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See Page 4, Boys!

No. 860. Vol. XXVI.

Week Ending August 2nd, 1924.

The Magnet 2^d

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Complete School Stories.

EVERY
MONDAY.



WAITING FOR THEIR CAPTAIN!

WHO LOCKED HARRY WHARTON IN THE BOX-ROOM?

(See this week's grand story of the Greyfriars chums, inside.)



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums. Write to him when you are in trouble or need advice. A stamped and addressed envelope will ensure a speedy reply. Letters should be addressed "The Editor," THE MAGNET LIBRARY, The Amalgamated Press (1922), Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

"TRUE-BLUE!"

By Frank Richards!

THERE is an exceptionally strong story on the programme for next Monday, my chums, showing your favourite author at his best. A new boy comes into the Remove and loses no time in showing himself to be an excellent cricketer. What better than that he should play in the Remove cricket eleven?

Despite the newcomer's apparent honesty and sincerity, there is an elusive something about him which certain members of the Remove do not cotton on to. Mystery will always find plenty of curiosity-mongers at Greyfriars well on its track. Bunter does not think too highly of the new boy—a state of mind brought about, no doubt, by Thornton's "meanness" in refusing to cash a postal-order in advance. But that counts for little. Even the hard-headed Bounder thinks that there is something "fishy" about Thornton, while Wharton, although reposing great faith in the new addition to the cricket eleven, is conscious that Thornton has a secret to keep.

APPEARANCES AGAINST HIM!

With such a complex character at Greyfriars it is quite on the cards to expect Harold Skinner endeavouring to solve the mystery. But the cad of the Remove is prompted to take the matter in hand from motives of revenge. He falls foul of Thornton from the beginning, and we see the crafty Skinner poking his thin nose into business that does not concern him. He scores the first point by exposing Thornton as the thief who "lifted" certain articles of value whilst a cricket match was in progress, for the new boy is captured after he has broken bounds at night, and the whole of the plunder is found upon his person. Despite this damning evidence, Thornton protests his innocence. But protestations prove futile with the angry Removites.

They decide to punish him after their own fashion, and he is sentenced to

RUN THE GAUNTLET!

Even then Thornton's spirit does not cave in. He takes the blows rained upon him with Spartan-like fortitude, and afterwards enlists the friendship of Harry Wharton himself, who openly declares the new boy's innocence. Thence on the story takes a rare turn, under the skilful pen of Frank Richards. There is an unexpected ending, as you might guess, otherwise the title of this grand yarn would not be

"TRUE-BLUE!"

Just a few words concerning our simple competition. At present it is going great guns. Those ripping "Royal Enfield" Bicycles are providing a popular attraction. Don't be disheartened, chums, if you fail to win one of these bikes at the first time of asking. Emulate the deeds of the worthy spider who performed his task before a kingly audience in Robert Bruce and "Try, Try, Try Again!"

"SHERWOOD GOLD!"

By Francis Warwick.

As I write these words, I regard with pride a huge pile of letters at my elbow showing how appreciative MAGNET readers are. The above-named stirring romance of the good old days has "caught on," as I fully expected it would. The author possesses the sterling quality of getting right down to his subject, so that for the moment the year 1924 is forgotten. How we have all longed to live in those stirring days, despite the innumerable discomforts they offered in comparison with the speedy scientific whirl of to-day. Well, well, 'tis wasted time longing for the impossible. But there is consolation in reading of the "good old days"—a consolation prize of first-class merit when Mr. Francis

Warwick is at the helm. Don't miss the next instalment of this grand serial, chums—it gets better and more exciting each week.

"SEASIDE SUPPLEMENT!"

What could be more popular at this season than a special supplement dealing with the seaside? Well, boys, it's on the programme for next Monday. Boating, bathing, fishing—and even donkey-riding—they are all included in this coming treat. And a certain Willie Winkle gives us his "Tragic Life Story." There are also some helpful hints from the cheery "Herald" contributors on "What to do at the Seaside!" Make sure you read this supplement, boys!

GRAND HOLIDAY SERIES!

This morning's post brought me the first story from Mr. Frank Richards of the special holiday series of Greyfriars yarns he has in preparation. I made mention of them a few weeks back. This series is undoubtedly going to rank as the finest your favourite author has ever written. I have just finished reading the opening story, and it leaves a pleasant flavour in the mouth, anticipant of something better still to follow. This much I can say now without giving too much away—Harry Wharton & Co. are booked for the East, the scorching deserts of Northern Africa, where sheiks of all sorts and conditions roam at will. Look out for this grand series, boys, and be sure and start with story number one.

THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL!

Just a reminder that this world-famous volume will shortly be on the market. Many readers who left their orders too late were disappointed last year. It is up to them to remedy the omission with the 1925 edition—a packed volume of stories, plays, puzzles, articles, coloured plates, and photogravures, etc.

AT SEA!

I have just received a breezy and interesting letter from one of my chums, who signs himself John de Caires. For enthusiasm he wants a lot of beating. But there, those who follow the sea are always hearty and straight to the point. My chum asks me if I ever see Messrs. Richards, Clifford, and Conquest. Of course I do. Many are the talks we have together, usually over some proposed story for the benefit of my thousands of readers. Good fellows? Yes, the finest trio of sportsmen one could meet in a day's march.

Your Editor.



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Concerning . . . MAGNET Readers!

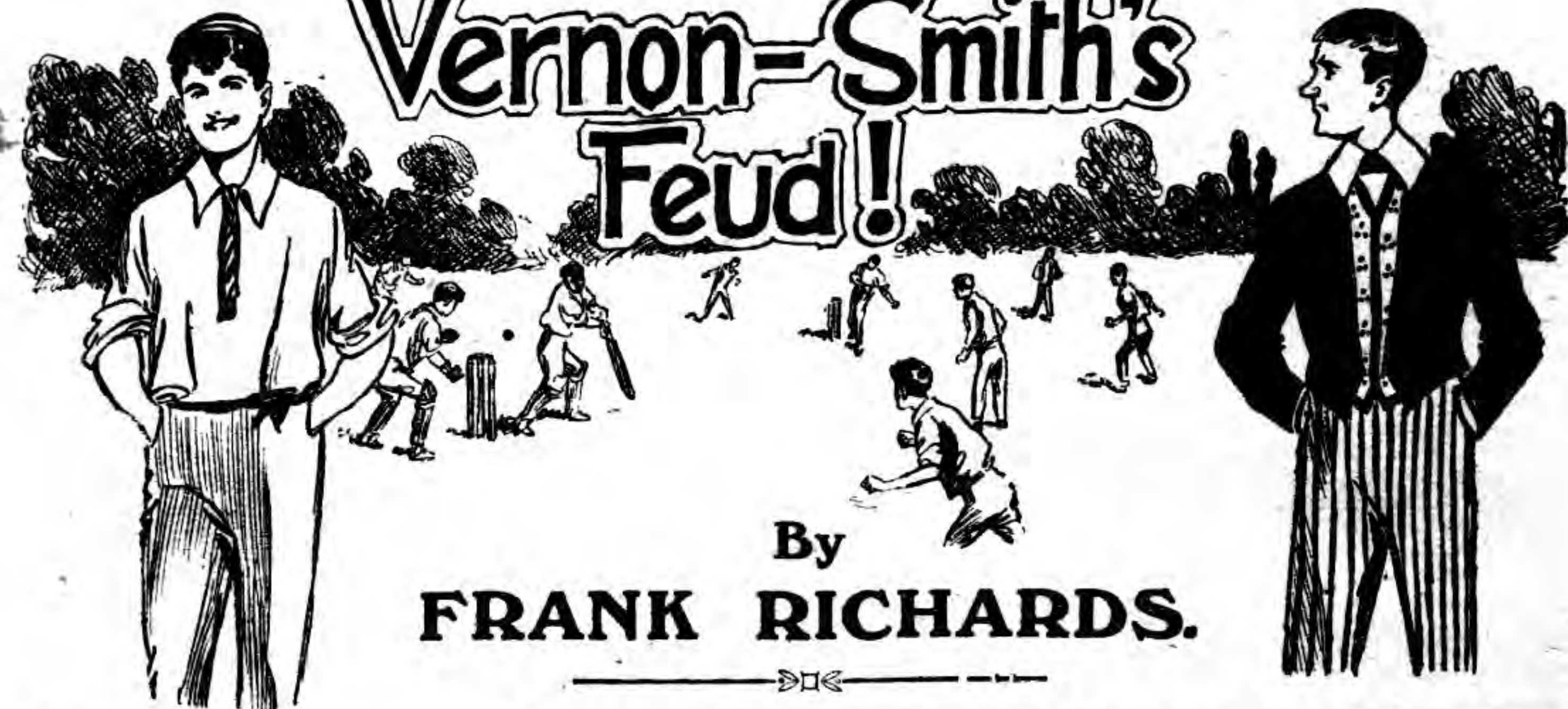
Note that the MAGNET LIBRARY dated week ending August 9th will be on sale at all newsagents on SATURDAY, AUGUST 2nd. . . .

To be excluded from the Remove Cricket Eleven comes as a bitter blow to the arrogant pride of Vernon-Smith, and arouses all the fierce animosity of which he is capable. In the Bounder of Greyfriars, Harry Wharton comes up against a tough proposition. It is to be a battle between them—a battle in which no quarter is either asked or given, and the stake is the Captaincy of the Remove. Who wins?

Vernon-Smith's Feud!

By

FRANK RICHARDS.



A Magnificent Extra-long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, with Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder, as the central figure.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Turned Down!

"RELY on me, old fellow!" "Eh?" "I'm going to back you up!" said Bunter impressively. Harry Wharton, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, did not seem much impressed, however.

He looked up rather irritably from a paper that lay on the study table before him—a paper that contained a list of names of fellows in the Remove. "What on earth do you mean?" he inquired.

"I mean what I say," said Billy Bunter, rolling into the study. "I'm backing you up, old chap. I mean it! I've come here to have a little talk with you about it—"

"You haven't!" said Harry Wharton grimly. "I'm busy! Go and talk in some other study, Bunter."

"Look here—"

"Buzz off!" said the captain of the Remove.

Wharton dropped his eyes to his paper again. It was a cricket list, and it absorbed the attention of the captain of the Remove just then. Billy Bunter's conversation, never very desirable, was more undesirable than ever at that moment.

But William George Bunter did not "buzz" off. He had come to Study No. 1 on business, and he was not to be deterred.

"This is rather important, Wharton," he said, with a serious shake of the head.

"Oh, rot!"

"Is that the list for the Highcliffe match?"

"Yes. Run away!"

"You're leaving out Smithy?"

"Yes. Buzz!"

"Putting in Nugent, I suppose," said Billy Bunter. "I suppose it's the best you can do, but Nugent won't be much

good against the Highcliffe chaps. He's rather a dud, you know."

"Thanks!" drawled Frank Nugent, from the armchair. "Do you want me to kick you into the passage, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles.

"Oh, really, Nugent! I didn't see you, old chap. I say, I'm glad you're getting a chance in the cricket. My opinion is that you're miles ahead of Smithy in form."

"Fathead!" said Nugent politely.

"But I didn't come here to talk about cricket," said Billy Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Remove again. "The fact is, Wharton, you're up against it, old man."

"Bosh!"

"I've just seen Smithy—"

"Go and see him again!" suggested Wharton.

"Smithy's on the warpath!" said Bunter warningly.

"Let him rip," said Wharton carelessly.

"That's all very well, old chap. Of course, you've got nothing to fear, with me backing you up—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton, and there was a chuckle from Frank Nugent in the armchair.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I'm on your side, Harry, old fellow, tooth and nail," said Bunter. "I've turned Smithy down—right down."

"Poor old Bounder!" said Frank Nugent sarcastically. "He must feel it."

"The fact is, Nugent, he does feel it; he's awfully cut up," said the Owl of the Remove. "He knows what a lot of influence I've got in the Form. But I told him plainly I was backing up my old pal."

"Who's that?" asked Wharton.

"You, old chap."

"My hat!"

