wednesday, and he'll be more amenable to reason. We'd better be getting back to Greyfriars."

"I'll ring up the Royalty Theatre at Latcham first," said Harry Wharton. "It's just about time for the company to be there."

At the telephone-box in the railway-station the Remove captain was put through to the Royalty Theatre, Latcham. He asked for Mr. Cornelius Mummer, and after a long wait he heard a hiccough at the other end, and a deep, reverberating voice came to his ears.

"Hullo! Who wants Mummer?"

"Is that Mr. Mummer speaking?" asked Harry Wharton.

"It is he!" came the reply in accents deep and dramatic. "What—hic!—can I do for you?"

Mr. Cornelius Mummer, by the sound of his voice, was evidently under the influence of potent liquor.

"Is Wibley there?" asked Wharton. "I want Wibley!"

"Ho!" growled Mr. Mummer at the other end. "'Tis the voice of the—hic!—traitor that I hear! I refuse to speak of my young friend Wibley, sir! Never let it be said that—hic!—Cornie would betray a friend! Neverrrr! Mummer may have lost his glory, sir, but never his—hic!—honour to a friend! Groooogh! Hic! Good-bye! Hic—hic!"

Mummer rang off, and Harry Wharton hung up the receiver and rejoined his chums outside.

"Mummer was mum!" he said, with a grin. "But I'm sure Wib's at Latcham. Anyway, we shall see on Wednesday. Now we shall have to hurry back, or Gossy will lock us out!"

The Removites cycled back to Greyfriars, well satisfied with the result of their visit to Courtfield.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Rogues in Conclave!

WIBLEY looked worried.

He was standing in the small, dirty, dressing-room behind the scenes at the Royalty Theatre.

The Tuesday evening performance had just finished, and from the other side of the curtain could be heard the wheezy strains of the orchestra and the shuffling of feet as the audience made their way out of the theatre.

Curfew, the manager, came up to him, rubbing his hands in his usual sleek manner.

"Hullo, Wibley! What's wrong?" he asked.

Curfew had shown himself more affable to Wibley than to any other member of the cast. He was most ingratiating towards the runaway junior, in fact. Wibley's fellow actors had noticed it, and wondered what axe the unpopular manager had to grind.

"I'm wondering whether my friends at Greyfriars will find me here," replied Wibley, in a quiet voice. "It's been

worrying me ever since Mr. Mummer told me that he had a telephone call yesterday. He said that the call was about me. That shows that somebody has an idea where I am."

Curfew slapped him on the back and gave a boisterous laugh.

"Why let that worry you, sonny?" he asked. "You needn't go back to school unless you choose, I suppose?"

"N-no," said Wibley, biting his lip. "But I don't want to be found here. The fellows at Greyfriars don't stand at half measures, you know. If they come here and find me—"

"They sha'n't take you away—have no fear of that!" laughed Curfew. "I'll look after you, Wibley. By the way, would you care to have supper with me to-night at my place?"

"No, thanks," replied Wibley shortly. Curfew gave him a sneering look.

"Frightened of shocking your rich aunt by stopping out late?" he asked.

"I want to get to bed," said Wibley. "I've told you before, Mr. Curfew, that I don't smoke, or drink, or play cards. And I don't intend to start, either. Good-night!"

Wibley gave the manager a short nod, and walked out of the dressing-room. A few minutes later the stage door banged behind him.

Ricketts, the stage-manager, who had been standing behind Curfew during the conversation with Wibley, stepped forward and gave a chuckle.



"Can we see Mr. Mummer?" asked Harry Wharton, as the Co. crowded in at the stage door. "You can see nobody!" snapped the doorkeeper. "Which Mr. Curfew 'as issued orders that no one is to be admitted. I—Here, what the—Yah! Ow! Yarooough!" The doorkeeper gave a yell as Bob Cherry pushed him against a fire bucket. The bucket was full of water, and the luckless man received a drenching. "Come on, chaps!" chuckled Bob Cherry. (See Chapter 9.)

"High and mighty little brat—eh, Curfew?" he said. "I'd have sacked him for his impertinence. But still, I see why you're keeping him under your wing, so to speak. You hope to get him into bad ways—to get him to lose money to you by playing cards. The kid hasn't any money to play with, so you'd get it from his rich aunt, who is so devoted to him. She'd pay anything rather than have her nephew exposed and disgraced. Ha, ha! It's a good game, Curfew, but will it work? The boy has a mind of his own, and so far, he's only given you the cold shoulder. I don't think, Curfew, that you'll ever get him to fall in with your wishes."

Curfew turned to his stage-manager with an unpleasant leer.

"Perhaps you're right, Ricketts," he said. "But, after all, a hundred quid or so hush-money from the boy's aunt wouldn't be much compared with the big stakes we usually aim at. I've a better plan in mind. Look here, Ricketts, I got Mummer half squiffy this morning, and the old rascal talked. He's staying at the house of Wibley's aunt, you know, with the boy. Mummer keeps his eyes open, and he told me that that house is worth the attentions of a cracksman who can do his job quickly and silently. Do you begin to see light now? If we can get Mummer on our side, he can be very useful. I've been waiting for the chance of another big coup, and then I'm going to quit. You know what I mean, Ricketts. This theatrical business has been a good cloak for my real profession, but the cloak is beginning to wear thin. I saw McGrath in the town this morning, and that confounded 'tec's presence here doesn't look healthy for us. He knows too much. You and I have got to work one more big job within the next day or so, and then we disappear—see?"

Ricketts lit a cigar and nodded.

"Yes, I see, Curfew," he replied. "With McGrath so close on our track it's up to us to bring matters to a climax. McGrath was in Courtfield, wasn't he? Lucky for us we didn't try to pull off anything there. You intend to work the final job at Wibley's aunt's place, then?"

"Exactly!" smiled Curfew. "Mummer will play into our hands, provided we give him enough liquor. He's living there, and he knows the lay-out of the house. What could be easier for us?"

The two rascals walked away, and came upon Mr. Cornelius Mummer in the narrow passage outside the dressing-room.

The Fallen Star was looking most dejected. His pockets were empty, and he was, as usual, in a thirsty state.

"Care for a drink, Cornie?" asked Curfew, with a laugh.

Mr. Mummer raised his eyes aloft.

"A drink to me would be as nectar to the gods of Olympus!" quoth the old tragedian. "'Tis sad indeed to think that the mighty Mummer has come so low as to go thirsting for liquid refreshment."

Curfew and Ricketts piloted him away, and the trio disappeared behind the swing doors of a public-house.

At closing-time Mr. Cornelius Mummer staggered forth unsteadily, thundering lines from "Hamlet" in a very tragic manner, much to the amusement of the passers-by.

Curfew and Ricketts walked off in another direction, smiling with evident satisfaction at the result of their talk with the impressionable Cornie.

Midnight was tolling from the town hall clock when the Fallen Star rolled up the drive of Miss Wibley's house and tugged at the bell.

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A minute later the door opened, and Wibley looked out. His lip curled contemptuously at sight of the inebriated Mr. Mummer.

"Open the portal!" said Cornie, with a dramatic flourish. "'Tis Mummer who seeks admittance!"

"You're not coming in here any more, Cornie!" replied the junior decisively. "I'm ashamed of you! You're drunk!"

"Ho! What meaneth those words?" gasped Mummer. "Who—hic!—dares to say that I'm drunk? Hic, hic! Perish the thought! Hic! I scorn the scurrilous aspersion on the fair name of Mummer! Hic!"

"Buzz off, Cornie!" exclaimed Wibley, in an angry voice. "I won't have you in my aunt's house in that state! You were half squiffy last night when you came in. There's a limit to everything, and I must study my aunt's feelings. You're not coming in! Good-night!"

"My young friend! Hic! Wibley, my dear boy! Hic—hic—"

Crash!

The door slammed to, and Cornie heard the bolt being shot. He gave a sad shake of his head, wiped away a tear from his bleary eye, and staggered round to the garage. He lay on some sacks in a corner, and within two minutes was fast asleep. There he remained all night, and Wibley woke him next morning by emptying water on his face. And, as Mr. Mummer's countenance was not used to water, Wibley's method of awaking him was most effective.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Night Out!

"HERE we are at Latcham!" said Bob Cherry.

It was Wednesday afternoon, and the train from Courtfield had just arrived at Latcham. The Famous Five, Squiff, and Vernon-Smith left the station and made their way along to the Royalty Theatre.

The matinee was in progress when they arrived there, so they walked about the town until they saw the people leaving the theatre. Then they went round to the stage-door.

"My heye!" said the seedy-looking stage-doorkeeper when the Greyfriars juniors presented themselves. "Wot do you lads want?"

"Can we see Mr. Cornelius Mummer?" asked Harry Wharton. "We've come on an important matter."

"You can see nobody!" snapped the doorkeeper. "Which Mr. Curfew 'as issued horders that no one is to be admitted. I—Here, what the—Yah! Ow! Stop! Yarooooogh!"

The doorkeeper gave a yell as Harry Wharton & Co. pushed past him. He tried to struggle, and Bob Cherry gave him a shove that sent him crashing against a suspended fire-bucket. That bucket was full of water, and the luckless doorkeeper received a drenching.

"Yooogh! Gerrooogh! Wow! Yeung willains! Come back! Grooogh!" he roared.

But the Greyfriars juniors were already climbing the stairs.

They burst into the dressing-room without ceremony, and there saw Mr. Mummer, Wibley, and the rest of the male members of the cast.

Wibley was removing his make-up in front of a cracked mirror. He gave a start on seeing his old schoolfellows.

"Wib!" roared Bob Cherry. "So we've found you, you bouncer!"

Wibley turned towards them, panting, his face flushed, and his hands clenched tight together.

"What do you want?" he demanded. "Why have you chaps come here?"

"We've come to take you back to Greyfriars with us, you silly fathead!" exclaimed Harry Wharton warmly. "Don't you realise what an ass you are making of yourself? You can't possibly stick this out!"

"Can't I?" demanded Wibley. "We shall see! I mean to try, anyway! You chaps can leave me alone to manage my own affairs. This is no bizney of yours!"

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry. "You've got to chuck playing the giddy ox, and come back to Greyfriars, Wib! The longer you stay away the worse it will be for you!"

At that juncture Curfew and Ricketts entered the dressing-room. They started on seeing Harry Wharton & Co.

"What the dickens are these boys doing here?" rapped Curfew. "Turn them out immediately!"

The Famous Five, Squiff, and Vernon-Smith closed in together on Wibley. The runaway junior looked round desperately.

"I won't go back!" he cried. "I—Yarooooogh! Yah! Hands off! Rescue! Ow—ooooh!"

The Removites attacked. They grabbed Wib and dragged him to the dressing-room door. They meant to get him out by hook or by crook.

Curfew gave a shout and called to Ricketts and a number of others. They all dashed at the struggling juniors and fought their way to Wibley's rescue.

A wild and whirling struggle ensued in the theatre dressing-room. Wigs and boxes of make-up and chairs were sent spinning. Curfew and Ricketts wrenched Wibley away from his schoolfellows and kept the juniors at bay, while Wibley dashed out of the room and sought refuge in the theatre.

"Now, you young scoundrels, out you go, or I'll fetch in the police!" snarled Curfew. His nose was streaming with claret, having come into violent contact with Johnny Bull's fist.

Harry Wharton beckoned to his chums.

"We can't keep up this rumpus here," he said. "I think we'd better go, chaps. Wibley has given us the slip, but we'll get him all in good time!"

Looking rather the worse for wear, the Greyfriars juniors left the theatre and walked to the corner of the street.

"What a frost!" gasped Bob Cherry. "It was rather a cheek on our part, of course, to barge into a theatre and start a fight like that."

Harry Wharton gave a grim laugh.

"You're right, Bob!" he said. "But the game isn't up yet. We'll wait here till after the evening performance and keep watch for Wib. We're bound to get hold of him somehow!"

His chums looked quickly at him.

"What about getting back to Greyfriars, Harry?" asked Squiff. "There'll be an awful row if we stop out—"

"Oh, bother that!" retorted Harry Wharton. "Now we're over here and we know where Wib is it's up to us to stay here till we get him. He's got to chuck this stage-life rot and come back to Greyfriars and face the music. I'll telephone Wingate and tell him that we're out after Wib, and may not be back till late."

"May not be home till morning, you mean, Harry!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Anyway, we're all game to stop out, as it's for a good cause."

"Rather!" The juniors kept watch on the theatre, but Wibley did not come out. He evidently intended staying there until after the evening performance.

Harry Wharton & Co. realised this, and had tea in Latcham, afterwards returning

(Continued on page 17.)



Supplement No. 158.

HARRY WHARTON
EDITOR

Week Ending January 19th, 1924.



What I Think About The Stage!

Several Greyfriars celebrities
have forwarded their views
upon this interesting topic.

MR. QUELCH.

What do I think of the stage? The stage is an excellent institution in its proper place. But its place is not at a public school. If some of my pupils would pay as much attention to their lessons as they pay to theatrical matters they would not look so foolish when I ask them questions. Greyfriars is not an academy of acting.

DICK PENFOLD.

At Greyfriars now it's all the rage, for boys to go upon the stage, and show the school they're clever. Some of them think they're awfully good, but they have themselves misunderstood, for they'll be actors—never!

GOSLING.

What I sez is this 'ere. I 'ad a hoffer to go on the stage once—at an election meeting. And as soon as I walked across the boards I got the bird, I did, shell and all. No, don't ask me wot I think of the stage. It ain't respectable. The stage, I mean, not wot I think of it. In course, William Gosling's 'ad his days, w'ich he wasn't always a school porter a-working and a-slaving of his sowl out for a lot of dratted boys w'ich ought to 'ave bin drowned at birth. I woz an actor once. I played the hanimile in a pantomime. A real actor wot appeared in public. But howing to a little difference of 'pinion with the front legs—by which I mean to say my partner, I resigned. Drat the stage! There's no room for talent nowadays. Legs is all done by clockwork.

BOLSOVER MAJOR.

There's only one thing lacking on the stage to-day, and that's a really first-class producer. Now, what's wanted is a chap like myself. My hat! Wouldn't I make them jump about if I got the job. Imagine me taking a rehearsal. I would stand in the middle of the stage with a megaphone in one hand and a dogwhip in the other. And if people didn't do as I told them, I'd jolly well dot them on the boko. Half the trouble is people get too much of their own way—but they wouldn't with me! To be a really successful

producer a fellow must have a firm hand—and a hard fist. And I've got both. Ask young Nugent.

BILLY BUNTER.

The stage is all very well in its way, but you can take it from me, theirs far too much purrsunal jellasy konnected with it. I woud reorganise the hole of the stage. Four instance, you may hav herd that after a suckssessful drammer a reely magniffiscent feed is provided for the aretists on the stage itself. That is all rong. The feed shoold kum furst. It goes without saying that a fellow carnt give a reely inspired purrformance on an empteia stummick. And all oranges taken into a theatre, by the publick shoold be konfiskated for the yawse of the aretists. Eating oranges in a theatre is vulger. In short, it isn't dun. And I woud put a stop two it.

THE HEAD.

An actor may best be described as one who earns his bread by the skill with which he plays upon the human emotions. To be a successful exponent of the histrionic art one must possess more than the average ability to interpret the characters as drawn by the playwright. One must be self-confident and possess that elusive thing known in certain stage quarters as a "personality."

MR. PROUT.

I have only one criticism to make about the stage, and that is that the public are not given what they want—at least, not often enough.

What is really needed—and very badly, too—are a few more Wild West melodramas.

As a matter of fact, I have myself written a play of this sort, which I have entitled "The Redskin's Revenge." The scenes are laid in the Rockies, in the wild days of about 1890, and show a horde of yelling savages charging down upon a lone traveller.

I have earmarked the part of the lone traveller for myself. I think you will agree I have written a play that will thrill everyone who is fortunate enough to witness it.

EDITORIAL!

By
HARRY WHARTON.

HALLO, laddies! This, my merry men, being a Special Stage Number, I consider I have struck the right note on which to open.

Many of you might consider Wibley a more suitable fellow to edit this number than myself. As a matter of fact, I offered Wibley the editorial chair for the week—but he declined it without thanks. Some fellows haven't the slightest sense of gratitude.

However, having got through the overture, so to speak, I might as well get on with the wassing—or the programme. The "star" turn this week is a special article by that fat chump, Bunter. Some of you may have noticed it already—he insisted I should put it on the front page. Billy had an idea that if you liked it he could give an encore on the last page. But in the words of the poet, laddies (that sounds stagey), he will be unlucky.

Bunter says he's an absolute dab at acting. And I quite agree with him. Only a chap with marked histrionic ability could swing the lead like he does.

Now, there are many people who consider it the easiest thing in the world to get on the stage. They think they have only to find some producer to give them a leading part—preferably at a big West End theatre—and their fortunes are made.

You can take it from me that a career on the stage is one of the hardest in the world. And to begin with it calls for a great deal of hard work—even for a small part. Even actors with world-wide reputations cannot afford to shirk.

Any student of the daily newspapers must have read from time to time of actors who have broken down through overwork, and who have been ordered by their doctors to take a rest. No: life on the stage is by no means a bed of roses.

Many of my chums may have an ambition to go on the stage themselves. Well, all I've got to say is, that if they feel they have real talent, and they don't mind hard work, then go ahead. And good luck to you.

I could fill columns with interesting chat about the stage. But I've already had to cut Bunter's article to get my own stuff in. And if I don't pack up I shall have to cut it some more.

Adieu! Fare thee well.

HARRY WHARTON.

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The Midnite Eggspress!!

A Famous Mellowdrarmer, Speshully
fictionised for The Grayfryers Herald.
By Dicky Nugent.

ACT I.

The Wicked Barrernet!

"A HA!" Wicked Sir Jasper uttered that remark. Sir Jasper was the villain of the piece. He was attired in immaculate evening-dress, with a gowld monokle studded with preshus stoans stuck in wun sinister eye.

Befoar him, gagged and bowned, lay a small boy, knamed George. And behind him stood Bung Wun, his Chinese servant, a mokking smile on his inscrewtable yello fase.

"Aha!" repeated Sir Jasper, parsing a meening glarnce to Bung Wun. "Sew you thort to eskape from me, hay? But you reckoned without my faithfull Bung."

Sir Jasper koffed. A narsty hacking koff it was, with a deesided note of menice in it.

Little George growned allowed.

"What wood you with me, O Sir Jasper?" he arsked, his yung voice rising to a pityful sob.

"I will tell you mi story," sed the wicked barrernet. "Five long yeers ago kum to-night, yore farther, who was then a speshul konstable, arrested me. My krime was buying chewing-gum after eight o'clock."

"He took me two the perleece-station, where I was sentenced two five yeers hard labor. I swore I wood have my revenge. Five long and weery yeers I wated—five long and weery yeers! And now the grate day has kum—"

"The day allee samee kum!" ekkood Bung Wun.

"I am going to make you suffer 4 yore farther's sins," resumed Sir Jasper. "It is now wun minnit to midnight. I am going two ty you too the raleway-line—the eggspress will go rorring by, and—my revenge will be komplet!"

"Noo—noo! Knot that, I implore you, Sir Jasper!" almoast shrieked pore George. "Spair me—oh, spair me! Spair me just this wunst, noble Sir Jasper, and I will een love the for ever!"

"Fool!" hissed the wicked barrernet. "You arsk me to spair you when I have weighted five yeers for this day? Noe, never!"

Sir Jasper issued a kurt kommand to Bung Wun. Poor George was lifted to the raleway-line and tyed to a sleeper. And in the distence kame the shriek of the onrushing eggspress. Sir Jasper and the inscrewtable Bung Wun took wun larst look at their fowl wurk, and dashed away to the former's palashul Park Lane manshun.

ACT II.

The Fatel Minnit!

Puff, puff, puff!

The midnite eggspress was rorring down the line. Anny minnit now it wood be upon the unforchunate George. It seemed that nuthing cood save him frem deth.

Puff, puff, puff!

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Neerer and neerer drew the giant lokermotive, its funnel bellchin sparks and flains. Poor George struggled desperitly with his crool bonds—but he cood knot move them. The sinister Sir Jasper had dun his fowl wurk well—2 well!

Puff, puff, puff!

Only a few yards seperated poor George from the onrushing trane now. If he was to eskape he wood have to do it at wunce. He struggled agane with his crool bonds. And slowly but surely he felt them give.

Roar, roar, roar!

Even as he rolled klear of the line the lokermotive flashed by. George sied a si of grate relief and struggled to his feat.

"Saved!" he gasped. "In the knick of time! And now to bring the wicked barrernet to book!"

The plucky felloe immedieately took to his feat and dashed to Sir Jasper's



The skout put out the bom by jumping on it.

manshun in Park Lane. When he arrived their he found all the blinds down. Know doubt Sir Jasper was already in morning for him.

"Revenge!" he hissed. "Revenge! Aha! Revenge is sweet!"

The brave ladd nokked at the door, which was at wunce opened by Biff Wun, Bung's yunger brother, who was Sir Jasper's valley.

"Tell Sir Jasper I must sea him at wunce," greated George. Then, changing his mind, he pooshed by the asstonished Biff and made his way to the barrernet's library. Flinging open the dore, he entered dramatikally, with wun hand razed.

"Ho, villun!" he snapped. "Yore fowl skeem has faled—and now I have kum 4 a rekonig."

But for wunce the brave ladd had overstepped himself. For with a sinister snarle, the yello form of Bung Wun suddenly apeered from beehind a lakered box.

The neckst moment George was herled to the ground. Sir Jasper sprung up

with a cri of rage to help his yello akkomplice. And within too minnutes of entering the howse, the dering yung lad found himself a prisener for the sekond time that nite.

"Their shall be know mistake this time!" hissed Sir Jasper crooley. "This time I will make sertain of you!"

The barrernet wispered something in Chinese to his servant, and the next moment poor George was lade upon the libary carpet.

A kewrius-looking instrewment was next obtained, which Bung Wun proceeded to fill with a green powder.

"This is a time bom," eggsplained Sir Jasper, with a kunning lear. "I am going to leave it by yore side, and in a few minnutes you will be blown to king-dum kum."

Poor George's fase terned a pail green. This time, he new, their wood be no eskape. So, like the brave lad he was, he reesolved to meat his fete with grate 40tude.

"Doo yore wurst!" he hissed. "But remember—remember, Sir Jasper, their'll kum a day!"

"Aha!" chuckled the barrernet. "We shall sea what we shall sea."

And with that he lited the fuse of the bom and dashed down the stares, Bung Wun bringing up his reer.

Splutter, splutter, splutter!

Aloan in the howse, George watched the sparks creep up the fuse. Any moment now the bom wood eggsplode. He thort his last minnute has kum, when their was a sound of footsteps on the stares.

And the next minnute in rushed a Boy Skout. The skout put out the bom by jumping on it, and freed George from his bonds.

"In the knick of time!" he breathed. "You found my lorst marble manny years ago, and I have knot forgot. I suspekcted you were in danger, and have kept watch on you. The perleece are without, and the wicked barrernet is under arrest."

"So perrish all villuns," sed George thankfully. "You have saved my life!"

With that, reskewed and reskewer left the howse and joyned the wateing perlice outside. In a few minnutes the darstedly Sir Jasper and the sinnister Bung Wun where hawled be4 the judge.

"Sir Jasper," sed His were-ship, at the end of the evvidence, "you are a skoundril of the deepest dy. You have bean fowned guilty of a narsty and wilkid krime, and mi sentence is that U reeceve wun thowsand kuts with the kat-o'-nine tales!"

The wikked barrernet pailed beneath his tan. But the nees sekond he was dragged skreeming sumthing horrible to the sells.

Wack! Wack! Wack!

The kat-o'-nine tales rose and fell.

"Yeroooogh, yeroooogh, yeroooogh!"

"Kum," sed the Boy Skout kwietly, as the agonising kries floted up 2 them. "Justice has bean dun. Let us deepart."

[Supplement ii.]



Told In The Green Room!

By
William Wibley

TRAGEDY and comedy go hand-in-hand, not only on the stage itself, but behind the scenes as well. The stage has its own mysteries, its own superstitions, and its own comedies.

I was once invited to the green-room of a certain theatre by a well-known actor who had promised to entertain the company after the show with some unusual stories.

And well do I remember it! The company were assembled and waiting. The lights were turned low, and at length the actor appeared.

"Now, my friends," he said in a low, powerful voice, "I am going to tell you the true story of a haunted theatre. The place I am speaking of is just at the back of Oxford Street. At present it is closed—as it has been for many years past now—and is used by some local firm as a warehouse.

"But in days gone by it was as popular as any theatre you could find in the West End of London. It was the home of the old melodrama, which we see all too seldom to-day.

"Men like George R. Sims and Henry Arthur Jones, who wrote the 'Silver King,' had many of their early works produced there, while I have appeared there many times myself.

"About six or seven years ago this theatre secured the reputation of being haunted. Just before midnight the clanking of chains was heard, followed by shrieks and groans. And the watchman whose duty it was to look after the place became so alarmed that he refused to remain on duty until the curious phenomena was investigated.

"He swore that the noises started at about eleven o'clock. And on one occasion he stated that he had seen the ghostly forms of dead-and-gone players walking across the furniture-littered stage, just as they had done in days gone by.