"It's coming to a tussle, you know," went on Bunter. "Now the Bounder's turned out of the cricket, Wharton, he's

fairly on the warpath. I hear that he's going to put up for captain of the Remove, and give you a fall, old fellow."

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't feel funky?" asked Bunter.

"No, ass."

"Well, a good many fellows are going to back him up," said Bunter. "He's got Skinner, and Snoop, and Stott, and Hazel—"

"He's welcome to them," said Wharton, with a curl of the lip. "If you've finished, Bunter, roll away."

"I haven't finished yet. This is a jolly serious matter, though you don't seem to see it. You're not so jolly safe as you suppose," said Bunter. "You ain't a bad Form captain, in your way, Wharton. But you're rather hoity-toity, you know."

"Rather what?" ejaculated Wharton.

"Hoity-toity! You think too much of yourself."

"Oh!"

"Sort of look on yourself as monarch of all you survey, and all that," said Bunter pleasantly. "Lots of the fellows don't like it. I don't like it myself."

Harry Wharton's hand strayed to a ruler, but he checked it. Really, Billy Bunter was not worth getting angry with.

"Is that all?" asked Harry.

"Oh no! You see, I'm talking to you for your own good, like a real pal. I'm putting things plainly. The fact is, Wharton, you've had your way so long that you've got rather a swelled head."

"There's the door, Bunter."

"I know, but I haven't finished yet. A good many of the fellows would like to see you taken down a peg or two."

"Shut up, Bunter," said Nugent.

"Sha'n't!" retorted Bunter. "If you were a real pal like me, Nugent, you'd tell Wharton the same. You know you can't stand him yourself sometimes."

Nugent coloured a little.

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"Will you kick him out, Harry, or shall I?" he asked.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Bunter. "I've come here as a friend, to support this study. You need it, I can tell you. Lots of the fellows will back Smithy up. You see, they're rather fed up with Wharton's carrying his head so high. After all, who's Wharton?"

Harry looked at the fat junior without speaking.

"Yes, come to that—who are you, Wharton?" pursued the Owl of the Remove. "Nobody in particular, if you only knew it! Not at all the big gun you fancy yourself, what?"

"Are you going?" asked Harry.

"Not yet. As matters stand," continued Bunter, "you've got some backing in the Remove. But the Bounder's got a lot of backers, too. If it comes to an election in the Form, I can tell you he will give you a run for your money. I hold the scales, in a manner of speaking. Whichever side I throw my great influence on will win."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle," said Bunter. "But that's how matters stand. Now, I'm not backing up Smithy, he kicked me—I mean, I don't approve of him. He's a bad hat, Smithy is. I'm backing you up, Wharton. Rely on me all along the line."

Of course, I shall expect a quid pro quo."

"Is he wound up?" asked Nugent.

"Shut up, Nugent! You remember, Wharton, I used to be in this study when you came to Greyfriars."

"Well, fathead?"

"I'm coming back," said Bunter.

"Are you?" asked the captain of the Remove grimly.

"Yes. I'm fed up with Toddy in No. 7. I had a better time in this study, and I'm coming back to No. 1. Will you speak to Mr. Quelch about it, Wharton, or shall I speak to him?"

"I certainly shall not," said Harry.

"Then I will, old fellow. As a member of the study, I shall feel bound to back you up and see you through," said Bunter. "You needn't have any fear of the result, with my support. All I shall expect is to be made comfortable in my old study. Something decent for tea, you know—and something for supper. Occasionally, if a remittance happens to be delayed in the post, I may require a little loan. That's understood between friends."

Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"You see the doorway, Bunter?" he asked.

"Eh? Yes!"

"How long will it take you to get through it?"

"Look here——"

"I give you ten seconds."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"After that I shall begin with this ruler."

"You cheeky rotter!" roared Bunter.

"If you don't want my support——"

"I'll try to worry on without it," said Harry. "Now then, time's up!"

He picked up the ruler from the table. Billy Bunter made a backward jump into the passage.

"Shut the door after you, Bunter!" grinned Nugent.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Buzz off!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove, and he made a stride towards the door, ruler in hand.

Bunter made another backward jump.

"Yah! You cheeky cad, I'm done with you!" he bawled. "I'm backing up Smithy! Do you hear? You're jolly well going to be pushed out of your job, Wharton! Do you hear?"

Slam!

The door of Study No. 1 closed on William George Bunter and his eloquence.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Bounder Begins!

HARRY WHARTON picked up the paper from the study table, and ran his eyes over it, with a corrugated brow.

Frank Nugent, from the depths of the armchair, watched him, a slight smile on his face.

The match with Highcliffe School was due in a few days, and that matter was giving the captain of the Remove some mental exercise.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, was no longer available for Remove cricket.

Excepting on the rare occasions when he was off colour, the Bounder had always been a tower of strength to his side, and in a fixture like that with Highcliffe the loss was a serious one.

Certainly, the Bounder's exclusion gave Wharton a chance he wanted of playing his best chum, Nugent. But it was not of much use trying to believe that Frank could put up a game like the Bounder. Wharton had tried his hardest to avoid this new trouble with Vernon-Smith, knowing the effect it would have on the cricket. But the trouble had come.

"Well, how are you getting on, Harry?" asked Frank Nugent, at last. "Getting through?"

Wharton smiled faintly.

"I think I've got a good list," he said. "You're going in, Franky."

"I suppose I can thank the Bounder for that."

"In a way, yes. It's rotten having to leave Smithy out," said Harry. "We want him against Courtenay's lot. But it's no good crying over spilt milk. After what he did, he had to be barred from Form cricket, for this season, at least; besides, it was the sentence of the Form, and I couldn't go against it. Anyhow, you'll put up a good game, old man, and it's a good team. What do you think of this?"

The captain of the Remove read out the list.

"Wharton, R. Cherry, Hurree Singh, J. Bull, F. Nugent, Peter Todd, T. Brown, S. Q. I. Field, Mark Linley, P. Hazeldene, R. Penfold."

"Good!" said Nugent. "But what about Redwing?"

Wharton shook his head.

"Redwing's working for a special exam, and he's rather giving cricket the go-by. I fancy, too, that his quarrel with the Bounder has upset him a bit—he has

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gone right off his form. Russell or Ogilvy would be better. He's not keen to play, either."

"He was keen enough not so long ago."

"I know. It's the Bounder!" grunted Wharton. "Redwing's not friends with him now; but I believe he thinks more of him, all the same, than of any other fellow at Greyfriars. I believe he doesn't want to figure in the eleven now that Smithy is out of it."

Nugent nodded.

"Anyhow, he's not up to Highcliffe form at present," said Harry. "Never mind Redwing. I think we shall beat Courtenay's crowd with this team. Anyhow, we'll have a jolly good try."

Nugent nodded again. He was looking very thoughtful.

"What do you think the Bounder is up to, Harry?" he asked.

"Blessed if I know, or care."

"He's not a fellow to take his sentence lying down. And to be barred from the cricket for the whole season is pretty serious. I can't fancy the Bounder contenting himself with games practice."

"He will have to," said Wharton, rather gruffly. "He knew what he was risking when he played that dirty trick on Redwing, and prevented him from getting to Rookwood for the match there."

"All the same, he will kick. Some of the fellows are saying that he will make a bid to shift you out of the captaincy. But I suppose that's all rot."

"I don't think he has much chance. Nearly all the Form were down on him, and voted for barring him out of Remove cricket."

"Fellows forget things, and change their minds, though," said Frank. "I can't imagine that he will get a majority of the Form on his side; but I'm pretty certain that he means mischief."

"Let him," said Wharton carelessly. "He can't do anything, that I can see, more than he's done already."

There was a tap at the door of Study No. 1, and Hazeldene of the Remove came in. Hazel's good-looking, weak face was a little flushed, and his manner was uneasy. He glanced at the cricket list in Wharton's hand, and his flush deepened.

"Hallo, old chap!" said Harry cheerily. "Take a pew."

"I'm not staying a minute," said Hazel uncomfortably. "I just looked in to speak to you about the Highcliffe match."

"That's all right," said the captain of the Remove, with a smile. "Your name's down, Hazel."

"Oh! Is it? For next Wednesday?"

"Yes."

"The—the fact is, Wharton—"

Hazel hesitated.

"Don't tell me you're crooked, or off colour, old man," said Harry. "We want you."

"I can't play on Wednesday!" blurted out Hazel.

"Why not?"

"I'm booked up for the day."

Harry Wharton knitted his brows.

"What the thump do you mean?" he exclaimed. "You knew days ago that you were picked for the Highcliffe match. I suppose you haven't fixed up something else for the same day?"

"Yes, I have," muttered Hazel sullenly. It was Hazel's way to take refuge in sullenness when he was in the wrong, and felt himself cornered, as it were.

"You have!" exclaimed Wharton. "Then you can jolly well unfix it again, Hazel. You can't go back on the team like that!"

"I'm telling you in time," said Hazel.



"Not looking for your name there, are you, Smithy?" asked Bolsover major. The Bounder did not answer. He read through the list and then jerked it away from the board. "I say, what's the game, Smithy?" exclaimed Peter Todd. "You mustn't take that down!" "Really?" drawled the Bounder, deliberately tearing the paper into four pieces. (See Chapter 4.)

"You've got lots of time between now and Wednesday to fill my place, I suppose."

Wharton fixed his eyes on Hazel's flushed, sullen face. He was quite taken by surprise. Hazeldene had been keen enough on cricket, and indeed had rather nourished a grievance that he was not given a sufficient show. It was like him to be vacillating, uncertain of his own wishes and intentions. But Wharton could not help suspecting that there was something behind it. He seemed to recognise the hand of the Bounder.

"Will you tell me what this new engagement is, Hazel?" he asked, very quietly.

"I don't see that that's your business," muttered Hazel.

Wharton set his lips. He did not want trouble with Marjorie Hazeldene's brother. And he could see that Hazel was ready for a quarrel, as the easiest way of justifying himself.

"Tell me this, at least. Is it anything to do with Vernon-Smith?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"I'm not going to tell you anything that doesn't concern you! Perhaps you'd like to turn me out of the cricket club, as you have Smithy!" sneered Hazel. "Well, I dare say there will be something else on if you do. It hasn't occurred to you that you're not the only pebble on the beach, I suppose?"

Hazel's manner was as offensive as he could make it. Like most weak

characters, he was always ready to fly into a passionate temper.

"Then it is Smithy," said Wharton.

"Find out!"

Wharton drew a deep breath.

He picked up his pencil and drew a line through the name of P. Hazeldene on his list.

"That's done!" he said.

Hazel backed to the door, red and uncomfortable. Hazel had his conscience. It seldom kept him back from wrongdoing; but it troubled him after he had done wrong.

"You can fill my place all right, I suppose?" he said.

Wharton's lip curled.

"Easily! You're not one of the big guns of the team," he said. "Russell or Ogilvy will fill the place quite well."

"You mean you don't want me in the team," exclaimed Hazel, his eyes flashing. "Skinner told me you only put me in to please Marjorie."

"Skinner's a cad, and you ought to have sense enough to take no notice of his rot," said Harry. "I know that Marjorie likes to see you play for the Remove. But I shouldn't put you in if you were not worth your place to please anybody, and you ought to know it! But, look here, Hazel, old chap!" Wharton controlled his annoyance, and made his manner as conciliatory as he could. "Look here! Marjorie will be disappointed if she comes over to see

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the match and you're not playing. Say the word, and I'll put in your name again."

"I—I can't now. I've promised!" muttered Hazel.

"You've promised Vernon-Smith to back out of my eleven!" exclaimed Wharton, his eyes flashing.

"I don't see that you need drag Smithy into it. I'm not under Smithy's thumb, I suppose?"

"It looks as if you are! It looks as if he's trying to muck up the Remove eleven now he's turned out of it!" exclaimed Harry. "Luckily, the other members are not weak-kneed fools to have their legs pulled in this style."

Hazel turned crimson.

"So I'm a weak-kneed fool?" he exclaimed.

"You're acting like one, at least!"

"That's enough!"

Hazel walked out of the study and slammed the door. Harry Wharton sat staring at the paper, now containing only ten names for the Highcliffe match.