"Several of us who were interested kept watch for a night or so. But, while we failed to see any of these ghostly players, we certainly heard some very strange noises. There were shrieks and groans, and then the deep, resonant voice of a man speaking in much the same manner as I have been doing in the show to-night."

The actor paused and pushed his long hair back from his forehead.

"And, gentlemen," he resumed, "the voice of the man I heard was saying the lines of a play that had been produced in that very theatre for the first and last time some forty years ago! I heard them distinctly, and I recognised them right away. For I had appeared in that very play myself!

"We switched on the lights and made a thorough search of the place. But not a living soul did we find. What had once been the dressing-rooms were now stacked with furniture, while the passages to the stage were choked with dust.

Supplement iii.]

"After that the story went round that the spirits of the dead actors who had played in that theatre had come back to haunt it as a protest against its being used as a warehouse. But the cause of those noises and voices remains a mystery even to this day."

"A very curious story indeed," said a member of the party. "But I can tell you of something equally strange, and for the truth of which I can vouch personally.

"As you know, I was for many years on the variety stage before I went in for legitimate work. And it was during that time that I was billed to appear in a hall at Islington, which, like the theatre you were speaking of just now, is closed, if it has not since been pulled down.

"The show started in the ordinary way, none of us having any idea of the dramatic happenings which were to take place before it finished. I did my own



"Look!" he screamed, pointing out into the audience. "It's staring at me! Take it away!"

turn, and, after changing, came down to the wings to give a message to someone before going home.

"At that particular moment a man I had met at different halls in various parts of the country was going on for his show. For a long time he had worked a double act with a partner; but the partner had since died, and, in consequence, he was doing a single turn.

"His show opened with a song. But he had only just started, when he stopped short, pointing out into the audience, his eyes bulging with fear.

"Look!" he screamed. "Look! It's staring at me! Take it away!"

"At first the audience thought it was part of the show, and waited for what was going to happen next. But in a very few minutes they saw that something was wrong. The curtain was rung down immediately, and the man was dragged, howling and shrieking, into the wings.

"A doctor was sent for, the manager of the house believing that the artiste

had been taken suddenly ill. But all the time the comedian implored them to 'Take it away!'

"It's his face!" he repeated. "His face is there! I saw it!"

"At length we managed to quieten the poor fellow down.

"And what was the explanation of his curious conduct?" I asked, as the comedian paused.

"Oh," he said, "just this! When the man's partner was about to die he had given him an act which he had just written, with instructions to pay any money accruing from it to his relatives. But the man had failed in his trust, and had used the act for himself—in fact, he was using it that very night. And apparently he was suffering from a guilty conscience, for he swore that the face he saw in the audience was that of his dead partner."

Well, that tale, too, I was assured, was perfectly true.

I think the best way to conclude this article would be to tell of some of the superstitions of stage folk. As most of my readers know, many members of my family are on the stage, and some of these superstitions they have told me of, and some I have gathered from conversations in the green-room.

Actors generally have a bad habit of borrowing. They will borrow grease-paint just as often as you like to let them. And they will borrow money, too. But it has always been considered very unlucky to borrow money just before "treasury," as the weekly pay-time is called.

Of course, there may be a reason for the following superstition. But if there is I don't know of it. To commence a tour on a Saturday morning—although it is sometimes done—is considered an ill-omen; and to pass a member of the fair sex coming out of the stage-door on the first night of a show is considered to be a sign that the piece will not have a very long run.

There have been numerous instances in which stage superstitions have been ignored, but in many cases some misfortune has befallen the artiste concerned.

For instance, "The Green Triangle," a show which started out on tour in 1908, ignored the fact that Saturday morning was an unlucky day to start. True, many of the actors in the show were against a start on that particular day, but for various reasons the management could not see their way clear to alter the date. Bad luck was prophesied for the show, and, true to tradition, the prophecy was fulfilled.

The show had only been on the road a fortnight when a fire broke out at the theatre where it was being staged. Several people were seriously injured, and nearly the whole of the properties were destroyed, involving a loss of several thousand pounds.

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Top of the Bill!

By
Billy Bunter

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star!
How I wonder what you are—"

YOU may think it strange, Dear Readers, but when I happened to see those beautiful words the other night it set me thinking. (Wonders will never cease.—Ed.)

Of course, there are stars and stars. There are stars that we see in the sky, like those in the poem, and there are stars we see when some silly ass dots us on the nose.

Also there are stars you see on the stage. To be a star on the stage is my ambition. I have often wanted to be a stage star. But all the fellows here are so full of puffed-up jelly that I have never been given a chance.

However, if the fellows do keep me

out of the Dramatic Society, they can't stop me thinking about what it must feel like to be a star.

As you doubt you are aware, I am an actor of considerable ability. And it would never surprise me if some day some well-known producer came up and hit me on the back and said:

"Master Bunter, you are just the fellow I have been looking for. You are a born artist. I am going to make you a great man. I have taken the liberty of casting you for the leading part in my new play, 'A Fool There Was.'"

Imagine it, Dear Readers. It would be wonderful. I might say it would be stupendous. I should buy a fur coat with an astrakhan collar. I should have my name in big letters posted all over London. In short, I should be the

darling of the gods in more senses of the word than one.

Without any bowing, I think I should be as good as too stars, in which case I should be what is known as a konstellation. More than that, Dear Readers, I should be a Komet.

Every night I should walk on the stage at six thirty and eight forty five. The place would be full of crowned heads, who would rise and cheer like anything. They would throw bowkays at me, and fellows like Wharton and Wibley and lots more I could name would boast to their friends that they were at school with me.

And then would come the acting.

In the first act I would make them laugh—(Hear, hear.—Ed.)—and in the second act I would make them cry with tears. (They wouldn't be able to help themselves.—Ed.)

If I was left to select the play I would have something on these lines:

A boy (that's me) would be found starving in the streets. A kind lady would take pity on him and stand him a jolly good feed. That would do for the first act. The second act could show the boy still having the feed. And in the third act he could be discovered to be a young prince. Of course, this discovery would be celebrated by another big feed which would be called a banquet.

A show like that would bring the house down. (We heartily agree with you.—Ed.)

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selection may be seen at the Tuck Shop. Terms, C.O.D.

(Needless to say, this did not come from Mrs. Mimbles.—Ed.)

AKTOR FOR HIGHER!

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Book this grate akt before it is too late. Apply Horace Coker, Esq., Fifth Form.

[Supplement iv.]

The Waywardness of Wibley!

(Continued from page 12.)

to the theatre and taking seats for the evening performance.

Before entering the theatre Harry Wharton telephoned to Wingate, much to the Greyfriars captain's surprise.

The house was packed for the last performance in Latcham of "Pirate Gold." Harry Wharton & Co., from their seats in the circle, watched the play with added interest, now realising that the part of Jim Hawkins was being played by none other than William Wibley of the Remove.

"By Jove! That's really old Wib acting! He takes the part rippingly, doesn't he?" murmured Bob Cherry. "There's no mistake about it, Wib is properly cut out for the stage!"

"Yes, but he's cut out to remain at school for a few years yet!" replied Harry Wharton grimly. "We'll get him after the show!"

The play finished, amidst thunderous applause, and directly the curtain was down the Greyfriars juniors hurried from the theatre.

The night was dark, and from the shop doorways opposite the theatre they were able to keep a close watch on the stage-door.

They saw the actors emerge one by one. A closed car drew up to the kerb, and then Wharton gave a gasp.

Three figures hurried out of the stage-door and clambered into the car, which next minute drove off swiftly. The three they recognised in the lamp-light as Curfew, Ricketts, and Wibley.

"Oh, my hat! So we're done, after all!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "They must have seen us waiting! That manager chap has rushed Wib away in a car. Goodness knows where he's gone to now! We've had our wait for nothing. And we shall catch it when we do get back to Greyfriars."

Harry Wharton set his teeth.

"We won't go back yet!" he said. "Look, here comes that Mummer merchant. As usual, I suppose, he's making for the public-house!"

Cornie did make for the public-house, and Harry Wharton & Co. waited outside until eleven o'clock.

"Last train to Courtfield has gone!" grinned the Bounder. "This will mean a night out for us!"

"Who cares?" said Harry Wharton grimly. "We're after Wib, and we mean to get him! Let's follow Cornie and see where he goes. Probably he and Wib are living together. Here comes the old blighter!"

Mr. Cornelius Mummer walked out of the public-house. His steps were quite steady, and he appeared to be more or less sober.

He walked slowly down the High Street, and Harry Wharton & Co. followed at a respectful distance.

Half an hour's walk brought them to the square where the house of Wibley's aunt stood. The Greyfriars juniors did not know that Wib had an aunt at Latcham, and therefore it came as a great surprise to them to see the disreputable Mummer walk boldly in at the gate of the big house.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Surely a cheap, third-rate actor like Mummer cannot afford to dig in such swagger quarters!"

"He's not going in," said Harry Wharton suddenly. "Look!"

Mummer had gone round to a side window of the house, and the watching juniors heard him tap softly on it. A

few minutes later the window opened noiselessly, and Mummer clambered through, being lost to view inside next minute.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Just in Time!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. drew deep breaths.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Frank Nugent. "What do you make of it, Harry? This business looks jolly fishy to me!"

Harry Wharton snapped his teeth together hard.

"It is fishy!" he muttered. "That rascal Mummer is up to no good in that house, and there's somebody else in there too who is in co. with him. I—Hullo! Look who's coming!"

The front door of the house had opened suddenly, and a youthful figure came out, hurrying down the path towards the gate.

It was Wibley!

"Wib!" exclaimed Wharton, darting out of the shadows and laying a detaining hand on the junior's arm. "What are you doing here?"

Wibley reeled back as though he had been struck. His face registered blank amazement on seeing Harry Wharton & Co. in the grounds of the house.

"You—you chaps here!" he muttered. "How did you find me?"

"We followed Mummer," said Harry Wharton shortly. "Somebody let him in at the side window. Was it you? What's the game, Wibley?"

"This is my aunt's house," replied Wibley quietly. "Mummer and I have been staying here, but last night I turned Mummer out, as he was drunk and I was ashamed to have him here. I—I couldn't sleep to-night, somehow. Curfew brought me home in his car, to dodge you. He got friendly with my aunt, and told her that he had given up his room at the hotel, and she invited him to put up here for the night. He accepted, of course. And just now I got up, hearing movements in the house, and saw Curfew and Mummer at my aunt's safe in the library. They are robbing the house! Curfew has bribed Mummer to show him about the house. I—I dared not tackle them alone, and I didn't want to scare my aunt. She's very nervous, you see. So I came out, intending to call the police or get help somehow before the rascals left with their swag."

Harry Wharton set his teeth grimly.

"I think there are enough of us to manage those two rotters," he said. "Don't bother about the police yet, Wib. We'll settle with Curfew and Mummer."

Wibley darted the Removites a grateful look.

"I'm much obliged to you fellows," he said. "I—I begin to realise now what a silly ass I've been. I think I can see Curfew in his true colours. He and Ricketts are scoundrels. They have been keeping to themselves all the money derived from the play, and the company is half-starving. I'm disgusted with the whole show! If you fellows save my aunt's property I'll come back to Greyfriars in the morning—honour bright!"

"That's the way to talk, Wib!" said Bob Cherry. "We'll soon nip Curfew's little game in the bud. I—Hullo, hallo, hallo! Who's this?"

A car had drawn up outside the house. Crouching down behind the shrubbery, Harry Wharton & Co. peered closely at it.

"Curfew's car!" muttered Wibley. "The fellow at the wheel I have never seen before, but it's evident he's waiting

for Curfew and Mummer, to drive them away with the plunder."

"Right!" said Harry Wharton. "We'll grab this rotter first, then. Creep to the gate quietly, you fellows, and then make a dash at the car!"

"Hear, hear!"

The juniors made no noise in approaching the gate. Then, at a signal from Wharton, the gate was wrenched open and they all made a simultaneous dash at the car.

The man at the wheel was taken completely by surprise. The juniors bowled him over and sat on him.

"Now, you rascal!" muttered Wharton. "We—why, my hat! He's disguised!"

In the struggle with the juniors the man's moustache had been knocked off and a wig he was wearing knocked awry. Wibley pulled off the wig, and gave a cry.

"It's Ricketts!"

The rascally stage manager looked balefully at the juniors.

Vernon-Smith gave a laugh.

"So they meant to flit away in the car—in disguise, so that no one would recognise them!" he said. "Quite a good idea—if it had worked!"

"And now, Wib, here's your chance to catch Curfew and Mummer beautifully!" exclaimed Wharton swiftly. "They're expecting Ricketts to wait-out here in disguise, aren't they? Well, you just change places with Ricketts. Put on his clothes and his disguise, and impersonate him. Wib, you can do it!"