Nugent whistled.

"The Bounder's beginning," he remarked.

"I'm sorry about Hazel on Marjorie's account!" said Harry, biting his lip. "But it won't damage the team. I'll get along and speak to Ogilvy."

The captain of the Remove left Study No. 1 and went along to Study No. 3. He found three Removites in that study, Tom Redwing, Russell, and Ogilvy. Redwing, with a grave, thoughtful face, was working at Xenophon on a corner of the study table. Ogilvy and Russell were talking at a great rate, probably rather to the detriment of Redwing's labours at Greek.

"Ogilvy, old man, I'm putting your name down for the match on Wednesday," said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Robert Donald Ogilvy, in surprise and dismay. Wharton raised his eyebrows.

"You're available, I suppose?" he said. "You've asked me about a dozen times whether you had a chance. Well, you've got it."

"Why the thump didn't you say so before?"

"I couldn't when a vacancy has only just occurred five minutes ago. But what's the trouble? Don't you want to play Highcliffe?"

"Of course I do; but I can't now," said Ogilvy. "I've fixed up something else for Wednesday."

"Can't you put it off?"

"I don't think Smithy would let me off," said Ogilvy ruefully. "The fact is, I can't very well ask him."

"Smithy!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yes, the old Bounder! Of course, he knew nothing about your getting a vacancy coming along in your team."

"I fancy he did," said Harry Wharton grimly. "But never mind. I suppose I can count on you, Russell?"

"Little me?" exclaimed Dick Russell.

"Yes. You're on the reserve-list, and I shall want you."

"Oh crumbs!" said Russell blankly.

"You don't happen to be fixed up with the Bounder for Wednesday, I suppose?" asked the captain of the Remove sarcastically.

"But I do," said Russell.

"Then you can cut it out!" snapped Wharton.

"I can't. You see, it's like this—"

"I don't want to know anything about it!" snapped Wharton. "If you don't want to play, I can find another man. Yes or no?"

"I can't! I—"

"That's no, then," said Harry.

And he left the study without another word, leaving Ogilvy and Russell staring.

at one another. With a grim and clouded brow, the captain of the Remove went on a further search for his eleventh man. He realised that Frank Nugent was right, and that the Bounder of Greyfriars was "beginning."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Check!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, sat in his study with a cigarette between his lips. Skinner and Snoop and Stott, of the Remove, were with him, and they were smoking also.

Since his break with his chum Redwing, Smithy of the Remove seemed to have become quite the "old Bounder" again. He was very pally with Skinner & Co., the black sheep of the Lower School, and Skinner & Co. had rejoiced to welcome him back to the fold.

The Bounder was well on his way to become once more what he had formerly been—the "hardest case" at Greyfriars. His better qualities—and he had many—seemed quite in abeyance now. The sentence of the Remove had roused his bitterest anger and resentment, and in these days the Bounder was "out" for mischief, caring very little how much mischief he did and what the results might be.

The Bounder, like the captain of the Form, had a pencil and paper before him, and he was making a list of names. But he did not seem wholly satisfied with the results.

"You've got us down, Smithy?" said Skinner, blowing out a little cloud of smoke.

"I've got you down," assented the Bounder. "Blessed if I think you'll be much good, though!"

"Oh, we can play cricket!" said Snoop.

A grunt from the Bounder.

"We never got a chance with Wharton," said Stott. "But I'll tell you what, Smithy. If you're going to make up a rival cricket team, you won't make it any better with cigarettes in the study. That's not the way to get your men into form."

"Oh, don't preach, old man!" yawned Skinner.

"That isn't preaching; that's common sense," said Stott. "If Smithy's serious, this isn't the way to do it!"

"Rot!" said Snoop.

The Bounder did not heed.

"I can make up a team of sorts," he said. "You three, and I've got Hazel; he's a pretty good man, luckily. Russell and Ogilvy have joined up; that makes six. Bolsover major; that's seven. Trevor makes eight, and Fishy makes nine. Wibley and Desmond; that's eleven, without counting me."

Harold Skinner winked at the curl of smoke rising from his cigarette.

He was wholeheartedly with the Bounder in any attempt to give Wharton a fall. He was even willing to play cricket for that purpose. But he was not by any means prepared to make work of it; neither were his friends.

The Bounder, barred from Remove cricket officially, had set to work, with patient persistence, to undermine Wharton's position, and his hope was to set up a rival cricket club in the Form.

The Remove were a numerous Form, and there were more than sufficient fellows to make up two elevens.

But all the good material, naturally, was in the Form eleven, and most of the secondary players were on the reserve list.

The Bounder was able to make up an eleven, but the quality thereof was another matter.

Fellows like Skinner & Co., who were keen enough for anything that would exasperate their Form captain, backed him up heartily in any measures he chose to take. The trouble was that they were no good at games.

Other fellows, who had only occasionally a chance in a Remove match, had joined up—fellows like Russell and Ogilvy, Wibley and Bolsover major. They naturally did not agree with their captain that they were not good enough for important fixtures. When they were left out they generally attributed the fact to an error of judgment on the part of the skipper. They were keen on cricket, and the Bounder's new scheme seemed to promise them a chance of getting into the limelight a little. Anyhow, matches were better than games practice, for keen cricketers, and the Bounder had undertaken to fix up matches.

In the Bounder's list there were two good men—himself and Ogilvy. Russell was fairly good. Skinner and Snoop, Stott and Fisher T. Fish were merely "duds." Hazeldene was a good man, when he was in form, but he had a way of failing unexpectedly, and at the best he was uncertain and unreliable.

It is said that a bad workman quarrels with his tools. Certainly the Bounder was not satisfied with his material. The best cricket captain would have been perplexed to make a good team out of the material left over in the Remove after the Form eleven had been selected.

"You can have Bunter, too," remarked Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo! Talk of angels!" ejaculated Snoop, as the fat figure and big spectacles of William George Bunter appeared in the doorway of Study No. 4.

Billy Bunter rolled in.

The Bounder gave him a frown. Billy Bunter was useless to him, unless it came to a Form election, in which case Bunter's vote counted as much as anyone else's. But that was very much in the air at present.

"I say, you fellows, have you seen Wharton?" grinned Bunter. "He's going up and down the passage in an awful bait. He, he, he!"

"What's the matter with his magnificence?" grinned Skinner.

"Hazel's chucked his rotten eleven!" said Bunter. "Wharton's looking for another man, but he can't find one. He, he, he!"

The Bounder grinned.

"They're all turning him down," went on Bunter. "I've turned him down myself!"

"You!" ejaculated Skinner.

"Yes; little me! He begged me almost with tears in his eyes to play in his team against Highcliffe next Wednesday. I refused."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

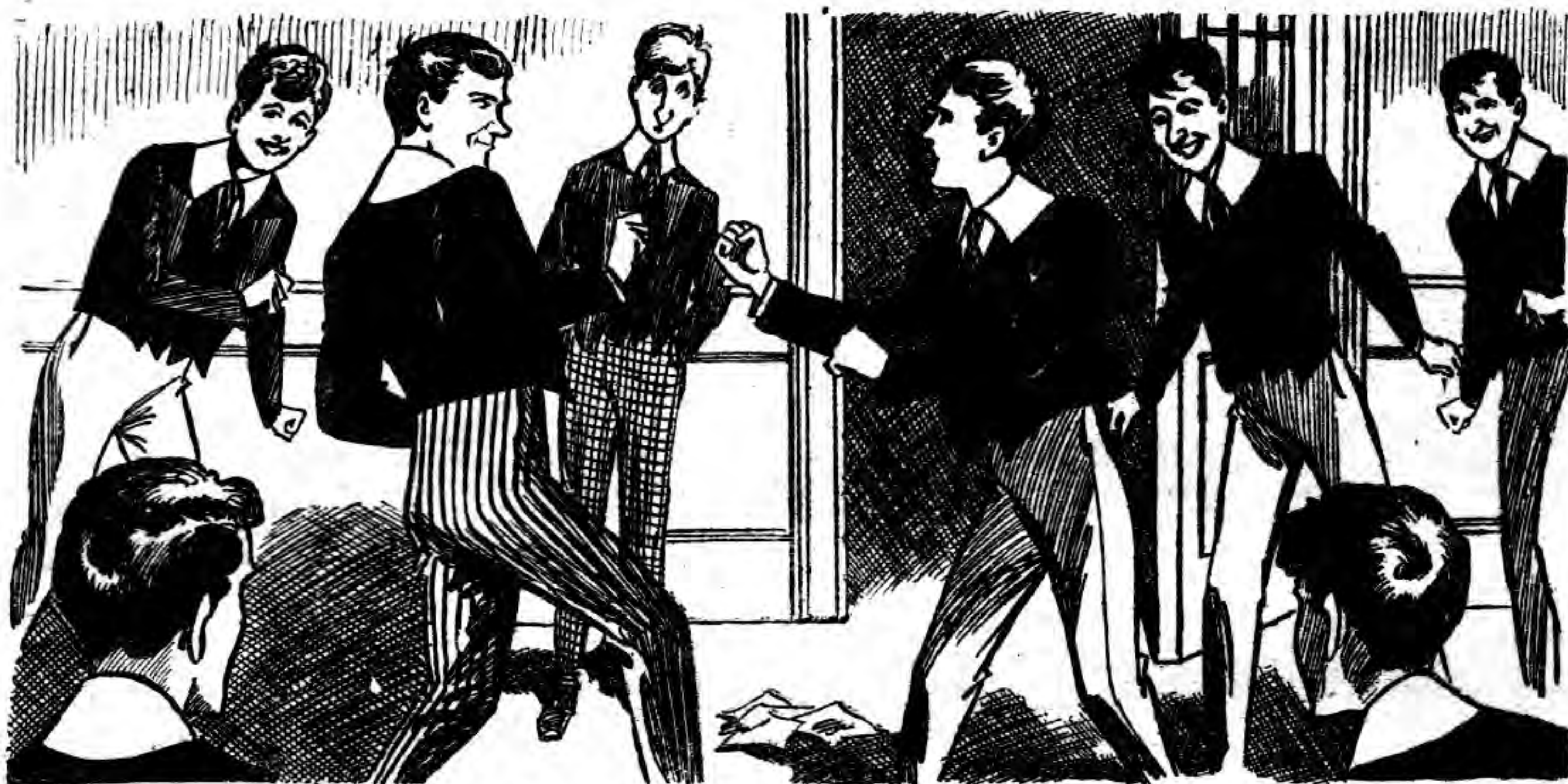
"He's coming here," went on Bunter, with a blink at the Bounder. "He's getting wild with you, Smithy."

"Dear man!" yawned the Bounder.

Skinner & Co. looked a little uneasy. They were up against Wharton, and ready to join in any move against him; but they had a disinclination to face his wrath personally. The Bounder read their expressions with a sardonic grin. He was making a party for himself in the Remove, but so far he was the only fighting-man in the party.

"Here he comes!" grinned Bunter.

Harry Wharton, with a frowning brow, stepped into the study doorway. Behind him loomed the powerful figure of Bob Cherry and the dusky, smiling face of Hurree Jainset Ram Singh.



"Pick that paper up and stick it on the board again!" said Nugent angrily. Vernon-Smith laughed coolly. "I'll jolly well make you if you don't, you cheeky rotter!" shouted Nugent. "Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Bounder sardonically. But his laugh was cut short as Nugent advanced upon him with his hands up. "A ring!" roared Bolsover major. "Stand back, you chaps—give them room!" (See Chapter 4.)

The Bounder eyed them coolly.

"I don't remember askin' you fellows to my study," he remarked.

"I want a word with you," said Harry abruptly. "I've just seen several fellows who are on my reserve list."

"Your personal property?" asked the Bounder.

Wharton did not heed that question.

"I've heard from two or three that you've booked them for a new eleven you're making in the Remove," he said.

"Really?"

"You've fixed up some game for Wednesday, the date of the Highcliffe match?"

"I suppose I'm not called on to chuck up cricket entirely at your lordly behest?" drawled the Bounder.

"Not at all. Better than smoking in your study, at least," said Wharton scornfully. "But this won't do, and it won't be allowed, Smithy."