Wibley's eyes gleamed.

"Why, of course I can! That's a topping wheeze, Wharton! My powers of impersonation will come in really useful at last! I can drive a car, too! I'll do it!"

Five minutes later Wibley, dressed in Ricketts' clothes and wearing the rascal's disguise, took his seat at the wheel of Curfew's car.

Hidden inside the car were Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and the Bounder. Squiff, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Inky concealed themselves in the shrubbery of the house, with Ricketts as their prisoner, securely gagged with a handkerchief.

Shortly afterwards two figures clambered stealthily out of the side window, carrying between them two large bags that were evidently weighty.

Curfew and Mummer saw the car waiting, and hastened towards it.

"Everything has worked out splendidly, Ricketts!" muttered Curfew to the silent figure at the wheel. "Nobody in the house has been roused. And now drive like the dickens to London. The sooner we get away from here the better!"

The two bags were dumped inside the car, and Curfew and Mummer got in.

Wibley started the engine, and drove the car down the hill towards the main streets of Latcham. He chuckled softly to himself. Curfew and Mummer had been caught like rats in a trap!

It was not long before a commotion sounded inside the car.

The two rascals had discovered that they were not alone.

Peering back through the glass window behind him, Wibley saw Curfew and Mummer struggling with Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and the Bounder.

Wibley slowed the car down as he came to the bridge that crossed the railway line just outside Latcham station.

All of a sudden he heard a loud shout from Wharton.

"Stop him, Wib! He's going—"

Crash! The door of the car flew open and the form of Howard Curfew hurtled

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out. Wibley rammed on the brakes and leapt from the driving-seat at the same moment as Harry Wharton and the Bounder piled out of the car. Bob Cherry had to remain behind to attend to Mummer.

In a race down the road the juniors would easily have overtaken the bogus manager, but Curfew was too wily a rogue to take that course for freedom. He leapt on to the side of the railway bridge, clambered over, and disappeared on the other side.

When the three juniors arrived and looked down they saw Curfew leap off the lower girders of the bridge and land in the centre of the permanent way below.

Next minute he had disappeared in the darkness of the railway ahead.

Wharton and the Bounder were quick to follow. They dashed along the railway line in the direction they had seen Curfew take, and finally found themselves at the entrance to a tunnel.

Of Curfew there was no sign.

"Has he gone into the tunnel, I wonder?" muttered Harry Wharton.

"We stand very little chance of finding him now, wherever he is!" said the Bounder quietly. "I think the best plan is to get back to the car, Wharton."

"Right-ho! Curfew's got away, but we've got the swag!"

They returned to the spot where they had left the car. Wibley and Bob Cherry had Mummer a prisoner. The Fallen Star was most pathetic in his pleadings to be allowed to go.

Wibley's lip curled as he looked down at him.

"You're a contemptible cad, Cornie!" he said. "I trusted you, and this is the result. I think you are more of a fool than a rogue, however. Curfew kept you short of cash, and you allowed yourself to be bribed. If you take us to where Curfew is staying we'll let you go free."

To this Mummer eagerly agreed.

While the juniors were discussing their plans two men walked up to them. Wharton gave a start on recognising the two who had spoken to them outside the Grand Theatre at Courtfield two days ago.

"What is the matter here, my lads?" asked one of them.

"Don't give me away, my young friends!" moaned Mummer in a soft voice from inside the car. "That's McGrath, a detective from Scotland Yard. He's been following the company about for weeks. He was after Curfew, not me!"

Harry Wharton explained, taking compassion on Mummer and leaving him out of the information he gave the two detectives.

Chief-inspector McGrath regarded the juniors admiringly.

"You've done splendidly, my lads," he said. "It's a pity that Curfew has escaped, but I shall catch him in time. That rogue is one of the cleverest cracksmen of the day. For months he has been operating in various parts of the country in the guise of a theatrical manager, assisted by Ricketts, who is as wily a rogue as himself. I have been following their tracks and collecting evidence against them. Ah, here are the other boys. They have still got Ricketts, I see."

Johnny Bull, Nugent, Squiff and Inky arrived with Ricketts held a prisoner between them. The Removites had the satisfaction of seeing McGrath snap the handcuffs on the wrists of the cowering rascal.

"I think we will go now to Curfew's apartments," said McGrath. "We shall

probably find there a good deal of plunder from his previous robberies."

The two detectives, Harry Wharton, Vernon-Smith, and Squiff drove off in the car with Ricketts. The others took the recovered valuables back to Miss Wibley's house.

Mr. Cornelius Mummer, having been given his liberty, at once made himself scarce, and Wibley laughingly gave it as his opinion that he would never see the Fallen Star again.

Miss Wibley, on being roused, was amazed to hear of the events that had taken place while she had been sleeping.

And soon afterwards Wharton, Vernon-Smith, and Squiff arrived.

"We got to Curfew's rooms, only to find that the rotter had been there before us and had taken away all the money belonging to the 'Pirate Gold' company," said Wibley. "But he had to leave behind all the swag he had got from previous robberies. So McGrath made a good haul."

Harry Wharton & Co. surveyed each other with grins.

"Well, here we are at Latcham, when we ought to be at Greyfriars, and it's past one o'clock in the morning!" said Harry Wharton. "The Head will be tearing his hair, I reckon!"

"You've got some excuse for being out," said Wibley. "He'll arise and call you blessed in the morning when he sees you bring in the giddy wanderer—meaning myself! I shall get into a fearful row for running away, but I'll stand that. I—"

"Don't worry, Wib!" said Harry Wharton, with a laugh. "McGrath is going to make things all right with Dr. Locke. He's going to tell him of the part you played in bowling out Curfew. I think things will turn out all right, somehow."

"I sincerely hope so, for Willie's sake," said Miss Wibley. "And now you young gentlemen must make yourselves comfortable here for the night. I have some spare bed-rooms."

"Thanks awfully, Miss Wibley!"

Ten minutes later the heroes of the Remove turned in, and slept the sleep of the just.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

All Serene!

IN the morning Harry Wharton rang up Greyfriars and informed Dr. Locke, much to that learned gentleman's surprise, that they had found Wibley, and were bringing him back later.

Wibley and the others waited in the High Street while Harry telephoned. When he came out of the telephone-box he found them talking to a group of harassed-looking people who had the unmistakable stamp of the theatrical profession about them.

Wibley introduced Wharton to the members of the "Pirate Gold" company.

"Now Curfew has flitted with the money, the rest of the company are absolutely stranded," said Wibley, looking gravely concerned. "They haven't received much by way of salary for weeks, and here they are at Latcham, without even the price of their railway fares back to London. It's a rotten shame. Something's got to be done."

The "Pirate Gold" artistes were undoubtedly in an awkward plight.

None of them had any money, and they did not know how they would be able to obtain food and lodging, let alone their fares home.

"Hard cheese!" said Bob Cherry, in his big-hearted way. "We can't see these poor actors and actresses stranded like this, Harry. We've got to do something for them to help them out of the hole."

Harry Wharton nodded, and a sudden gleam came into his eyes.

"Yes, we'll help them—and I've got an idea," he said. "On Friday night our performance of 'Captain Skidd's Revenge' comes off at the Grand Hall at Friardale. We've got rid of most of the tickets, and there's sure to be a big demand for unreserved seats on the night of the performance—the show has been well advertised in Friardale, you see. Well, why not use the scenery belonging to the 'Pirate Gold' company, and present 'Pirate Gold' in Friardale instead, with the original theatrical company, augmented by the Remove?"

"Great pip!"

"That's a topping wheeze, Harry!"

"We could easily work the two plays into one," went on Harry Wharton. "The actors from the 'Pirate Gold' company would play the principal parts, of course, and the money taken for the show would be devoted to helping them out of the hole that Curfew has landed them in. The other chaps are bound to agree to that, when we explain matters to them."

"Rather!"

"That's awfully good of you, Wharton," said Wibley. "The thing can be managed easily, of course. I'll tell the others."

Wibley acquainted the "Pirate Gold" artistes of Wharton's suggestion, which they willingly and gratefully fell in with.

The Removites made a whip-round, and nearly six pounds was given to the stranded actors to "carry on" with until Friday evening.

Then Harry Wharton & Co. and Wibley took train for Friardale.

They arrived at Greyfriars just as morning lessons finished, and the other boys were trooping from the Form rooms. Immediately they were surrounded in the quadrangle by an eager, excited crowd of boys, who demanded to know what had happened and where Wibley had been, and how Harry Wharton & Co. had found him.

Wingate walked up and halted in astonishment on seeing the returned Removite.

"So you've come back, Wibley!" he exclaimed. "You little rascal, what have you been up to since Saturday?"

"I ran away to go on the stage, Wingate," replied Wibley meekly.

"Great Scott! You—you've been on the stage!"

"Yes, and I'm rather glad to be back again at Greyfriars," said the amateur actor of the Remove, with a grin. "The rest of the company are stranded at Latcham—the manager did a bunk, you see, with all the money. I'm going in to see the Head now."

Wibley went in, with Harry Wharton & Co. and the Bounder.

These latter youths emerged from the Head's study a short while after, smiling.

Ten minutes later Wibley came out. He was not smiling—quite the reverse, in fact. There was a look of woe and suffering on his face, and he was energetically wagging both his hands in the air.

"Licked?" inquired Bob Cherry sympathetically.

"Yow-wow—yes!" gasped Wibley, clasping his smarting hands together and pressing his knees against them. "Four



The Greyfriars juniors closed in together on Wibley. The runaway junior looked round him desperately. "I won't go back!" he cried. "I—Hands off! Rescue!" In response to his call Curfew and a number of actors dashed on the scene. "Rescue!" A wild and whirling struggle ensued in the theatre dressing-room. (See Chapter 9.)

on each—ow-wow-wow! Laid on thick, too—groogh! But the Head was a sport! He took a—womp!—reasonable view of things. He said—yoo-oo!—that if McGrath hadn't interceded for me I should have had a—gerroogh!—flogging! Ow-ow-ow!"

The Removites grinned.

All the school soon buzzed with the news of Wibley's amazing escapade, and thrilled at Harry Wharton & Co.'s adventures in Latcham the previous night.

Universal sympathy was felt for the unfortunate theatrical company that had been left stranded by the bogus manager.

Wibley recovered from the effects of his caning, and he and Harry Wharton soon had a revised version of "Captain Skidd's Revenge" in course of active preparation. This version was to take in most of the incidents in "Pirate Gold," and thus give the actors in that ill-fated piece an opportunity to repeat the best parts.

The "Pirate Gold" company came to Friardale that evening, and Wibley, Harry Wharton & Co., and the principal Removite members of the cast met them in the Grand Hall for rehearsal. Everything went swimmingly, and great things were expected for the performance on Friday night.

Friday night came at last, and by seven o'clock the Grand Hall in the old-fashioned High Street was crowded to its full capacity. Greyfriars fellows turned up in force, from the mighty Sixth down to the small fry of the First and Second, and the villagers responded nobly to the advertisements exhorting them to "roll up in their thousands."

The title of the piece had been altered to "Pirates of the Spanish Main." Loud cheers greeted the lowering of the lights and the first strident bars of the orchestra. This orchestra was composed of the amateur musicians of Greyfriars, culled from the Remove and the Upper Fourth. There were three violins, a one-string fiddle, two tin whistles, a piccolo,

a cornet, a piano, and drums from the Remove Boy Scouts Troop.

The orchestra played up like Trojans, and were quite winded with their efforts by the time the curtain rose.

"Pirates of the Spanish Main" commenced amidst encouraging cheers, and it held the audience in the throes of tense excitement from start to finish. Wibley exceeded himself, and displayed his powers of acting to the full. His old fellow-artists of the "Pirate Gold" Company gave of their best, and the Remove members of the cast performed their parts well. Altogether, the play was a great success. The rafters of the village hall fairly shook under the tumult of cheering that followed the final drop of the curtain.

When the audience had departed, Harry Wharton & Co. and Wibley and the stranded actors remained behind in the hall to take account of the takings.

"Fifty-one pounds eleven-and-six!" said

A VERY SAD CASE.

"Yes, it's a very sad case, ma'am," said the burly man who had overtaken and stopped the rector's wife. "The father is too old and feeble to work, the mother is a chronic invalid and can't leave her bed, the baby has the whooping-cough, and the other nine children are crying for food!"

"How terrible!" exclaimed the rector's wife sympathetically.

"It's shocking, ma'am—shocking!" agreed the man. "But you've not heard the worst yet. They're five pounds behindhand with their rent, and to-day the landlord threatened to turn them all into the street unless someone pays the money."

"I must help them!" cried the good lady, opening her bag. "But may I ask who you are?"

"Certainly," he answered. "I am the landlord!"

Johnny Bull, who performed the role of cashier. "Not a bad haul—eh?"

"Topping!" said Harry Wharton. "That will give the 'Pirate Gold' company three pounds apiece, and leave us enough to cover expenses."

The stranded actors thanked the Removites fervently for the good turn they had rendered them. They then left for Friardale station, en route for their homes, and Harry Wharton & Co. returned to Greyfriars feeling well satisfied with the manner in which events had turned out.

"Well, Wib, how would you like to be like those poor blighters who have been working for practically nothing for months, and have had to return home with hardly any money and with no jobs?" said Harry Wharton, as they strolled along the Friardale Lane together.

Wibley laughed.

"I shouldn't like it at all," he replied. "I realise now that life in a third-rate touring theatrical company is pretty rough at the best of times, but with a rascally manager it's—well, it's not worth living at all. Of course, I still mean to go on the stage one day, but I think I'll wait."

"And not play the giddy ox any more," grinned Bob Cherry. "I hope you stick to it, Wib. Chaps running away from school to go on the stage are a beastly nuisance. I'm blessed if I can see anything attractive in stage life. Give me Greyfriars and lessons and lines and lickings!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused the others.

And William Wibley's voice was as loud as any.

THE END.

(There is another magnificent story of Harry Wharton & Co. next Monday, entitled "The Greyfriars Flood!"—a story that will hold your interest from first to last. Don't miss it, chums!)

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THE BEAUTY CONTEST!

A Special Contribution from the pen of S. Q. I. FIELD.

SOME of you may doubt whether this is a true story. Well, you are entitled to think what you like. I give you the narrative for what it is worth.

To begin at the commencement, as the Irishman said, there was a Beauty Contest over at Courtfield. Not the usual type of Beauty Contest, to which fair maidens flocked, but a Male Beauty Contest!

Billy Bunter declared his intention of competing. Of course, we went into fits of laughter. The idea of the big, fat, ungainly Bunter taking part in a Beauty Contest was altogether too rich!

The fellows in the Common-room simply shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully through his spectacles at the hilarious throng.

"You fellows can cackle!" he growled. "You'll pipe to another tune when I come toddling back to Greyfriars with the first prize! This contest is open to all boys under sixteen——"

"Under sixteen stone?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! It's open to fellows under sixteen years of age, and, without wishing to boast in any way, I reckon I stand a jolly good chance!"

"You'll have to wear a mask, then!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Really, Smithy, you beast——"

"If there's a booby prize offered, Bunter's bound to bag it!" said Tom Brown.

And there was a fresh peal of merriment.

Billy Bunter flourished a fat fist in our faces, and rolled away to the Remove dorm, to change into his Sunday best. He also treated himself to the unusual luxury of a wash.

Having carefully brushed his hair, and curled his eyelashes, and dabbed his lips with some rouge—which he borrowed from the "props" of the Remove Amateur Dramatic Society—Billy Bunter set out for Courtfield.

The fat junior was absent about an hour; and while he was gone we played chess in the common-room, and dismissed the Male Beauty Contest from our minds.

At the end of the hour, Billy Bunter made a dramatic reappearance. He burst into the room like a whirlwind, and his fat face was aglow with excitement.

We were very surprised to see Bunter back so soon. It seemed as if he had barely had time to walk over to Courtfield and back.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Didn't you take part in the Beauty Contest, Bunt?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Was there a booby prize?" asked Tom Brown.

"No, but there was a real prize, and—I say, you fellows—I've won it!"

"Gammon!"

"Draw it mild, Bunter!"

"None of your fairy-tales," growled Harry Wharton, "or we'll give you a jolly good bumping!"

Billy Bunter blinked at us impressively.

"Here is proof, you doubting Thomases!" he said. And then, to our utter amazement, he put his hand in his breast pocket, and produced, with a great flourish, a five-pound note!

For a moment we were struck speechless. As Hurree Singh remarked afterwards, you could have knockfully bowled us over with a feather!

Billy Bunter—the fat, bloated, positively ugly Owl of the Remove—had taken first prize in a Beauty Contest!

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Bolsover major, after a pause. "If I'd thought anything like this was going to happen, I'd have taken part in the contest myself! I'm not an Adonis, exactly, but I reckon I'm a bit better looking than Bunter!"

"I guess this fairly beats the band!" said Fisher T. Fish. "How did you wangle it, Bunter? Did you bribe the judges?"

"Oh, really, Fishy——"

"Did the judging take place in a dark room?" asked Peter Todd.

"Of course not, fathead! It took place in the full glare of electric light."

"Then the only thing I can think of," said Peter, "is that the judges must have been blind! They couldn't possibly have given you the prize on the score of beauty, because you don't possess any!"

"Dry up, Toddy!" said Billy Bunter. "You're only jealous because I've won a fiver, and because I'm the best-looking fellow in the district."

"Br-r-r!" growled Peter.

When Wingate of the Sixth came in to shepherd us up to bed, he found us looking utterly dazed. And Wingate himself looked dazed when he learned what had happened.

"How on earth did you come to win this prize, Bunter?" he asked.

"On my merits, of course!" replied the Owl. "I was far and away the best-looking fellow that took part in the contest. The judges looked at me, and they didn't need to look any further. They were consumed with my beauty, you know—simply eaten up with it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wingate frowned.

"I daresay we shall hear the true facts of the case to-morrow," he said. "Meanwhile, off you go to bed!"

Next day the amazing affair was fully explained.

It appeared that the judges, in this particular Beauty Contest, were a set of bearded old jossers who were accustomed to judging at Baby Shows.

Now as everybody knows, most of these Baby Shows are snares and delusions, because the judges don't go by beauty. They go by weight. The plumpest and heaviest competitor takes the prize. And this was exactly what had happened over at Courtfield.

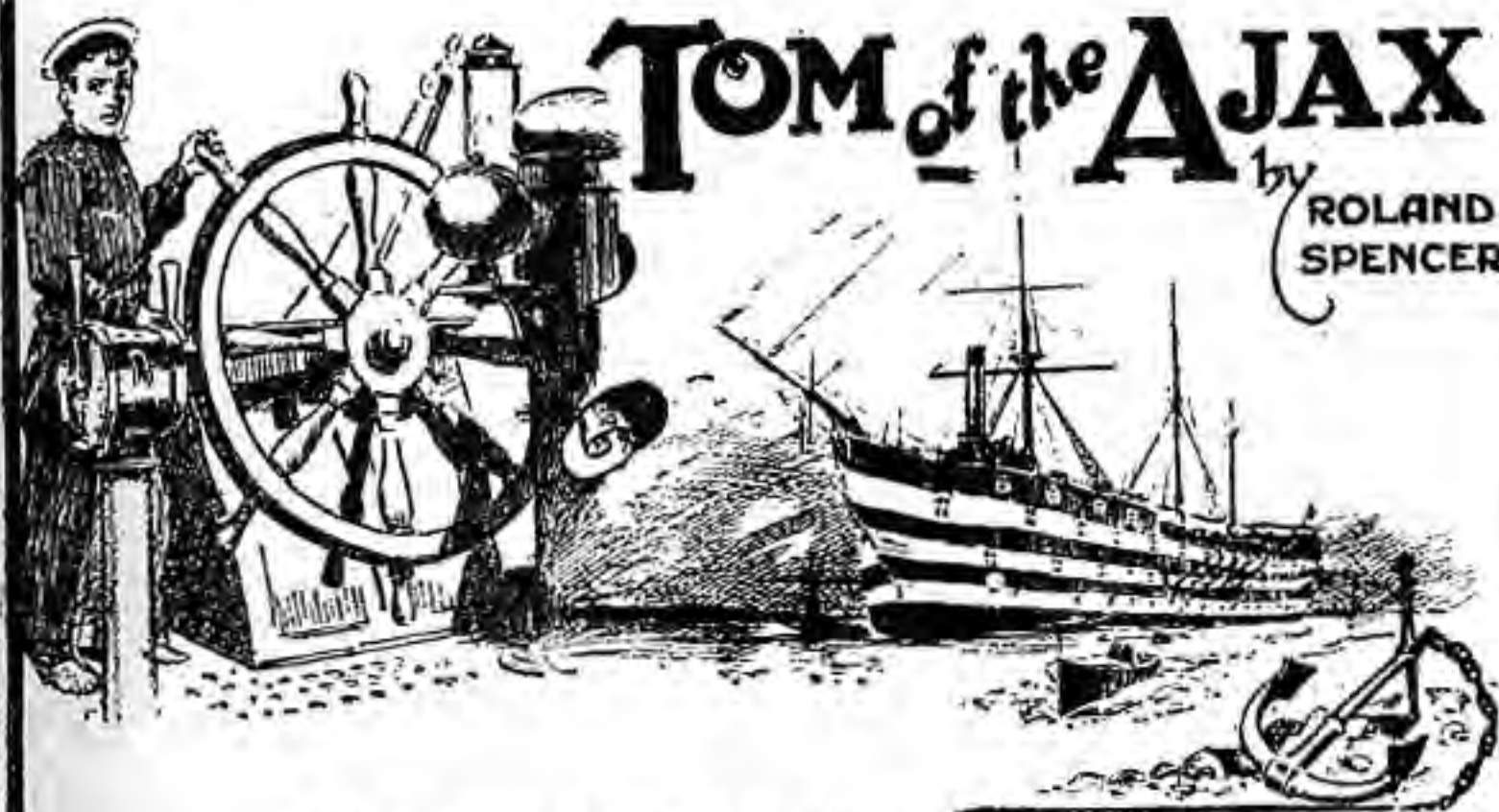
There had been about a dozen competitors, and they had each been dumped into the chair of a weighing-machine.

Billy Bunter had been the last to be weighed, and the whole "box of tricks" had collapsed beneath his huge bulk!

In the circumstances, the judges had had no alternative but to award the prize to our plump porpoise! And Billy Bunter treated himself to some sumptuous feeds during the days that followed, and drank the health of the judges in foaming ginger-pop!

THE END.

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FERRERS LOCKE is a deuce of a time!

With a weary gesture Jim Blakeney tossed aside the evening paper, and glanced in the direction of the clock upon the mantel-piece.

It wanted five minutes to the hour of seven. At six o'clock the world-famous detective had telephoned him, and had fired off a string of questions which had left the young footballer gasping. And without giving any explanation for such a strange procedure, Ferrers Locke had rung off.

"Why the deuce did he want to know about the pass keys?" muttered Blakeney. "I feel hopelessly in the dark, and none the more cheerful for having read the local report of the whole affair."

Needless to say, the "Middleham Mercury" had made the most of the "story" relative to the firing of the Rangers' grand-stand. They had more than hinted that in the interests of the public safety, it was asking for trouble to store petrol-tins in the grand-stand, and had mildly censured Jim Blakeney in their columns for such negligence.

"The dummy of a reporter who scrawled that tosh," exclaimed Blakeney irritably, "ought to make certain of his facts beforehand. Wish to Heaven that I could explain the presence of those confounded petrol-tins myself! I—"

He broke off as a discreet tap sounded at the door of the sitting-room. A moment later Jenkins, the butler, appeared.

"There's a chauffeur to see you, sir!" he announced rather indignantly.

"A chauffeur!"

"Yes, sir," repeated Jenkins scathingly. "A chauffeur! And he's audacious enough to say that he must and will see you. Very important his business is—at least, those were his words. Shall I send him away, sir?"

"Did he not state his name?" asked Blakeney, ignoring the butler's remark.

"No, sir!"

"Hum! Seems a pretty determined customer, apparently," said Blakeney, rather amused at the indignation growing in the face of the aged retainer, who was very punctilious in the matter of callers leaving their names and cards. "I think I'd better see the gentleman!"

"Very well, sir," replied Jenkins, with a covert grimace.

He vacated the room, and appeared again a moment or so later in company with a tall, uniformed man in chauffeur's

garb, who carried his peaked hat and goggles in one hand.

"Mr. Blakeney?" he inquired of the young footballer.

"At your service. What can I do for you?"

"I have a message to give to you, sir,

HOW THE STORY OPENS.

JIM BLAKENEY, the eighteen-year-old centre-forward of the Middleham Rangers, who is a nephew of

TIGER SLEEK, a notorious criminal, who has thus far escaped the dock.

MORNINGTON HARDACRE, the late managing-director of the Rangers, a great friend of Blakeney's, and inventor of a secret wireless ray.

RONALD SWIVELLER, the inside-left of the Rangers, and nephew of Hardacre. Jealous of Blakeney's rapid strides into favour, Swiveller has committed a series of crimes in his endeavour to get Jim Blakeney hounded out of the town. Each attempt to mar Jim's good name, however, has been thwarted by

FERRERS LOCKE, the world-famous detective. The sleuth, by a strange and thrilling series of events, throws in his lot with Blakeney, and becomes his firm friend.