"Who won't allow it?" yawned the Bounder.

"I won't!"

"Dear me!"

"If you can make these smoky cads play cricket, more power to your elbow," said Harry, his glance passing disdainfully over Skinner & Co. "But you will have to leave the Form reserves alone. You're out for mischief, Smithy, and you're going to be stopped."

"You're going to stop me?" smiled the Bounder.

"Yes!"

"Might a fellow inquire how?"

"Any man on the Remove reserve list who refuses to play for the Form when called on will be turned out of Remove cricket, as you've been," said Wharton. "I'm going to put up a notice to that effect in the Rag. I think that will put a stop to your little game."

"The stopfulness will be terrific, my dear and esteemed fatheaded Smithy!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"And if that isn't enough," roared Bob Cherry over Wharton's shoulder, "we'll give you a jolly good ragging, Smithy. Do you think you're going to

muck up Remove cricket matches because you were booted out of the team for playing a dirty trick?"

"Shut the door after you," said the Bounder.

The door was shut, but it was opened again in a few minutes. Robert Donald Ogilvy put a red face in.

"Smithy, old man!" he stammered.

"Trot in!"

"I won't come in—only a word!" said Ogilvy. "You know I'm a reserve for the eleven, Smithy, and Wharton makes a point of my playing on Wednesday."

There was a blaze in the Bounder's eyes, but his face was calm.

"Well?" he said.

"Well, I can't go back on the club, can I?" said Ogilvy. "Of course, when I agreed to play for you, Smithy, I hadn't the remotest idea that there would be a chance for me in the Highcliffe match. That alters the case, doesn't it?"

"You've promised now."

"Yes; but the Remove has first claim. As a reserve, I'm bound to play if called on. Prior engagement, you know."

"You mean that Wharton will kick you out of the cricket if you dare to refuse?" sneered the Bounder.

Ogilvy crimsoned.

"I should ask to be kicked out if I refused when my skipper makes a point of it," he said. "It seems that you've got round Hazel to let him down. I'm not leaving the Remove in the lurch to please you, Smithy. You can't expect it. If you do you'll be disappointed. So that's that!"

And, shutting the door very hard, Ogilvy retired.

The Bounder sat very still, no longer smoking.

Skinner suppressed a chuckle. He was the Bounder's supporter, and he wished the Bounder success. But the cynical philosopher who declared that there is always something agreeable in the misfortunes of our friends was certainly right so far as fellows like Skinner are concerned.

"Rotten, old man," said Skinner, with

a private wink at Snoop. "Your new eleven won't amount to much if Wharton takes any man he likes from it whenever he chooses. Still, you can rely on me, old scout, from start to finish."

"Which would be very gratifyin' if you were any good," said the Bounder. "But you're not, so I don't feel much bucked about that."

"Look here—"

"Oh, get out!" snapped the Bounder. "I've got to think this out. One swallow doesn't make a summer, and I'll beat Wharton yet!"

And Skinner & Co. strolled, grinning, from the study, leaving the Bounder of Greyfriars alone to work out his problem.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Asking For It!

"CHEEK!"

Thus Cecil Reginald Temple, the captain of the Fourth.

Temple of the Fourth had strolled into the Rag with Fry and Dabney. He came to a halt where a paper was pinned on the wall in the handwriting of Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove.

Cecil Reginald sorted an eyeglass out of his waistcoat pocket, jammed it into his eye, and surveyed the paper disparagingly, and pronounced that it was cheek.

"Neck!" said Fry.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

Dabney and Fry were not always in complete agreement with their chief; but on this subject there was not a dissentient opinion in all the Upper Fourth Form of Greyfriars.

For Temple & Co. prided themselves upon the fact that they were the junior club, and that they provided the school junior eleven. The Remove, at the best, were only a Form, and sent out only a Form team. In Form matches, it was true, they beat the Upper Fourth hands down. The Fourth could show

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no cricketers to equal the Famous Five and Squiff and Smithy and Peter Todd and Tom Brown. Nevertheless, they were only a Form team, and time and again Cecil Reginald had declared that they had no right—no claim whatever—to arrange outside fixtures and meet teams from other schools.

It was unusual, said Temple; it was unprecedented—it ought not to be allowed. What Wingate of the Sixth was thinking of, as head of the games, in permitting it, Temple professed himself unable to understand. Possibly Wingate was thinking of the fact that the Remove fellows put up good cricket, while the Upper Fourth only fumbled with the game. But Cecil Reginald would not be likely to admit that. He shook his head over old Wingate's delinquency, and opined sometimes, in a pessimistic mood, that things would never go really well until Greyfriars got a new captain.

So the sight of the cricket list in Wharton's hand moved Temple's lofty ire, as it always did. He pronounced that it was cheek, and Dabney and Fry heartily concurred.

"It ought to be stopped, you know," said Temple, shaking his head. "It lets the school down."

"Oh, rather!" concurred Dabney loyally.

"They win matches," remarked Fry, in a thoughtful sort of way. Edward Fry had a way of saying uncomfortable things sometimes.

Temple frowned at him.

"It's not the proper thing, and you know it," he said. "Are we the junior eleven of Greyfriars or are we not?"

"We are—we is!" said Fry.

"Well, then, isn't it pure, unadulterated cheek for the Remove—the Lower Fourth—to butt in like this, fixing up outside matches with schools like Highcliffe, St. Jim's, and Rookwood?"

"Awful cheek!" said Fry. "Only, they can't be stopped, somehow. They ought to leave the matches to us, only they won't! It might never have happened, though, old scout, if you'd let some of the Remove men into our eleven in the first place."

"I did let some in—fellows that knew their place," said Temple loftily. "Not uppish fellows like Wharton, or thundering hooligans like Bob Cherry, or cheeky cads like Vernon-Smith—"

"Or anybody who could play cricket," said Fry blandly.

"Look here, Fry—"

"All serene, old man! I'm with you all along the line," said Fry. "I'd like to see the cheeky fags stopped. Only, it can't be done!"

"I've a jolly good mind to take down this paper and tear it up!" said Cecil Reginald.

"That would mean a row with the Remove."

"Who cares for a row with the Remove?" asked Temple truculently.

"Oh, nobody, of course! But we don't want to be scrapping with those dashed fags. Let them rip!"

"Let me catch you taking our paper down!" roared Bolsover major's bull-voice behind Temple. "I'd jolly well make you stick it up again!"

The chums of the Fourth looked round uneasily. Bolsover major, the biggest fellow in the Remove, towered over them. Lofty as the heroes of the Upper Fourth were, important fellows as they were in their own eyes, they had to recognise the fact that Bolsover of the Remove could have walked over any one of them—indeed, he would not have found it difficult to handle two of them. Cecil Reginald Temple, whose

elegant hand had been raised with a half-formed intention of jerking down the offending paper, changed his mind on the spot, and put his hands into his pockets. Looking at the burly Bolsover, he decided that it would be more in accordance with his dignity to treat the cheeky Remove with contempt.

"You can't play cricket, you chaps," went on Bolsover major. "We mop you up in Form matches. Marbles is your game!"

Temple reddened with anger.

"You don't do much of the mopping-up, Bolsover," remarked Fry. "I don't see you in the Remove eleven very often."

"Oh, don't let's argue with these fags!" said Temple loftily. "Really, they ought not to be allowed in the Rag. Turns the place into a bear-garden, don't you know!"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

There were a dozen Remove fellows in the room, and Bolsover's loud voice had drawn them to the spot. Fellows whose names were in the list, and fellows who, unaccountably to themselves, had been left out, felt just the same on this subject—they were prepared to dust the Rag with any Fourth Form chap who laid a sacrilegious hand on an official Remove notice-paper.

Herbert Vernon-Smith came in at the doorway, and he sauntered to the spot with Skinner and Hazeldene. Hazel scowled at the notice, resenting the fact that his name in it had been replaced by that of R. D. Ogilvy. It was by his own act; but Hazel was not reasonable in his resentments. The Bounder stopped before the paper, and read it through, with a peculiar expression on his face that drew all eyes on him. Temple, somewhat to his relief, found himself no longer the centre of all eyes.

"Not looking for your name there, are you, Smithy?" asked Bolsover major, and there was a laugh from some of the fellows.

The Bounder did not answer.

Having read the list through, he reached up to it and jerked it away from the wall.

"I say, what's that game, Smithy?" exclaimed Peter Todd. "You mustn't take that down!"

"Really?" drawled the Bounder.

"Look here, Smithy—" exclaimed Mark Linley.

Quietly, deliberately, the Bounder tore the paper across, and then across again, and flung the four pieces far into the room. There were exclamations on all sides as he did so. The Fourth-Formers stared, and exchanged glances. Frank Nugent, who was among the Removites, ran forward, though too late to stop the Bounder's action.

"Smithy, you cheeky cad—"

The Bounder faced him with a cool, insulting smile.

"Well, what have you got to say about it?" he asked.

"You've torn down the Form captain's notice!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yes. I'm ready to answer for what I've done," drawled the Bounder, "to Wharton, or you, or anybody else."

"Wharton's not here, or you wouldn't have dared to touch his notice!" exclaimed Nugent angrily.

"That's not true, dear man—and you can fetch him as soon as you like," sneered the Bounder. "Or if you like to call me to account personally, I'm your man!"

"Rather too big an order for Nugent!" jeered Skinner.

"Better run away and tell Wharton!" said Snoop.

Nugent flushed crimson. He was the only member of the Famous Five, as it

happened, in the Rag at that moment. That the slim, handsome Nugent was no match for the hardy Bounder was well enough known in the Remove, to Nugent himself as well as to anyone when he was cool. But he was not cool now. He was passionately angry at the Bounder's action. He came a step nearer to Vernon-Smith, his eyes blazing.

"Pick that paper up again, Vernon-Smith."

"What?"

"Pick it up and stick it on the wall!" Vernon-Smith laughed.

"I'll make you, if you don't, you cheeky rotter!" shouted Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. And his laughter was echoed in a derisive cackle by Skinner & Co. Skinner's eyes were gleaming with anticipation now. Trouble—real trouble—was beginning at last, between the Bounder and the Famous Five.

But the Bounder's sardonic laugh was cut suddenly short. Frank Nugent came directly at him, with his hands up.

"Keep off, you ass," said the Bounder, backing away a pace. "You're not up to my weight, Nugent."

"Will you pick that paper up, you cad?"

"Not likely."

"Then put up your hands."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"Well—if you will have it!" he said.

His hands came up as Nugent rushed at him again.

"A ring!" roared Bolsover major.

"Stand back, you fellows, give them room. A ring!"

The juniors crowded back to make room for the fight.

"Shut the door!" shouted Skinner.

The door slammed, almost on the nose of William George Bunter, who was blinking in from the passage. In the centre of an excited ring, Frank Nugent and the Bounder were fighting furiously.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Fight in the Rag!

"HE, he, he!"

That unmusical cachinnation, at the door of Study No. 1 in the Remove, drew the glances of four juniors to William George Bunter. It was teatime, and four members of the Famous Five had gathered to tea in Study No. 1. Wharton and Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh were waiting for Nugent to come up to tea when Billy Bunter blinked in at the doorway and cachinnated.

"Blow out, old fat bean," said Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!"

"What the thump are you carrying an alarm-clock about with you for, Bunter?" demanded Bob.

"Eh! I haven't—"

"It sounded like one."

"He, he, he!"

"There it goes again! Turn it off, for goodness' sake," said Bob. "If that's a laugh, old fatty, I'd rather hear you weep. In fact, I'll give you something to weep for." And Bob Cherry picked up half a loaf from the tea-table.

"I say, you fellows—he, he, he—"

"Two to one, in doughnuts, that I catch you right on the boko, Bunter," said Bob, taking aim. "Is it a go?"

"Beast! I say, are you fellows expecting Nugent?" asked Billy Bunter, keeping a wary eye on the missile.

"Yes—and not expecting you," said Johnny Bull!

"Well, you won't see Nugent in a hurry," grinned Bunter. "In fact, I don't think Smithy will leave very much of him."

Harry Wharton jumped up.

"What's that, Bunter?"