JACK DRAKE, Ferrers Locke's young and capable assistant.

By a cunningly worked plot, evolved by Tiger Slick, and put into practice by Ronald Swiveller, Jim Blakeney is arrested as the murderer of Mornington Hardacre, who is found dead in the library at the Myrtles. Ferrers Locke, however, proves conclusively Blakeney's innocence, and the young footballer is acquitted.

Some time later the will of the late Mornington Hardacre is granted probate, and Jim Blakeney finds that he has inherited the bulk of the murdered man's estate. Much to his dismay, Ronald Swiveller is left only a small annuity of one hundred pounds. Fearful of the grim hand of the law, which still seeks the murdered man's assassin, Swiveller suddenly leaves the neighbourhood to start life anew.

Theodore Kettleton and his fellow-directors of the Rangers Club refuse to work under Jim Blakeney, and the youngster buys them out. A few days later a rival club springs into existence under the patronage of Kettleton. The new eleven contains six ex-members of the Rangers, whose contracts have expired. The popularity of the old club begins to wane, and Kettleton resorts to shady tactics to drag its good name in the mud.

On the strength of his being selected to play for England, Jim Blakeney challenges Kettleton's eleven—the Crusaders—to a match.

At half-time the Rangers are leading by two goals. Suddenly the grand-stand bursts into flames, and a panic ensues. The chief fireman informs Blakeney that the stand has been deliberately fired, and Ferrers Locke takes up the case. By an ingenious collection of clues, the sleuth brings home the crime to Theodore Kettleton, who is at once arrested.

(Now read on.)

which is"—he glanced significantly in the direction of the butler—"highly confidential."

"Jenkins," said the footballer, taking the hint, "you may retire."

The stiff figure of the old retainer relaxed into a bow, and, casting a superior kind of glance at the chauffeur, Jenkins departed.

"Now, my man," commenced Blakeney, who was curious to know his caller's business, "what's this 'highly confidential' message you were talking about?"

For answer the chauffeur drew from his pocket an envelope, and handed it to Blakeney.

"With Mr. Kettleton's compliments, sir," he added.

Blakeney's eyebrows elevated a trifle as he heard the name of his enemy, and, more curious now than before, he hurriedly slit the envelope. The letter it contained was as peculiar as it was unexpected. It ran:

"Dear Mr. Blakeney.—Despite our differences of opinion, I think it best that you should know certain facts which have come to my knowledge in connection with the burning of the grand-stand this afternoon. I have at my home a man who can throw light upon the regrettable affair. Thinking that you would like to interview the fellow—whom I am detaining until you arrive—I have taken the liberty of despatching my chauffeur with this note, and have given him instructions to drive you here as speedily as possible. Say nothing of this to anyone until you have proved things to your own satisfaction.

"THEODORE KETTLETON."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Blakeney, aloud. "What a bit of luck! Can't understand Kettleton veering round like that, though. Perhaps he's not such a bad fellow as I imagine."

He recollected that he was voicing his thoughts aloud, and looked up sharply at the chauffeur. But the man was standing rigidly at attention, his tanned features sphinx-like.

"I'll accompany you in a moment," said Jim Blakeney, rising to his feet. "By the way, you're a new man, aren't you? Don't recollect ever having seen you before."

For one moment a startled look crept into the eyes of the chauffeur, but it was speedily replaced by a respectful smile.

"Yes, sir," he made answer. "As a matter of fact, I only entered Mr. Kettleton's service yesterday."

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"I see." Blakeney made the remark carelessly, as he slipped into his coat and reached for his hat. "I'm ready!"

He followed the chauffeur to where a smart, closed-in limousine was standing in the drive. Still puzzled to account for Kettleton's obvious friendliness, and, moreover, eager to interview the man he had detained, the Rangers' centre-forward entered the limousine and settled himself in the cushions. With a respectful salute the chauffeur closed the door after him and clambered into his seat at the wheel. The nose of the car was swung round, and the engine broke into motion.

Then, its well-tuned motor running smoothly and almost noiselessly, the car headed for Middleham at a speed well above the police regulations. For five minutes or so Jim Blakeney pondered over the strange missive he had received, and then a feeling of drowsiness overtook him.

"This won't do," he reflected. "I must pull myself together."

He put down the tired feeling that had taken possession of him as a consequence of the exertions of a particularly trying day. But as the car proceeded, the feeling of inertia grew and grew until he began to feel alarmed. He tried to sit bolt upright, and found, to his horror, that the movement was denied him. Then, and only then, did he become aware of a sickly, pungent odour that pervaded the interior of the car—an odour that, whilst appealing to his senses, robbed him of the power of action and almost articulation.

Then, through the restful haze that had settled on his brain, one dread thought struck its note.

Drugged!

With a gasping cry that was left half strangled in his parched throat, Blakeney tried to rise. He clutched at the strap of the window as he felt himself falling, and missed his object; his knees gave way, his brain swam round in a dizzy whirl; he faintly remembered striking the floor of the car, and then all was a blank.

The driver of the limousine turned his head and gazed in at the window of the car. He seemed to be satisfied with what he saw, for a grunt of triumph escaped his thin lips. Then, detaching a small cylinder from the speaking-tube of the car, and plugging the mouthpiece of the latter with a portion of cotton-wool, he

settled down at the wheel and accelerated his engine. Inside five minutes the limousine was leaving behind the twinkling lights of Middleham, and was heading for the open country.

And Jim Blakeney, sprawled in an inert heap on the floor of the car, was breathing stertorously, his subconscious brain conjuring up a fearsome picture of Tiger Sleek—the product of his drug-created sleep.

The Alternative!

WHEN Jim Blakeney recovered consciousness it was to find himself securely bound hand and foot to a chair, in a well-lighted and cosily-appointed room. He blinked about him, and winced as a sharp pain shot through his brain. The furniture of the room became more distinct as the haze cleared gradually from his head, and the young footballer began to gaze about him with interest.

He struggled to free himself of his bonds, but it was a futile effort. The cords only bit deeper into his ankles and arms. From a distance away came the muffled sound of voices, and one upraised above the others caused the footballer to shiver involuntarily, for he recognised the dominating tones of Tiger Sleek!

"The scoundrel!" he breathed, finding it difficult to frame the words on account of his parched throat. "I walked into a trap!"

In what part of the world the house in which he was now a prisoner was situated he had not the faintest idea. He was endeavouring to recall the events which had culminated in his pitching to the floor of the limousine, when the door of the room suddenly opened and the familiar and dreaded figure of Tiger Sleek strode into the room. At his heels trooped Bill Stubbins, and the man who had posed as Kettleton's chauffeur.

"So, my bantam," growled the Tiger fiendishly, "you have come round, eh?"

"What's the game?" demanded Blakeney. "Why have you kidnapped me like this, Tiger?"

"Your sharpness of mind appears to be somewhat impaired, sonny!" hissed the Tiger, in his sibilant voice. "Surely you can guess why I have taken the trouble to have you brought here?"

The young footballer did not reply. In

his heart of hearts he knew the reason of his capture. But he confined his answer to a defiant glare that brought an angry glint to the expressive eyes of his rascally uncle.

"This time, my buck," went on the master-criminal, "there will be no mistake. Savvy? I have come to the end of my patience, Jim. I want the Wireless Ray. I'm going to have that Wireless Ray!"

"You'll never get it from me!" retorted Blakeney defiantly. "You're a scoundrel and a liar, Tiger! You and I ceased to have anything to do with each other months ago!"

"That's where you make a mistake, my son!" flashed the rogue, with a curl of the lip. "The Tiger never forgets his dear relations—and you've been 'dear' in all conscience. But listen here, unless you consent to deliver up to me the plans and specifications of Hardacre's Wireless Ray within forty-eight hours, you'll never play in the International match against Scotland!"

"Then I must become resigned to my fate," returned Jim philosophically. "You see, Tiger, no mention was made of the Ray in Mornington Hardacre's will, and I have never discovered any trace of it in the Myrtles. How now?"

"You lie! You cunning dog, you lie!" rapped the Tiger furiously. "But you will change your tune, I'll wager! More obstinate folk than you have learned to change their ways and moods under Sleek's Slick Treatment. You smile? But there's nothing funny in what I say, my lad. Not only will you be conspicuous by your absence in the coming International match, if you remain obstinate, but you will also suddenly disappear from mortal ken! Then, once again, the Myrtles and all that therein lies will change hands."

"I follow you, you scoundrel!" said Jim. "But don't for one moment imagine that the property would come to the next-of-kin, Tiger. Ha, ha! You start—"

"Then you've made a will already, eh?"

"Nothing of the kind, uncle!" retorted Jim. "But you seem to forget that the next-of-kin is wanted by the police on several charges—suspected murder of Mornington Hardacre, for instance."

Tiger Sleek smiled easily.

"Have no fear, Jim," he grunted. "I am innocent of that charge, despite the paltry evidence the police hold of my share in the plot to kill Hardacre."

"Then why did you fly from Middleham?"

"It suited my plans!" rapped the rascal gruffly.

"There is still another charge—almost as bad," continued Blakeney. "What of your attempt on the life of Ferrer's Locke?"

"Ah!" The exclamation forced itself between Sleek's yellow teeth, and an ugly scowl overspread his bloated features. "Ferrer's Locke! He would have the very deuce to prove anything. But he'll never live to place me in the dock," added the master-criminal. "It's going to be a fight to the death between us—and your dear, respected uncle is going to prove the victor!"

"Big words, uncle," smiled Jim. "I'm not given to wagering, but I'll bet you a level hundred that you lose!"

"Cub!" Sleek strode forward and dealt his nephew a savage blow upon the cheek. "You've said enough—on that subject, at any rate!" he hissed. "But we're wandering from the point. The Wireless Ray we were talking about. I have given you forty-eight hours to decide. If at the end of that time you still refuse to deliver the plans into my

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hands you will make a mysterious exit from this world! And the manner of your passing, my young bantam, will not be sudden or merciful—it will be prolonged."

"Your threats do not frighten me," returned Blakeney contemptuously. "But I repeat—I know nothing of the Wireless Ray. It has never been found!"

"You lie! You—"

Tiger Sleek's heated denunciation trailed off. He felt, despite the uneasiness it caused him, that Jim was speaking the truth.

"You ought to know me better, Tiger," grinned Blakeney. "But let me tell you this; if I had the secret of the Wireless Ray in my keeping I would never barter it for what you offer me!"

"Not even for your life, eh?"

"No; not for that even," said Jim stoutly. "No foreign power should have what by right should be offered to Britain first. You're not only a scoundrel, Tiger, you're a traitor to your country!"

"Enough!" snapped the scoundrel, his heavy eyebrows coming together in grotesque fashion. "You sing very high for a boy; perhaps you'll change your note when you have been left for forty-eight hours' reflection without any food or drink!"

"Bah! I've already said your threats have no terrors for me!"

"We shall see—we shall see!" hissed the master-criminal, with a leer. "I want the Wireless Ray, and I've set my heart on getting it. If, as you say—and I'm rather inclined to believe you now—you have not found any trace of the Ray, you must allow one of my men to stay at the Myrtles for a short period, and guarantee his safety whilst he is hunting for its secret hiding-place. Perhaps I'll stay with you myself—"

"And perhaps you won't!" exclaimed Jim. "I'd hand you over to the first policeman I came across!"

"Very well. We'll come for your answer in forty-eight hours!" snapped the Tiger. "Think it over carefully; think what you have to lose. The honour of playing for England—he smiled cynically—"half a million of money, and lastly your life! A lot at stake, my son. Think it over!"

"My answer will be just the same then as now!" flashed the footballer. "You'll never have the Ray; you'll never set foot in the Myrtles, Tiger, so long as I am alive!"

Sleek's eyes narrowed, and he made a stride towards his bound captive. But with an obvious effort he managed to control the passion that consumed him and withdrew. The cunning smile that came to his bloated face, however, was more terrifying than any wild rage could convey—it was sinister, repulsive, and cruel.

"Very well," he said calmly. "Stubbins—the gag?"

"Right-ho, chief!"

The burly figure of Bill Stubbins, the Tiger's right-hand man, moved forward. His hand slid into his pocket, to emerge a moment later with a cruel, wooden gag, held in place by a dirty handkerchief.

Jim Blakeney struggled violently to prevent the rogue from fixing the gag, but Bill Stubbins did not boast the same temperament as his chief. After two ineffectual attempts to tie the gag, he brought his massive fist full into the young footballer's unprotected face, and swore viciously.

"Perhaps you'll take it quietly now!"

But Jim Blakeney was past all hearing of the words. The sickening blow had robbed him of his senses, and with a low moan his head fell forward on his chest.