"He, he, he!"

"You fat chump, what do you mean?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove angrily. "Where's Nugent?"

"In the Rag!" chuckled Bunter. "He got waxy when the Bounder tore your cricket notice down—"

"The Bounder tore the cricket notice down! Rats!"

"Well, he did—and Nugent went for him," giggled Bunter. "I dare say he's sorry he did by this time. The Bounder will make shavings of him. He, he, he!"

"Good old Franky—if it's true," said Johnny Bull.

Wharton's brow was like thunder.

"Let's go down," he said.

"He, he, he! You won't find much left of Franky—yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, as the half-loaf whizzed from Bob Cherry's hand.

It landed on Bunter's fat chin, and the Owl of the Remove sat down in the passage with a bump and a roar.

"Yoooooop!"

Half a loaf is said to be better than no bread. But Billy Bunter had reason just then to doubt the accuracy of that ancient proverb. His fat chin felt as if no bread would have been much better than that half-loaf!

"Come on!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

The four juniors rushed from the study, quite forgetful of tea. Billy Bunter, sprawling in the passage, was in the way.

"Yoop! Don't tread on me, you beasts. Oh, my hat—gerroff—Bob Cherry—you rotter—Inky, you cad—Bull, you beast. Oh crumbs!"

If a doormat could feel, undoubtedly it would feel just as Billy Bunter felt when the four Removites had passed. He sprawled in a dusty and breathless state, yelling, as they vanished down the Remove staircase.

"Ow, ow! Grooogh! Oooch! Whoooh! Ow! Beasts! Grooogh!"

Heedless of Bunter, the chums of the Remove raced down the stairs. Harry Wharton was the first to reach the Rag, and he hurled the door wide open and ran in.

"Go it, Nugent!"

"Give him some more, Smithy!"

"Man down!" yelled Skinner.

Frank Nugent was on the floor, the Bounder standing over him, panting, with blazing eyes. Skinner went reeling in one direction, and Sidney James Snoop in another, as the captain of the Remove burst through the excited ring.

"Look whom you're shoving, you bully!" howled Skinner.

Wharton did not even look at him. He was at Frank Nugent's side in a moment. The Bounder dropped his hands and stepped back, with a sneering grin.

"Franky, old man—"

Nugent gasped.

"It's all right, Harry. I'm not done yet."

He staggered to his feet. His handsome face already showed severe signs of punishment; the Bounder was a hard hitter. There was scarcely a mark on Vernon-Smith's hard face.

Wharton stood before his chum, his eyes blazing at the Bounder.

"Vernon-Smith, is it true that you've torn down my notice?"

"Quite."

"Then you'll answer for it to me."

"Any old thing," yawned the Bounder. "I'll answer for it to the whole

family, if you like. But I suppose it isn't unreasonable to ask you to come on one at a time, is it?"

"I'm ready," panted Nugent.

"Leave him to me, Frank."

"Is Nugent licked?" asked Skinner maliciously. "If he's licked, he's got to throw up the sponge."

"Shut up, Skinner," snapped Bob Cherry savagely.

Wharton threw off his jacket.

"Leave him to me, Frank. This is my job."

"Hold on," said the Bounder coolly. "I'm not particular, but I'd like to know whom I'm scrapping with. Are you licked, Nugent? If you are, I'm ready for the next man in."

"I'm not licked, you rotter," said Nugent. "Get aside, Harry. This is my scrap."

"It's mine," said Wharton.

"Rot! Let me alone."

Nugent spoke with very unusual sharpness. As a matter of fact, his chum's concern for him was not very flattering, in a way. Nugent did not care to be treated like a fellow who could not take care of himself.

The Bounder laughed mockingly.

"Look here, Frank, old man!" whispered Wharton earnestly.

"Rubbish! Let me alone. I'm going on."

"I wish you'd leave him to me."

"Or to me, old chap," urged Bob.

"Well, I won't."

"Is this a scrap, or a conversazione?" asked the Bounder with a yawn. "For goodness' sake buck up, some of you. I want my tea, you know."

Wharton gritted his teeth.

"If the fight's going on, you'll fight with the gloves on, not like blessed pugs!" he said. "Get the gloves, Bob!"

"Right-ho!"

"Dear me! Am I spoiling Franky's good looks?" asked the Bounder, with an air of exaggerated concern.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Nugent flushed crimson, and, pushing Wharton almost roughly aside, he rushed at the Bounder.

Wharton was almost pale with anger. He knew only too well that his chum was no match for the Bounder—the only member of the Famous Five who was not. But he could not interfere further—he had to stand and look on while his best chum was hopelessly licked by a fellow who outclassed him in physical prowess—a fellow he ought never to have faced in combat, especially with the bare knuckles. Nugent had unlimited pluck, but in that the Bounder equalled him—and in all other qualifications the Bounder was far ahead.

For some moments Wharton stood with set lips while the combat went on—Nugent taking severe punishment without flinching, and the Bounder hardly getting touched.

"Time!" rapped out Bob Cherry, who had taken out his watch.



"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "You won't find much left of Franky—yaroooooh!" Bunter's cackle was cut short as the half-loaf in Bob Cherry's hand whizzed through the air. It landed on Bunter's fat chin, and the Owl of the Remove sat down in the passage with a bump and a roar. "Yoooooop!"

(See Chapter 5.)

Neither of the combatants heeded. In that wild and whirling combat there were neither rounds nor rests, though generally, in the Greyfriars Remove, these matters were carried through according to rule.

"Time!" roared Bob angrily. "Stop them!"

And two or three pairs of hands grasped each of the combatants and dragged them apart.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Hard Hit!

FRANK NUGENT sank into a chair, and Hurree Janiset Ram Singh fanned his crimson, heated face with a book. He was glad enough of the rest. He had already gone on beyond his strength, though he was quite determined to go on longer.

Herbert Vernon-Smith lounged away a few paces, and seated himself carelessly on the edge of the long mahogany table. Skinner & Co. gathered round him, grinning with glee. It was the Bouncer's fight, and howsoever long it lasted, the result was a foregone conclusion—first victory to the new party in the Remove. The Bouncer, hard as iron all through, showed scarcely a sign of his exertions, and there were few marks on him. He breathed evenly as he sat lounging on the edge of the table during the minute rest.

"Good man, Smithy!" murmured Snoop. "Your win, old man. He would have cracked up in another minute."

The Bouncer shrugged his shoulders. "Deep!" murmured Skinner. "Very deep! You're too deep for that lot, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith looked at him.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, beginning on Nugent!" grinned Skinner. "Of course, he can't stand up to you. Look at Wharton! He'd rather be getting all those jolly old thumps himself—he winces every time you hit Nugent! It's entertainin' to watch his face."

"Is it?" said the Bouncer.

"Oh, no end!" said Skinner. "I fancy he'd give a term's pocket-money to take Nugent's place, if the obstinate ass would let him!"

"Something like a pal," said the Bouncer.

His face clouded for a moment. He had supporters in the Remove, but there was none among his friends there who would have stood by him in a tight corner. He had had such a pal in Tom Redwing, and his own passionate and headstrong temper had turned that pal away.

"Give him some more, hard!" said Skinner. "It's a jolly good beginning to the jolly old campaign, you know, to lick one of that swanking set before all the Remove. It lowers their giddy prestige."

"It does and no mistake," said Snoop, "and a little more of this, and I fancy Nugent won't be feeling like a cricket-match on Wednesday. I fancy he will be feeling more like sanny!"

"Do you think Smithy hasn't thought of that?" grinned Skinner. "Trust Smithy!"

"Time!" called out Bob Cherry reluctantly.

It was clear enough to Bob that Frank Nugent was in no state to go on with the fight. It was equally clear that Frank was determined to go on till he dropped.

Frank Nugent jumped from the chair with a show of alacrity. The Bouncer lounged forward from the table.

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The thick ring of Removites looked on with keen interest. There was general admiration for the plucky fight Nugent was putting up against an overwhelming adversary. But nobody had the faintest expectation of seeing him win—or, indeed, of surviving another round of the Bouncer's hard hitting.

Harry Wharton, with compressed lips and knitted brows, looked on, fully expecting to see his chum knocked out in the round. Skinner & Co. watched with grinning faces. The prospective defeat of a member of the Famous Five was cheering to the black sheep of the Remove. They hoped that it might prove an omen—the beginning of the end.

"Go it, Smithy!" chuckled Skinner.

"Back up, Nugent!"

To the surprise of the onlookers, the Bouncer did not push an overwhelming attack. He was as fresh as paint, while his opponent was obviously fatigued. A savage attack from the Bouncer would have finished Frank Nugent.

But it did not come.

To the surprise of the Removites, and the anger of Skinner & Co., Vernon-Smith contented himself with defence.

He even gave ground a little, and Nugent panted after him, seeking to attack. But the Bouncer's defence was good.

"Time!"

Nugent stepped back, looking fresher at the end of the round than at the beginning. His eyes were brighter, too. He was hoping now that he would defeat the Bouncer, whose vigour had so suddenly and unexpectedly faded away.

But Skinner was under no deception. He stared angrily at the Bouncer as Smithy loafed on the table again.

"What's this funny game, Smithy?" he demanded.

"Game!" repeated Smithy.

"You're letting him off."

"Think so?" yawned the Bouncer.

"Anybody could see it! I know Wharton can see it, if Nugent can't!" growled Skinner. "What's the silly game? Have you lost your nerve, Smithy, or what's the matter?"

"Mind your own bizney!"

"What!" howled Skinner.

"Don't worry, old bean!"

Skinner stepped back and scowled. The Bouncer waited calmly for the call of time, and when it came he toed the line again. It was Frank Nugent who attacked, and the Bouncer simply stalled him off, with such ease that it was clear that victory was in his hands, had he chosen to take it.

Some of the Remove fellows began to laugh. There was, in fact, an element of the ridiculous in Nugent making fierce attacks upon a fellow who had only to exert himself to finish the fight at any moment he chose to select.

"How much longer is this going on?" asked Bolsover major scoffingly. "Wake me up when it's over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get a move on, Nugent!"

"Why don't you touch him, Smithy?"

Frank Nugent realised how matters stood, helped thereto by a slight mocking smile that played over the Bouncer's hard face. His face, already red with exertion, became scarlet. He realised that he was being played with, and that he was already defeated. He gathered all his energy, and made a fierce, rushing attack—an attack that compelled the Bouncer to hit hard in self-defence.

Crash!

Frank Nugent went down.

At the same moment the big door of the Rag was opened, and Wingate of the

Sixth came in. Wingate's rugged brow was dark. The uproar in the Rag had brought the captain of Greyfriars to the spot, and he had his ashplant under his arm.

"Fighting here!" he exclaimed. "Can't you have the gloves on in the gym if you can't keep the peace, you young sweeps. Stop that!"

It was stopped already. Nugent was making an effort to rise, but he fell back on his elbow, panting feebly. Harry Wharton dropped by his side to help him.

Wingate strode angrily on the scene.

"Who's in this?" he snapped.

"Smithy and Nugent," said Squiff.

"They'll both take six!" said the captain of Greyfriars. "You young sweeps! Nobody objects to a decent scrap with the mittens on—but this is outside the limit! You're head boy of the Remove, Wharton; you ought to have stopped this. You'll take three hundred lines."

"Very well," said Harry, without much heed. All his concern was for his defeated chum.

"Now, Vernon-Smith and Nugent."

Wingate let his ashplant slip down into his hand. "Bend over!"

Frank Nugent was on his feet now, leaning on Wharton. His crimson face had gone white, the colour ebbing from it, and his eyes were half-closed. Wingate's face grew darker as he looked at him. There were harsh marks all over Nugent's handsome face—his lip was cut, his nose swollen, one of his eyes darkening. His punishment had been severe, though nothing like it would have been had not the Bouncer so unaccountably spared him in the last rounds.

"You first, Vernon-Smith," said the prefect, after a hard look at Nugent.

"Ready!" said the Bouncer lightly.

"Six" from a prefect's ashplant was a light or a severe penalty, according to the circumstances—and the prefect! Sometimes six light flicks upheld the cause of law and order without doing much damage to the victim. But on this occasion it was a real six—the Bouncer felt every one of them as he bent over a chair. Wingate did not spare the rod.