It was an easy matter then to fix the gag, and Bill Stubbins made certain of his task by tying the dirty handkerchief extra tight.

"That will do, Stubbins," grated the Tiger. "He's safe enough now—leave him to it!"

And with that callous remark the master-criminal beckoned to his associates to follow him. The key was turned in the lock, and the trio trooped downstairs. Five minutes later they were imbibing alcoholic liquor not wisely but too well, whilst their captive in the room above was conscious of the steady ticking of the clock, already commencing to eat up in its ravenous and unremitting jaws the forty-eight hours offered him in which to reflect. But as each hour ticked by remorselessly Jim's resolve only gained in strength. Come what may, he would not consent to the Tiger's proposals.

On the Trail!

"WHERE'S your master, Jenkins?"
Ferrers Locke casually asked the question as he entered the sitting-room of the Myrtles



With a gasping cry that was left half-strangled in his throat, Jim Blakeney tried to rise. He clutched at the strap of the window as he felt himself falling, and missed his object. His knees gave way, his head swam; he faintly remembered striking the floor of the cab, and then all was a blank.
(See page 22.)

and made himself comfortable in an arm-chair.

Jenkins, the butler, stood by attentively.

"He's gone out, Mr. Locke. Left here half an hour ago!"

"Indeed! Then I'll wait until he returns before I have dinner," said the sleuth, pulling out his favourite briar.

"He left no message, I suppose?"

"No, sir," replied the old retainer gravely. "A chauffeur called on him with a note half an hour ago, and the master accompanied the man in his car to—"

Jenkins blushed and began to stutter.

"Accompanied him where?" asked the detective impatiently, with a sharp look at the butler.

"To Mr. Kettleton's, sir," stammered the servant. "I—I— He left the note

on the table, sir, and—and I took the liberty of reading it!"

"To Kettleton's!" exclaimed the sleuth, sitting bolt upright. "Did you say Kettleton's, Jenkins?"

"Ye-yes, sir. Here's the note, sir!"

Ferrers Locke was on his feet now, a strange, perplexed expression on his intellectual features.

"Quick, man!" he rapped. "Let me have a look at that note. Kettleton's," he added, half to himself. "Strange!"

He almost snatched the note from Jenkins' shaking hand, and eagerly began to scan it. Then he whistled blankly, and peered at the note again.

"What was the chauffeur like, Jenkins?" he asked quickly. "You saw him, I suppose?"

"Yes, Mr. Locke. He was a tall, dark-skinned young man dressed in a brown uniform. And if I might say so, sir, he was extremely rude!"

"Quite, quite!" interrupted the sleuth impatiently. "Tall, eh? My word, this looks fishy. This note never came from Kettleton," he added, unconsciously talking aloud.

"Did it not, sir?" ventured the amazed butler. "It's signed by him, sir!"

"Order the car!" rapped the sleuth, almost pushing the butler from the room. "Don't stand there gaping like a fish out of water. Something has happened to your master. Some roguery is afoot! Stir yourself!"

"Mercy me!" gasped the butler, in horror. "The car, the car—yes, Mr. Locke, certainly, Mr. Locke! Mercy me!"

In a state of great agitation Jenkins shuffled out of the room and sought the chauffeur. Meantime Ferrers Locke paced up and down the carpeted floor again and again. It was obvious to him that the letter was a forgery, for he had been with Kettleton himself three-quarters of an hour ago—the time at which the message would have been written and despatched had it come from Kettleton. Then again the sleuth had interviewed the chauffeur before he had visited Kettleton. And the chauffeur was not a tall man. On the contrary, he was a small man, and wore a blue uniform, not a brown one. To make assurance doubly sure, the sleuth reached for the telephone and called up Kettleton's number. Of the maid that answered the phone he inquired if Jim Blakeney were at the house, and as he had expected, received a reply in the negative.

"Who the deuce is responsible for this?" muttered Locke anxiously, gazing at the message which had lured Blakeney from the house.

"Responsible for what, guv'nor?"

It was Jack Drake's cheerful voice that asked the question. The detective's young assistant stood framed in the doorway of the sitting-room regarding his master with a cheery grin.

"Come here, my lad!" said the sleuth.

Briefly, and relating the facts as he knew them, Ferrers Locke acquainted Jack Drake of the forged letter, and Jim Blakeney's absence. The boy's face lighted up with astonishment and incredulity as his beloved chief explained.

"Then you really think that Jim's been kidnapped?" he gasped.

"There's no other construction to place upon his absence, I am afraid, my lad," returned Locke gravely. "The message is obviously a forgery—I can't help thinking the worst. But we must get on the trail, Jack. Remember, Jim's due to play in the International match in three days' time!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Drake eagerly. "I wonder if it's a case of jealousy, guv'nor? I wonder if some rival has got Jim into

his hands with the idea of preventing him playing for England?"

"Might be something in that," muttered the sleuth thoughtfully. "There are so many fields to explore, though," he added, with a grimace. "For instance, we've not heard or seen the last of the Tiger, I'm certain. Ronald Swiveller, too, has dropped into the background for the time being, and, lastly, there's Kettleton's precious pack of directors all up in arms against Blakeney. Now, which trail is the most likely one?"

"Beats me, gov'nor," reflected Drake, scratching his head by way of inspiration. "We've never cleared up the murder of Mornington Hardacre yet—perhaps the parties concerned in that matter have the biggest grudge against Jim."

"Maybe you're right," said Locke. "The person who has in his possession the last cheque Hardacre ever made out and signed, has been sensible enough to refrain from cashing it. Till that cheque is cashed, I am afraid the mysterious murder of Mornington Hardacre will add yet another crime to the long list of those unsolved in the police records. Still, the Tiger, if you remember rightly, was implicated in the affair. Perhaps it would be wise for me to get on his track."

"And what about me, gov'nor? Where do I come in?"

"You had better hunt up Ronald Swiveller, my lad. I'll run along to Inspector Motley and ask him to keep an eye on Kettleton's co-directors; but somehow or other I don't imagine they are concerned in this affair now that Kettleton is in safe keeping."

To Jack Drake, who had been on a visit to London that day, the exciting train of events of the afternoon culminating in the arrest of Theodore Kettleton, came as a great surprise. He whistled in amazement as his beloved chief unfolded the story.

"By Jove, gov'nor!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "You're a wonder, and no mistake! Middleham seems to be a hot-bed of crime, doesn't it?"

"It certainly would appear so, my lad," smiled the sleuth faintly. "But enough of this idle chatter—we are wasting time, and the car is here."

Grabbing his coat and hat, Ferrers Locke entered the car which had pulled up in the drive, and intimated to the chauffeur that he would not require his services. With a few hurried instructions to Jack Drake, who was to follow a trail in another direction, and a few words of conversation with the excited Jenkins, which concerned a description of the car in which Jim Blakeney had been carried away, the sleuth slipped in the gears and drove off.

Jack Drake stood staring after the receding rear light until it was lost from view altogether by a bend in the road. Then he shook his head.

"They might well refer to Jim Blakeney as a marked man," he muttered. "Tain't all milk and honey being a millionaire and a clever footballer, not forgetting the possession of an uncle like Tiger Sleek thrown in. My hat! Things have hummed since we came to Middleham! I wonder what the end of it will be?"

But Ferrers Locke's young and capable assistant did not waste much time in uncertain speculation. He was essentially a lad of action. In less than five minutes after his chief had taken the trail, Jack Drake, his overcoat pockets bulging with a packet of sandwiches specially prepared for him by the thoughtful Jenkins, was interviewing Mrs. Buttrix—Ronald Swiveller's one-time landlady.

By great good fortune the buxom THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 832.

woman took a fancy to the irrepressible detective's assistant. She invited him into the sitting-room and bade him make himself at home.

"And so you are a friend of Master Ronald, eh?"

"Well—er—not exactly a friend," replied Drake, with a smile. "But he and I are very interested in each other, ma'am."

"I'm so glad!" beamed the good lady. "You look a nice straight kind of young man, and, between you and me, Master Ronald is inclined to fly too high."

She accompanied the remark by an eloquent gesture of the hands which deplored Swiveller's shortcomings. "He would do better to have friends like you about him."

"You are very kind, ma'am," replied Drake. "I wonder if you could tell me where he is? The last time I heard from him he was in—"

"Lattrey!" chimed in Mrs. Buttrix.

"Yes, that's the place," returned the young detective, taking his cue. "I've mislaid his address."

"I can give it you," smiled Mrs. Buttrix goodnaturedly. "Master Ronald owed me a small amount of money, and he despatched it to me last week. Didn't say much about himself. In fact, from his letter, I gathered that things were not going too well with him. I don't think he's ever got over the shock of his uncle's death."

"Or the rotten way he was treated in the will either," interpolated Drake, with a view to enlisting the further sympathy of the talkative woman.

"Ah, me," sighed Mrs. Buttrix, "I must confess that the will surprised me."

In this strain she chattered on for five minutes or so, much to Jack Drake's



In the figure of the man standing beneath the lamp-post Jack Drake recognised Turnley, the driver of the taxi, who, it had been proved, was a member of the Tiger's gang. (See page 25.)

concealed annoyance. But at last she produced the address from which Ronald Swiveller had last written and gave it to Ferrers Locke's young assistant. With the address safely stowed in his notebook, Drake suddenly remembered that he had an important engagement, and, murmuring his apologies at having to depart, spiced well with compliments and thanks for Mrs. Buttrix's special benefit, he bowed himself out, as it were.

Once in the main road, a few hundred yards away from the house which sheltered the talkative Mrs. Buttrix, Drake stopped beneath a lamp-post and drew out his notebook.

"What a stroke of luck!" he exclaimed. "That woman fairly made me tired with her endless chatter, but it was worth it, after all. So, Mr. Ronald Swiveller, you and I are to meet again—at Lattrey, eh? Let me see—that's about twenty miles from here!"

Replacing his notebook in his pocket, Jack Drake sped hot-foot for the railway station, and in less than five minutes was seated comfortably in a first-class compartment en route for the town of Lattrey.

The Open Door!

"LATTREY!" The voice of the guard aroused Jack Drake from the doze he had fallen into, as the train came to a standstill. Pulling his coat about him, for the night was bitterly cold, the young detective stepped briskly out of the station and chartered a taxi to take him to the address furnished by Mrs. Buttrix. Twenty minutes later the taxi drew up to the kerb with a grinding of brakes, and the driver jerked his thumb in the direction of a house on the right.

"Ere you are, gov'nor!" Jack Drake alighted and paid off the cabby. Now that he had arrived at Swiveller's address, he was undecided which course to pursue—to knock boldly at the door and ask to see Swiveller, or hang about in the vicinity for Swiveller to show himself. He decided on the former.

With all the assurance in the world, he walked up the steps of the house and rapped the knocker of the door. It was opened by a frail, middle-aged woman, who appeared to be a trifle hard of hearing.

"What did you say, young gentleman?" she croaked.

"I said does Mr. Ronald Swiveller live here?"

"Ah! Swiveller—Mr. Swiveller! Friend of his? Ah! Yes, he moved from here yesterday, sir!"

Jack Drake bit his lip to stifle the exclamation of annoyance that rose in his throat.

"Moved? Do you know where he's gone?"

The woman elevated her ear for a repetition of the query.

"Do you know where he's gone?" howled Drake.

The woman at the door shook her head negatively.

"Can't tell yer that, sir," she croaked, "cos I don't know meself, see?"

It was useless wasting further time in conversation with the afflicted woman, who still clung to the door as though fearing Drake would force his way in. Apart from that, Jack had a suspicion that he was talking to someone insane, and in consequence he began to feel creepy. Murmuring his thanks, he backed away and stood hesitating in the street below.

"Here's a fine go," he reflected. "Just as the scent was getting warm,

too. I wonder if I could find Swiveller in one of the taverns; that used to be one of his Middleham habits, and the leopard doesn't change his spots."

He set off at a rapid pace towards a row of lights in the distance which betokened the centre of the town. He had not traversed more than a quarter of a mile when he saw a figure beneath the street lamp a few yards in front of him. Being an observant type of lad, Drake gave the man a cursory glance, and then passed on without being noticed.

But, ten yards further on, Drake gave vent to a whistle of astonishment. For in the figure of the man beneath the street lamp he had recognised Turnley, the driver of the taxi, who, it had been proved, was a member of Tiger Sleek's gang.

"What the deuce is he doing here?" muttered Drake. "Guess I'll keep my peepers on him. I've lost the trail of Swiveller, but I might achieve my object with this scurvy-looking rascal. I'll—"

He broke off and dodged back into the shadows as he perceived the man walking towards him. The footsteps rattled by, and Drake followed in their wake at a distance of twenty yards. When the man in front stopped Locke's assistant stopped also. When the Tiger's confederate entered the public bar of a tavern Drake entered the saloon next to it and watched his quarry over the counter.