But the Bouncer's expression did not change. He was hard as iron, and a Head's flogging would not have drawn a sound from his lips.

"That's for you, Vernon-Smith."

"Thanks!" drawled the Bouncer, and there was a laugh from some of the juniors.

Wingate turned to Nugent again. His manner was irresolute. Justice required that both culprits should "bend over"; but it was obvious that Frank was in no state for punishment. The captain of Greyfriars paused, ashplant in hand.

"I'm ready, Wingate," said Nugent faintly. Not for worlds would the junior have admitted that he was afraid to take six.

"May I put in a word, Wingate?" drawled the Bouncer.

"Well?"

"You can give me the other six, if you like."

"What?"

"It was really my fault; I started the trouble," said Vernon-Smith coolly. "Leave Nugent out and give me the other six. All the same to you so long as you whop somebody, I suppose?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky young sweep," said Wingate, "I've a jolly good mind to take you at your word!"

"Do!" said the Bouncer.



"Man down!" yelled Skinner. Frank Nugent was on the floor, the Bounder standing over him, panting, with blazing eyes. Skinner went reeling in one direction and Sidney James Snoop in another as Wharton burst through the excited throng. "Franky, old man—" "It's all right, Harry!" gasped Nugent. "I'm not done yet!" (See Chapter 5.)

Wingate slipped the ashplant under his arm. Certainly he did not want to punish Nugent.

"If you assure me that you started this, Vernon-Smith—"

"I did!"

"Then the matter ends here—"

"It isn't true, Wingate," broke out Nugent. "I started it!"

"Do you want six?" roared Wingate.

"I don't care! I struck the first blow," said Nugent. "I'm not getting begged off by Vernon-Smith!"

"You're a young ass!" said Wingate. And, with the ashplant tucked under his arm, he walked out of the Rag.

"Let's get out of this, Franky," muttered Wharton.

Nugent nodded, and leaning rather heavily on his chum, he left the Rag, and was glad enough to find himself in Study No. 1 in the Remove, away from curious eyes.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

After the Fight!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. had their tea rather late that day, and their faces were grim. It was not the usual cheery meal in Study No. 1.

They had done all they could for Nugent: his damages had been carefully tended by friendly hands. But there was really little that could be done. A cut lip, a swollen nose, a black eye seemed likely to haunt Frank Nugent for some time to come, nor was he likely soon to recover from the racking weariness that overcame him, with the reaction after the strenuous fight in the Rag.

Sturdy enough as he was, Nugent had taken on a task far beyond his strength, and had gone on much longer than was prudent, and now he was feeling utterly spent and weary and depressed. And his sunny temper was clouded, too. Defeat was not pleasant, and still more humiliating than defeat was the Bounder's scornful sparing of him, as Nugent

regarded it. Neither was the sympathy of his chums wholly gratifying.

Nugent did not pride himself on being a fighting-man; but he did not like being looked on as a lame duck. There was an unaccustomed bitterness in his breast as he sat in the armchair with aching limbs and dulled eyes.

He ate little, and spoke less.

Tea was soon over, and it was with some relief that the Famous Five separated.

Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Johnny Bull rose to go, and Wharton rose to go with them, with a look at Nugent.

Then Nugent spoke with a bitterness that surprised his comrades.

"You'll leave Smithy alone, you fellows!"

"Eh?" said Bob, flushing a little.

"Do you think I don't know what you're after?" said Nugent. "You can lick Smithy almost as easily as he licked me, hang him! Well, you're not going to do it!"

"Look here, Nugent—"

"My esteemed Franky," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The thrashfulness of the disgusting Smithy is the proper caper."

"Do you want to make me look a bigger fool in the Remove than I look already?" said Nugent bitterly. "Are you going to make the fellows say that I can't go about the school without somebody to protect me? Leave Smithy alone!"

The chums of the Remove exchanged glances.

"I don't see why I shouldn't ask Smithy to have the gloves on with me in the gym," said Bob Cherry.

"Because he licked me?"

"Well, because he's a cheeky cad!" growled Bob. "You oughtn't to have taken him on, Frank. He's above your weight."

"I'm not so jolly certain that you could lick him, either, if you come to that!" snapped Nugent.

"I'll try!"

"You won't! Let him alone! Do

you think I want the fellows to be saying that a chap can't scrap with me without being bullied afterwards by my friends?"

"Bullied!" exclaimed Bob.

"Well, that's what it comes to. Do you want to make out that I'm a milk-sop that mustn't be touched? Mind your own business!"

"Frank!"

"Look here—" growled Johnny Bull.

"My esteemed chums," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "let us not have the wordfulness in the excellent and ludicrous family circle. Our respected chum Franky is rightfully correct."

"Rot!" growled Johnny Bull. "Smithy's asked for a licking, and I think he ought to have it."

"Same here!" grunted Bob. "But I'll leave it to Wharton. What do you say, umpire?"

Wharton looked at his chum in the armchair. His face was very sombre. Nugent's defeat, and his evident suffering, had roused the deepest anger of the captain of the Remove, and he was longing to stand before Herbert Vernon-Smith with his hands up, to give back to the Bounder, with compound interest, what he had given to Nugent. But he was quite able to understand Frank's point of view.

"Frank's right, in a way," he said. "It might not be quite the game for one of us to lick the Bounder, because he's—because he's had a scrap with Frank. But look here, Frank. I've got to deal with him for tearing up the cricket notice. We can't let that pass!"

"That's so!" exclaimed Bob eagerly. "Leave Nugent out of it, and deal with him for that."

"Good egg!" said Johnny Bull.

"I've dealt with him for that," said Nugent sullenly.

"You have?" ejaculated Bob.

"Oh, I know I haven't made much of a show of it!" said Nugent, crimsoning. "You needn't remind me of that. I shall get it rubbed in enough, without hearing it from you fellows."

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"I didn't mean—"

"Look here, Smithy ought to be jolly well licked!" growled Johnny Bull. "His cheek's got to be stopped. If he's not to be licked, he ought to have a Form ragging for meddling with the cricket notices."

"Oh, go ahead, and do as you like!" said Nugent. "Only don't speak to me again afterwards, that's all! I can't stop you."

"Look here, Frank—"

"That's enough, I tell you!"

Frank Nugent turned his face away from his chums, and sat staring moodily into the empty fire-grate.

An angry reply trembled on Bob Cherry's lips; but fortunately he checked it.

"My esteemed chums, let us give Nugent his excellent head," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Harry Wharton nodded assent. He realised that the Co. were very near to a split, and that he was determined should never be effected by the Bounder.

"Oh, all right!" said Bob, rather gruffly. And he walked out of the study, and Johnny Bull and the nabob followed him.

Wharton remained.

He cleared the tea-table, and brought out his books ready for prep. Nugent sat motionless for a long time, staring at the grate. He was suffering in mind and body, and his temper was sore. He glanced round at last, and an involuntary smile came over his face as he caught Wharton's look of deep concern.

"It's all right, old man," he said. "I'm not quite slaughtered. I was a fool to tackle the Bounder."

"What about prep, old man?"

"No prep for me to-night—I couldn't look at the stuff. You get on—I won't interrupt you."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I'll chance it with Quelchy in the morning," he said. "Never mind prep. Care for chess?"

"Oh, my hat! No!"

"Let's get out for a stroll round the quad," said Harry. "It's cool now, and it will do you good, old fellow."

"That's a good idea."

Nugent rose, with something of an effort, and looked at his face in the glass. He smiled grimly at his reflection.

"My word! Quelchy will jump on me to-morrow when he sees this," he said. "Can't be helped. Let's get out."

The chums of the Remove went downstairs. Dusk had fallen, and it was a cool evening after the hot summer's day. Skinner & Co. were loafing in the lower passage, and they whispered to one another and chuckled as Frank passed them with the captain of the Remove. Nugent flushed, but he gave no other sign of having observed Skinner. The two chums walked silently in the quiet coolness of the old quad.

"You'll have to take my name off the list, Harry," said Nugent abruptly.

"Do you think so?"

Wharton had been thinking so himself. "Can't be helped. I sha'n't be anything like fit."

"I dare say that was what Smithy had in his mind," said Wharton, biting his lip.

"I don't know! After all, he didn't begin the trouble—I started on him," said Nugent. "And—there's no denying it—he didn't give me so much as he might have given me. He's a queer customer, Smithy is. I wish this rotten row had never taken place—I mean, Smithy being turned out of the cricket in the first place. It couldn't be helped, I know; but it means a lot of trouble in the Remove."

Remove."

But Harry Wharton did not echo his chum's wish. His feelings towards the Bounder, just then, were black and bitter, and he no longer regretted that he was on fighting terms again with his old enemy. The struggle had come, undesired by him; but now that it had come, he was prepared to carry it through without truce.

When the two chums came in, they passed Vernon-Smith on the staircase. The Bounder smiled mockingly; and Harry Wharton paused for a second, but Nugent pulled at his arm, and they went on their way. Behind them they heard a low, mocking laugh from the Bounder of Greyfriars.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Hazel's Way!

"BUT why?"

Marjorie Hazeldene spoke in a low voice, with a distressed look in her blue eyes. Hazeldene of the Remove, who was standing by his bicycle, stared at it as he answered, seemingly unwilling to meet his sister's inquiring glance.

"Oh, I'm fed up with them!" he said. "Anyhow, you and Clara can come over and see the match to-morrow, if you want to. It won't make any difference, my not playing for the Remove."

"But it will," said Marjorie. "I don't see why you shouldn't be in the team, Hazel. The last time I saw Harry he told me you were in great form."

"Oh, did he?" said Hazel.

"Yes. I know there is some trouble going on in your Form at Greyfriars," said Marjorie. "Billy Bunter came over to see his sister Bessie at Cliff House yesterday, and you know how he talks." "All jaw, like a sheep's head!" growled Hazel.

"That old trouble with Vernon Smith has broken out again," said Marjorie. "Was it he who induced you to resign from the eleven, Hazel?"

"Can't a fellow make up his mind on his own?" demanded Hazel, with the quick resentment of a weak character—always led, and yet resenting the imputation of being led. "I tell you, I'm fed up with them. I'm always down about ninth or tenth to bat, for one thing."

"Isn't that better than not batting at all?" asked Marjorie.

"Well, I suppose it is, in a way," admitted Hazel. "But I haven't quarrelled with Wharton, Marjorie. I'm backing up the Bounder, that's all. He's going to start a rival cricket team in the Remove, and he's looking for recruits. There was an idea of a match the same day as the Highcliffe one, but that's fallen through. But you can rely on old Smithy to give Wharton a tussle."

Marjorie Hazeldene, sitting on the stile in the lane near the gates of Cliff House, regarded her brother with a troubled look as he fumbled uneasily with his bicycle. It was quite clear to her that the cool and cunning Bounder was making a catspaw of Hazel—and equally clear that a hint to that effect would only drive Hazel into an obstinate and passionate temper.

"I wanted to see you play in the Highcliffe match," she said. "It's one of the biggest Remove matches."

"Well, I don't wholly like standing out of it, if you come to that," muttered Hazel. "But if the Bounder gets his way, he will very likely be captain of the Remove soon, and it will be worth a fellow's while standing in with him."

Marjorie compressed her lips a little.

"You think he would make a better captain than Harry?" she asked.

"Well, I don't know about that. Wharton's a good skipper, in his way," admitted Hazel. "Still, it's arranged now, and it's too late for me to alter my mind. Ogilvy's got my place."

"Well, if it's too late, it can't be helped," said Marjorie. "But it's a disappointment. I don't think I shall come over to Greyfriars after all. I'm not keen on seeing Ogilvy play," she added, with a smile.

Hazel laughed.

"Perhaps I have been rather an ass," he said slowly. It was a peculiar circumstance, but very often after a talk with his sister Marjorie, Hazel realised that he had been rather an ass. "A fellow doesn't want to be made use of. Of course, it's Smithy's game to get Wharton's men away if he can. He's tried it on with Ogilvy and Russell, but they've chucked him, as soon as Wharton held up a finger. Skinner, and Snoop, and Micky Desmond, and that lot are backing him up—they'd back up any fellow who stood spreads like the Bounder; but he hasn't got any of the cricketers."