The man left the tavern after a sojourn of half an hour, and Drake did likewise. Thus the chase went on. Drake's blood was thrilling with excitement now. Inwardly he felt he was on the verge of a great discovery. Up one street and down another went the Tiger's confederate, apparently unaware of the fact that he was being shadowed. And then, to Drake's astonishment, his quarry headed for a neighbourhood that belonged without a doubt to the "upper class."

"Hallo," muttered the young detective, "what's the game?"

Scarcely able to believe his eyes, Locke's young assistant saw his quarry enter the drive of a corner house—the most distinguished-looking house in the whole of the neighbourhood. Quickening his steps, Drake followed and was just in time to see the Tiger's confederate key himself into the place. From a point of vantage on the opposite side of the road Drake watched the house for about ten minutes. A good strong wind had sprung up, and it made eerie music as it whistled through the trees.

Suddenly his attention was drawn to the front door of the house he was watching. A fitful gust of wind had swept against it, and, to Drake's astonishment, it now appeared open.

"Hallo," exclaimed the lad, "here's luck, if you like! He didn't close the door. Guess I'll have a look round without being asked. It would be a feather in my cap if I trailed the Tiger to his stronghold unaided."

With this reflection Jack Drake noiselessly and swiftly crossed the road and darted behind a friendly bush which grew opposite the gateway of the house that concerned him. There he waited, his heart beating a trifle faster than usual, for a few seconds. But, save for the moaning of the wind as it whistled through the trees, all was still.

Then, taking his courage in both hands, Locke's young assistant crept forward and reached the door of the house. It gave to his touch without a sound. Every nerve tautened in the lad's body as he stood within the hallway of the house, listening, listening. A flickering light that hung pendant-

TRAPPED!



As Jack Drake swung open the door he saw framed in the aperture two massive figures, each pointing a revolver at his head. "Hands up!" Like a cornered rat Locke's young assistant gazed about him. But there was no avenue of escape. Slowly he stretched his hands aloft. "Nicely done!" hissed the Tiger, from the stairs. (See page 26.)

fashion in the long and narrow hall revealed a winding flight of stairs. To right and left of him were two doors.

Treading softly over the carpeted hall, Jack Drake reached the foremost door, and listened intently. But no sound of life reached him from the room beyond. He repeated the experiment at the other door, and the result was the same. Then suddenly, as he paused undecided, there echoed out a coarse guffaw from the floor above him.

"Upstairs it is," muttered the young sleuth. "Nothing doing down here."

With more caution than he had hitherto practised, the lad mounted the winding staircase, testing each stair as he climbed to make certain that it did not creak under his weight. He reached the bend in the staircase without mishap, and saw, to his great delight, a room directly in front of him, from which a beam of light and the sounds of animated conversation proceeded. More still, he perceived that the door was slightly ajar.

"I'm in luck, and no mistake," reflected Locke's intrepid assistant. "Can't hear much from here—reckon I'll move

a bit nearer. If there's any trouble I shall be able to hop it quick down these stairs again and out into the street."

With that comforting thought, Drake moved noiselessly on to the landing, taking his bearings as he went in case of surprise. Next to the room from which the beam of light and the sound of voices emanated he observed another door. The key was in the lock, and, with scarcely a sound, the lad turned it and pocketed the key.

"Nothing to fear from that direction," he reflected. "Now for it."

Another two strides forward and he had reached the open door. Now he could hear the conversation plainly.

"Easy as falling off the proverbial log!" came the unmistakable tones of the man he had followed. "We are certain to find it, Tiger!"

Every nerve in Jack Drake's body thrilled as he heard the name of the master-criminal.

The Tiger!

Locke's young assistant could have hugged himself with delight. The

Tiger! He would have something to report to his beloved chief, after all. In his eagerness to catch the ensuing words Drake leaned forward still further. As he did so his shadow was thrown against the interior wall of the room, and simultaneous with its appearance the sinister voice of the Tiger rang out:

"Don't stand outside, Drake! Come right in!"

As the dreaded voice of the master-criminal fell upon the watcher's ears Drake seemed momentarily paralysed. His jaw dropped, and a cold shiver ran down his spine. Then, recollecting the nature of the man he had traced to his rendezvous, and forced on by the fear that his life would not be worth a moment's purchase should he be captured, Drake darted back.

But he had not moved a couple of paces when the bulky figure of Bill Stubbins loomed up in front of him. Even at that moment, Drake saw, to his astonishment, that the door of the room which he had previously locked, and the key of which he had in his pocket, was now open.

He was caught in a trap. Before him was the grinning, muscular man who was the Tiger's first lieutenant; behind him was the chief himself, perhaps the whole of the gang. Drake took the easiest line of resistance. With a yell, he flung himself at the burly figure of Bill Stubbins, and dashed his fist full in the rascal's face. Stubbins evidently had not expected such violent resistance, for he reeled under the blow, tottered unsteadily on the edge of the landing, and then crashed to the stairs. In an instant Locke's assistant had jumped over his prostrate body, and was racing for the door at the end of the hall below. He reached it without mishap, fierce yells from above floating after him.

"Locked!"

With a choking cry, Drake tugged at

the latch of the front door—the door he had left ajar. But the latch did not budge. With a wild glance over his shoulder, the lad saw the grinning face of the notorious Tiger Sleek peering at him at the top of the stairs. At the scoundrel's back was the chauffeur, whom Drake had followed, and the burly Bill Stubbins. The latter was ruefully caressing his damaged face.

All this Drake took in in an instant. Next, he had darted for the foremost door, with the idea of making his exit through the windows which he knew must lay beyond. But again, to his growing horror, he found that the door was locked.

The Tiger and his confederates were descending the stairs, in no apparent hurry, it seemed, to capture the terror-stricken lad below. The whole scene reminded Drake, as he gazed wildly about him, of the story of the cat and the mouse. They were playing with him. But there was hope yet; he had not tried the door to his left. He darted towards it, and his heart leaped joyfully as the handle gave to his touch; but his satisfaction was only momentarily. For as he swung open the door he saw framed in the aperture two massive figures, each pointing a revolver at his head.

"Put them up!"

The taller of the two rapped out the command and advanced a pace. The light from the swinging lamp in the hall glinted evilly on the shining revolver, and revealed a face that was almost as sinister and repulsive as Tiger Sleek's.

"Up with your hands! Do you hear?"

With a furtive look to right and left of him, like a trapped animal, his pulse beating far above the normal, Jack Drake slowly stretched his hands aloft.

And from the Tiger sounded a grating laugh that chilled the very blood in Drake's bones.

"Nicely done!" hissed the master-criminal sibilantly. "Bring him upstairs. He can join his dear friend Blakeney."

Two of the gang advanced and laid rough hands on the slim young figure of Ferrers Locke's assistant. He was half-dragged, half-carried up the stairs, and forced into the room outside which he had listened a few moments before in exultation.

To his surprise, he saw that the room was cosily and costly furnished. Great armchairs and a luxurious settee filled the major portion of the room. But Jack Drake had little time to study his surroundings. He was sent reeling to the further wall by a vicious shove from behind. When he had scrambled to his feet he saw the hideous faces of the gang peering at him, predominant among them that of Tiger Sleek himself.

"You thought you were mighty clever, my lad," grated the Tiger. "Little did you think that the chap you trailed here was aware of your identity when you passed him by the lamp-post nearly an hour ago!"

"You mean that I walked into a trap deliberately laid for me—eh?" flashed Drake, to whom the revelation came as a surprise—an unpleasant surprise at that.

"You've guessed correctly, my son," grinned the chief. "The door was left open for your benefit. I banked on the chance of your entering the house, and I won!"

"Well, now that you have me in your power," said Drake defiantly, "what do you intend to do with me?"

"That is a question which can only be answered by yourself," said Sleek.

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, my lad," came the hissing tones of the Tiger. "Your life is in my hands. Unless you do as I request it will pay forfeit!"

"And what do you want me to do?"



Jack Drake proved as unwilling to be gagged as Jim Blakeney had been, and his obstinacy met with the same reward. A gnarled fist was dashed into his face, well-nigh rendering him unconscious. (See page 27.)

"Lure your master—Ferrers Locke—to this place. I will leave it to you to arrange the method. But Ferrers Locke must come here—must come! Do you understand?"

"And what if he does come?" asked Drake, who had no intention of complying with the rascal's request. "What then?"

"You can leave that to me," growled Sleek. "I have an account to settle with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

To the gang's astonishment, and to the Tiger's anger, Jack Drake burst out laughing.

"That's a rare joke!" he exclaimed. "I can see myself luring Ferrers Locke into your hands, you villain!"

"Then you will die!" roared the master-criminal, now beside himself with rage. "Die—you understand? You will join your obstinate friend, Jim Blakeney."

"I shall be pleased to meet Jim again," replied Drake, unperturbed by the other's outburst.

"Take him away! Treat him the same as the other!" hissed the Tiger. "These lads are obstinate. Perhaps, in time, they will both be amenable to reason."

"Don't kid yourself, Tiger!" said Drake, as he was caught by several pairs of strong hands and hurried out of the room. "My answer now is the same as it will be at any future date. Ferrers Locke is on your track. Do your worst!"

The famous detective's young assistant was rendered incapable of further speech by the simple expedient of a rough hand being clapped over his mouth. Then, struggling fiercely, he was carried up

another flight of stairs and dumped on the landing.

"Open the blessed door!" growled Bill Stubbins.

One of the party obeyed the command, and switched on the electric light in the



JACK DRAKE.

room beyond. The sudden glare temporarily blinded Jack Drake, but when at length his eyes became accustomed to the light, he darted back in surprise. At the far end of the room, gagged and bound to a chair, was the familiar face and figure of Jim Blakeney. The footballer commenced to struggle in his bonds, and

a low gurgling sound came from his throat as he recognised the new arrival.

"Ain't he pleased to see yer," grinned Bill Stubbins. "Hark at 'im—a-tryin' to talk to yer; saying 'how de do!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the gang.

"You curs!" exclaimed Drake, endeavouring to shake off his captors. "You villains!"

The scoundrels laughed still more at the lad's indignant rage, and then the burly Stubbins made a gesture of the hand. Instantly the detective's young assistant was lifted from his feet and carried to a chair corresponding with that in which Jim Blakeney sat. Despite his fierce struggles Drake was bound tightly to the arms and legs of the chair in less than three minutes. That task accomplished, one of the party commenced to gag him. Drake proved as unwilling to submit to this treatment as Jim Blakeney had been on a former occasion, and his obstinacy met with the same result. A gnarled fist was dashed into his face, well-nigh rendering him unconscious, and by the time his senses fully returned the gag was fixed. With burning eyes Locke's young assistant faced his captors, and if looks could have killed the whole pack of them would have expired on the spot.

"Vicious little brat, ain't 'e?" growled Bill Stubbins. "Perhaps a night or two in 'ere without any food or drink will tame 'im. Come on, boys!"

The "boys" trooped out of the room, and Stubbins, who brought up the rear, switched off the electric light and locked the door.

The two prisoners listened to the sounds of their captors' footsteps until they died away altogether. Then,

(Continued on the next page.)

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A MARKED MAN!

—(Continued from previous page.)

although it was a hopeless effort, they strove to pierce the inky blackness that reigned around them on all sides to see each other's face.

Both tried to speak, and both could only succeed in making a weird jumble of grunts that were as meaningless as they were painful to utter. For quite three hours Drake and Jim Blakeney listened to the deadly monotonous ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, and then their heads began to droop on their chests. But even sleep was denied them, for a cruel cramp began to shoot through



"TIGER" SLEEK.

their limbs, and both awoke at almost the same instant.

Tick-tock, tick-tock!

The noise of the clock became maddening. It seemed to burn its deadly monotonous chant right into their brains. The taming process the Tiger had spoken of was beginning to bear fruit. By six o'clock the following morning two weary, sleepy and hungry young men were ready almost to do anything he might suggest if they could, in return be granted freedom—and sleep. Almost willing—for although the flesh was ravenous in its demands the spirit still burned brightly in two stout hearts.

Tick-tock, tick-tock!

(Jack Drake and Jim Blakeney are in the power of the notorious criminal Tiger Sleek, but Ferrers Locke, the wizard detective, is on the trail. Will he reach his two young friends in time? Look out for next Monday's fine instalment, boys.)

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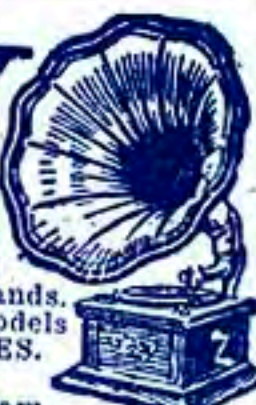
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