"Only you," said Marjorie.

"Well, I'm not bound to make a giddy sacrifice of myself," said Hazel. "I dare say he's been pulling my leg, too. It's rather a distinction to play Highcliffe. All very well for the Bounder to edge me out, because he's out himself. I dare say he will like company, loafing about with his hands in his pockets while other fellows are playing for the school. I suppose I'm rather an ass."

"And it's too late now?" asked Marjorie.

"Well, Nugent's standing out," said Hazel. "Smithy gave him an awful licking yesterday, and he's fairly crumpled up. It's rather thick. Lots of the fellows think Smithy crooked him for the match on purpose."

"Surely he would not be so base?" said Marjorie.

"Well, there's no telling with the Bounder, when he gets his rag out," said Hazel. "He's a dangerous customer."

"And a dangerous friend, I should think."

Hazel nodded.

"Only a fellow doesn't want to eat humble-pie," he said, with one of his quick changes of mood. "I'm jolly well not going to ask Wharton to give me the place if Nugent stands out to-morrow."

"But you can offer to join up," said Marjorie. "After all, if you're wanted in the team, it's a matter of duty."

"Yes, that's so, too. A fellow hates to have a fellow swanking over him, though," muttered Hazel.

"But Wharton doesn't swank, does he?"

"Well, no, I can't say he does. Skinner's always piling on the agony about it, but dash Skinner! He's nobody's friend," said Hazel. "He likes to set fellows by the ears; it amuses him. I'm not going to let Skinner's cackle keep me out of a big match. Look here, Marjorie, I'm jolly well going to ask Wharton if he wants me to-morrow; and, if he does, I'm jolly well going to play!"

Marjorie smiled at her brother a little sadly. That was the point she had wished him to reach, and which, tactfully, she had contrived to make him reach. It was for his own good that she used her influence; but she wished that he had been strong enough to need no influence.

"That's settled," said Hazel, with an air of great determination. "I'm not

(Continued on page 16.)



Champion of Cricket!

— By Horace Coker

I'M a clever chap at cricket, I'm a wonder at the wicket,
I'm the most impressive person on the pitch.
I've got all my wits about me. When the First Eleven's without me
It is like the Surrey team without Bill Hitch!
I'm an enterprising chappie, and I never feel so happy
As when driving all the bowlers to despair,
By getting them in fixes, and by scoring lots of "sixes,"
Till I make them gnash their teeth and tear their hair!

You may talk of Hobbs and Fender, but these heroes must surrender
To the claims of Horace Coker, don't you know;
You may prate of Cecil Parkin, but I cannot help remarkin'
That, compared with me, he's just a trifle slow!
Both at bowling and at batting, on the turf or on the matting,
I'm by far the finest expert in the land!
I'm a skilful chap at stumping, and when boundaries I'm clumping
All the lookers-on admit it beats the band!

I regard that fellow Potter as a rascal and a rotter,
For he says that I am talking through my hat.
Says he: "At cricket, Coker, you're a most amazing joker!"
Which is brazen cheek—and I'm not standing that!
More in anger than in sorrow, I shall go to him to-morrow
And my fist will come in contact with his nose;
I'm a burly, brainy boxer, and I'll give him such a shock, sir,
That he'll fall in meek contrition at my toes!

When my pads I briskly buckle I can often hear a chuckle
From the cheeky crowd of infants looking on.
"Coker hopes to make a million!" comes a shout from the pavilion,
"But in half a tick his wicket will be gone!"
Yes; they scorn me and deride me, and they love to chaff and chide me,
But I'll show 'em I mean business right away!
I shall cut a handsome figure as I smite with vim and vigour,
And the bowlers will not get me out to-day!

My supporters needn't worry, for I'll shortly play for Surrey,
They'll see me at the Oval next July;
I shall hit with so much "ginger" that I'll very likely injure
All the people on the buses passing by!
The opposing side will fear me, and the crowd will rise and cheer me,
I shall prove myself a giant in the fray!
Then "three times three" for Coker, who is *not* a comic joker,
But the first and foremost player of the day!

Supplement i.]

EDITORIAL!

By HARRY WHARTON.

CHAMPIONS abound at Greyfriars. They are as numerous almost as the sands of the seashore. We have popular George Wingate, the champion athlete; Horace Coker, the champion comedian; Claude Hoskins, the champion musician; Billy Bunter, the champion gorger; and George Tubb, the champion leap-frogger—to mention only a few. Champions swarm everywhere; and, this being the case, it is only right that we should have a special number in their honour.

It is the natural desire of every healthy-minded, able-bodied fellow to get to the top of the tree. Cardinal Wolsey's advice to "fling away ambition" is scornfully rejected. We are a very ambitious crowd at Greyfriars. Each one of us, practically, is possessed of a burning ambition to become the champion cricketer, the champion crammer (I don't mean "fibber," but "scholar"!), the champion gymnast, the champion boxer, and so on and so forth. The spirit of competition is very keen; and this is as it should be. If we crawled lazily through life, without any definite goal in view, we should not only be lacking in character and backbone, but what a tame existence it would be!

I have heard it said that we can't all be champions. Yet why not? The field is wide, and there are so many championships to be won. Even the biggest dunce and duffer in the school can be champion of something, if only he makes up his mind to it, and plunges boldly into the fray. We should not expect Alonzo Todd to become a champion of cricket; but there's no reason why he shouldn't become a champion of something else. He might, for instance, deprive Dr. Johnson of the honour of being the champion dictionary-compiler! Alonzo has a big vocabulary, and he is very fond of using jaw-breaking words.

The Greyfriars champions are well in the limelight this week, and they have a lot to say for themselves. Some of them have too much to say. Horace Coker blossoms into poetry; and from his style of writing you would imagine he was cock of the walk, ruler of the roost, and the most important person on this planet. He is all this and more—but only in his own estimation!

Of course, there are two sorts of champions—the genuine and the counterfeit. The real champions are seldom given to bragging and boasting; the spurious champions are eternally blowing their own trumpets. Billy Bunter will tell you he is champion of this, and of that, and of the other. Bunter is never more amusing than when he talks like this; and you will enjoy a good many laughs this week at the expense of the Owl of the Remove—and others!

HARRY WHARTON.
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THE telephone-bell clanged loudly in Mr. Prout's study. The master of the Fifth, who was engaged in cleaning his golf-clubs, gave a snort of annoyance.

Mr. Prout did not regard the telephone as a boon and a blessing to men. In the brief interval between morning school and dinner he had been called up no less than six times by various people—chiefly Courtfield tradesmen.

"I feel like hurling this hateful instrument out of the window!" snorted Mr. Prout, as he strode up to the phone.

"Who is there?"

The reply was more like the barking of a dog than a human voice. But Mr. Prout recognised that bark. It belonged to Sir Hilton Popper, the local baronet. Mr. Prout and Sir Hilton frequently played golf together; but they were not on very good terms at the moment. There had been an argument as to who was the golf champion of the Greyfriars district. Mr. Prout, who didn't believe in false modesty, declared that the honour belonged to him. Sir Hilton Popper, on the other hand, was convinced that he was the champion golfer, and that Mr. Prout was merely a clumsy novice by comparison.

Mr. Prout frowned when he heard Sir Hilton's bark on the telephone.

"You wish to speak to me, sir?" he said coldly.

"I do, otherwise I should not have called you up on the telephone," came the reply. "What about a game of golf this afternoon, Prout?"

"I regret I am otherwise engaged," said Mr. Prout.

There was a snort over the wires.

"What! You refuse to play with me?"

"To be quite candid—yes!" said Mr. Prout. "Truth to tell, I am tired of playing against novices!"

"Novices!" hooted Sir Hilton. "Why, you—you—"

"I desire to compete with foemen worthy of my steel," said Mr. Prout.

There was an explosive roar from the other end of the wire.

"You are insolent, sir! You are making remarks which you would not dare to say to my face! I regard you, sir, as a—a miserable old toad!"

Mr. Prout gave a jump. He wondered if he had heard aright. He knew that Sir Hilton Popper sometimes let his tongue run away with him; but this was the first time that the peppery baronet had gone so far as to address him as "a miserable old toad." Mr. Prout grew purple in the face. He tried to speak, but words failed him. He was fairly dancing with rage. Finally, he slammed the receiver on to its hooks, and paced up and down his study.

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"I have never been so insulted in my life!" he exclaimed. "Sir Hilton Popper has grossly slandered me, and he shall pay dearly for those words! I will write to him at once!"

After letting off steam in this manner for some moments, Mr. Prout sat down and penned the following epistle:

"To Sir Hilton Popper.

"Sir,—You have seen fit to address me over the telephone as a Miserable Old Toad. Permit me to inform you that I am neither miserable, nor old, nor a toad. The only time I am ever miserable is when I am playing golf in your company. You play such a deplorable game that I defy any man to be cheerful when watching you.

"With regard to my being old, I hurl the insinuation back in your teeth. I am still on the right side of sixty, and I feel particularly young and vigorous at the present moment. So much so, that if you were here now I think I should offer you personal violence.

"You also had the brazen effrontery to characterise me as a toad. I have looked up the dictionary definition of this creature, which is as follows:

"A toad is a venomous reptile, somewhat akin to a frog, which usually makes its home in the shallow water of a ditch or dyke. It is a creepy, crawly, contemptible creature."

"I do not answer to this description; though I must admit that, like the toad, I am 'in low water' at the present moment, having just purchased a new set of golf-clubs.

"And now, sir, allow me to inform you that I shall place this matter in the hands of my solicitors, Messrs. Slyman & Fox, of Courtfield, who will be instructed to serve you with a writ for slander forthwith.

"Very grimly yours,

"PAUL PROUT."

Having written that somewhat remarkable epistle, Mr. Prout rang for Trotter, the page, and instructed him to take the letter by hand to Sir Hilton Popper's residence.

Within an hour there was a visitor for Mr. Prout. He burst into the Form-master's study unannounced, and his face was distorted with anger. The visitor was Sir Hilton Popper.

Mr. Prout sprang from his chair, and the two men glared at each other so fiercely that, if looks could have killed,

both would probably have expired forthwith on the study carpet.

"Sir!" stormed Sir Hilton Popper. "I have just received an extraordinary letter from you! Not only is it extraordinary, but it is downright insulting, begad! I demand an explanation at once!"

Mr. Prout gave an angry snort.

"It is you who have been insulting!" he exclaimed. "You must either have been mad, or intoxicated, to address me as you did! You referred to me, if you recollect, as a—a miserable old toad!"

"What! Nothin' of the sort!" thundered Sir Hilton Popper. "I should never make use of such personal epithets. I always keep my thoughts to myself!"

"You distinctly said on the telephone to-day—"

Sir Hilton gave a gasp.

"I have not used my telephone to-day!" he exclaimed. "As a matter of fact, it is out of order."

It was Mr. Prout's turn to look astonished.

"You—you did not ring me up an hour ago?" he gasped.

"No, sir, I did not!"

"Then—then I can only conclude that I have been made the victim of a practical joke. Some young rascal must have telephoned to me, and imitated your curious bark—I—I mean, your voice!"

Even as Mr. Prout spoke there was a tap at the door, and Loder of the Sixth entered. He held a squirming junior by the collar, and hauled him into the study.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Prout. "Why have you brought Skinner to me, Loder?"

"I caught him in the act of playing a trick on you, sir," said the prefect. "I happened to be in the post-office in the village an hour ago, and Skinner was in the telephone-box. He had his back to me, and wasn't aware of my presence. I heard him imitate Sir Hilton Popper's voice, and he called you a miserable old toad, sir. I have therefore brought him to you for punishment."

Both Mr. Prout and Sir Hilton Popper glared at the unhappy Skinner, who fervently wished that the floor would open and swallow him up.

Mr. Prout then picked up a cane, and the practical joker went through the mill. His yells of anguish floated down the Fifth Form passage, making the fellows wonder whether a murder was being committed in Mr. Prout's study.

It was a sadder and wiser youth who crawled out of that study a few moments later; and in future Skinner will think twice before he attempts to stir up strife between Mr. Prout and Sir Hilton Popper!

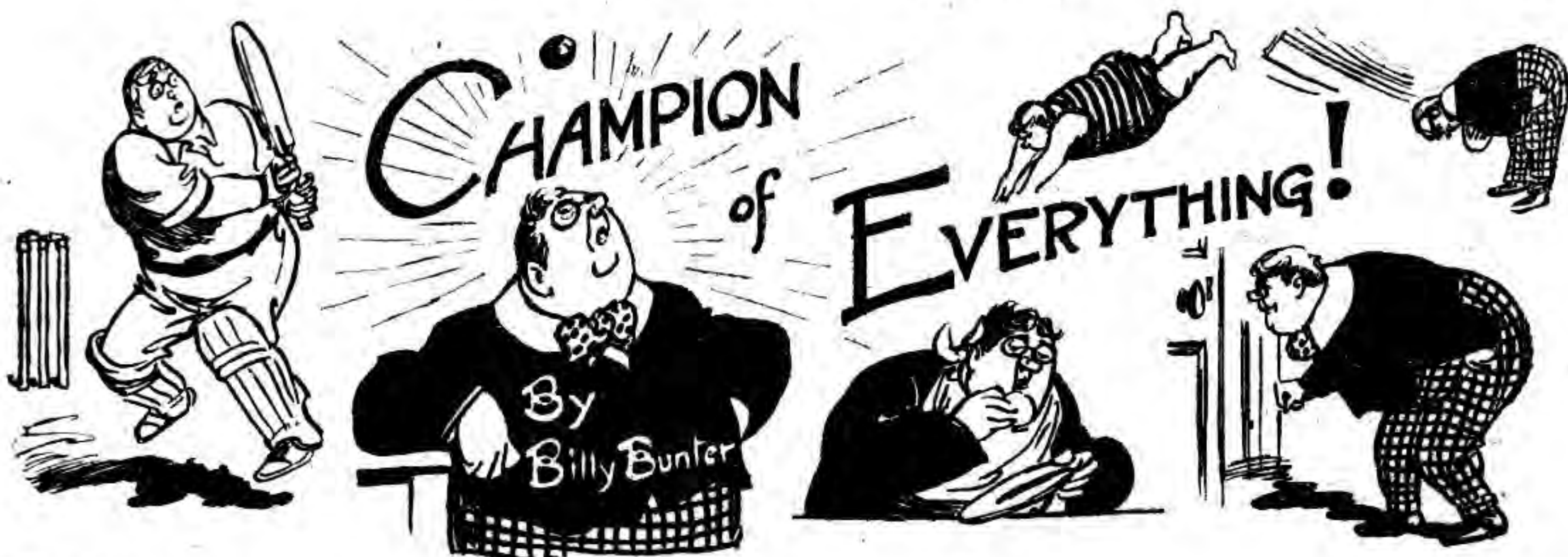
THE END.

[Supplement ii.]

The Children's Best Coloured Paper

JUNGLE JINKS

Out on Thursday—Price 2d



FAR be it from me to swank or bragg, or blow my own trumpitt. A Bunter duzzent do that sort of thing. The fellows who are always swanking, like Wharton and Cherry and Nugent, have really got nothing to swank about. Whereas I, who am not a bit konseated, have got ample reezon to swank, and to puff out my chest with pride.

But I refuse to be a bombastick, bumpshus, bragging bounder. I have got a reputation for modesty, and I'm not going to soil it. I'm simply going to tell you about one or two of my achievements.

I can trooly say that I am the gratest champion Greyfriars has ever had. Champion of what? you will ask. Why, lots of things, as I will proseed to prove.

All the world knows—at least, it ought to know—that I have won the Gorging Championship of Greyfriars three years in suxxession. The first year I got into the final with my miner Sammy, and beat him all ends up. I gained the victory by a clear margin of ten doe-nutts.

Last year I was in the final with Coker of the Fifth. Coker isn't a gluten in the ordinary way; but when an Eating Championship comes along, it's reely serprizing how much tuck he can stow away. He gave me a good run for my munny, but, of corse, I had him whacked at the finish.

This year I completed the hat-trick by again carrying off the Gorging Championship. And I was up against a tuffer propersition than either Coker or my miner. That mizzerable worm, Skinner, had been training for the event by going without grub for a whole week be-4-hand. He absolutely starved himself, so that he would be ravvenus on the day of the kontest. We assembled in the tuckshop to fight our duel to a finish; and the way Skinner started off filled me with fear and 4-boding. He fell upon a rabbit-pie with a snarl like a hungry savvidge, and he polished it off in record time. I had to eat a rabbit-pie, too, but I couldn't stay the pace. Skinner was all over me in the early stages of the kontest.

Gradually, however, I wore him down. He duzzent possess the stamminer that I've got. Moreover, being a skinny fellow, he hasn't so much room inside as me; and this was a severe handycap.

When we had waded through the pies and the pastrys, and had got as far as the storberry-ices, Skinner was wacked. He couldn't go on. His jaws refused to perform their funkshuns. With a groan of angwish, he rolled off the tuckshop stool; and I was duly acclaimed the champion gorger of Greyfriars. "Cheer upon cheer rang out from a hundred throats," as an author would say; though

Supplement iii.]

personally, I never cheer with my throat!

Having carried off the Gorging Championship, I looked round, like Alexander of old, for fresh worlds to konker. I cast covetous eyes on the Kricket Championship, and determined to win it. And when a Bunter makes up his mind to do a thing, why, it's as good as done.

I couldn't get a game with the Remove, owing to personal jellusy on Wharton's part. But one day the First Eleven were a man short, and old Wingate begged me, on bended eyes, and with tears in his knees, to fill the breech. Of corse, I played a marvellus game. Things were going very badly for Greyfriars when I went in to bat. Nine wickets were down, and only a paltry twenty runs had been scored. I soon changed the complexion of the game by hitting the ball out of the ground six times running. I nocked the pavilion roof about a good deal, dislodging several tiles. I also dislodged old Quelchy's tile—in other words, his silk hat. The ball took it off his head as clean as a wissle! Everybody was amazed at my brilliant eggshibition of batting. Of corse, I made a century, and won the match for Greyfriars, and became a permanent, as well as a prominent, member of the First Eleven. By common consent, I was declared to be the kricket champion of Greyfriars.

Easily Understood!

The showman was in his element. Before an admiring crowd of country yokels he was dilating upon the virtues of his waxwork collection gathered upon the village green. Turning to the effigy of a thin gentleman in gorgeous garb, he exclaimed:

"Now this, gentlemen, this is the cream of the 'ole collection. You'd be surprised if I was to tell you wot I paid for 'im. 'E's taken from life, 'e is. 'E's—"

"Stow that guff, mister, and come to the point!" interrupted a voice. "Tell us 'oo 'e is!"

"'E's George IV., gentlemen, Hemperor of Hindia, one of the gratest English monarchs since the time of William the Conqueror."

"But I thought," interposed a small man, in blue glasses, determined to get full value for the threepence admission he had paid, "that George IV. was a very stout man."

"Very likely 'e was, sir," replied the showman. "But if you'd been 'ere as long as 'e 'as without even a mouthful of food, you'd 'ave shrunk a bit yerself!"

Champion gorger and champion kricketer! But I was not kontent. I meant to earn fresh lorrels, and I decided to take part in the Boxing Tornyment. I covered myself with glory, and I covered my opponents with broozes and cuts and wheels. You ought to have seen the final between me and Bolsover majer. It was worth going a good many miles to see. We were pretty evenly matched to begin with, but after a few rounds my sooperiority asserted itself, and I waded in, and gave my berly opponent a terrifick hammering. In the fifth round I adminnistered the nock-out—a powerful kick with my left leg—and Bolsover went down for the count. I felt rather sorry for him when I saw them carry him away to the sanny. I was loudly hailed as the victor and the Boxing Champion of Greyfriars; and some of my admirers threw bo-kays into the ring.

I then had a cut at the Swimming Championship. I won this with ease. Swimming always comes natcheral to me; and I can't help thinking I must have been a porpuss in some other incarnation. Anyhow, I never had to learn to swim, like other fellows. When I was a tiny toddler of four, I tumbled into the sea one day, and instead of sinking like a stoan, I calmly swam ashore.

I won the Swimming Championship of Greyfriars in grate stile. It was afterwards said by some of my critticks that I swam with one leg on the bottom. I hurl this insinuation back in their teeth with scorn. I have never yet taken a mean advantage of anybody, and I never shall.

I have won duzzens of other championships; and I only wish I had time and space to tell you how it was done.

Everybody will agree that I'm the Champion Spy, the Champion Sneak, the Champion Eavesdropper, and the Champion Fibber of Greyfriars. Some people say there is no meritt attached to championships of this sort; but people who talk like that are only jellus of my wonderful achievements.

Champion of Everything! That's the proud and eggsalted position I occupy to-day. There are no championships left for me to strive for. I hold them all. In every branch of sport, in every sfeer of learning, W. G. B. is the acknollidged champion. I have swept the board, so to speak.

Will somebody call for three cheers for Billy Bunter, the Greyfriars Champion? Thank you!

"Hip, hip, hip—"

Now then, all together!

"Hurrah! Hurrah! HURRAH!"

Long live the Champion of Everything, and may his substantial form never grow less!

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(Continued from page 12.)

going to be a catspaw, and that's what it comes to. Smithy can get some other fellow to pull his chestnuts out of the fire, by Jove!"

The brother and sister parted at the gates of Cliff House School, and Hazel mounted his bike to ride back to Greyfriars. His mood of independent determination was still strong upon him.

He put up his machine and walked round to the House.

Vernon-Smith was in the doorway, with Skinner and Snoop, and he gave Hazel a friendly nod.

"I've been looking for you, old bean," he said.

"Have you?" said Hazel indifferently.

"Yes. Come up to the study."

"Sorry! I've got to speak to Wharton."

Hazel walked on towards the staircase, leaving the Bounder staring and biting his lip. Skinner winked at the pigeons in the quadrangle. Once more something was going wrong with the Bounder's scheming, and Skinner, as usual, found something entertaining in a friend's discomfiture.

Hazeldene knocked at the door of Study No. 1 in the Remove. It was tea-time, and he expected to find the captain of the Remove there. He found him there with the other members of the Co.

Wharton gave him a cheery look. He was aware that Hazel had gone over to Cliff House to see his sister after lessons, and he had wondered whether he would return with one of his kaleidoscopic changes of mood on him. Apparently he had.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "There's a bun left, Hazel. Bag it before it's gone."

Hazel laughed.

"I haven't come to tea. Is it true that Nugent is standing out of the match to-morrow, Wharton? I heard some of the fellows saying so."

"Yes," said Harry.

"Filled in his place yet?" asked Hazel, with transparent carelessness.

"Not yet."

"Hem! I'm not asking favours, of course," hesitated Hazel.

"Of course not," assented Wharton, with as much gravity as he could muster. He knew what was coming now.

"But if you want me for the match, I'm your man," said Hazel.

"Good!"

"The—the fact is"—Hazel hesitated and coloured—"I don't mind owning up that I've been a bit of an ass. I've rather had my leg pulled, though I didn't see it at first."

Harry Wharton smiled. He did not need telling that.

"All serene," he said. "As Nugent is standing out, after all, I can put you in again, Hazel, all right. Your name goes down."

"Right-ho!" said Hazel. "You can rely on me, of course."

Wharton nodded, and Hazel quitted the study, leaving the Famous Five of the Remove smiling.

"I'm glad of that," Frank Nugent remarked.

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"Same here," assented Harry. "It would have been rather rotten if Smithy had got Hazel into his party."

"No great catch for anybody, I should think," grunted Johnny Bull.

"No; only—"

Wharton did not finish, but his chums knew that he was thinking of Marjorie Hazeldene. For her sake, her friends in the Greyfriars Remove had tolerated a great deal of sullenness, and sometimes insolence, from the irresponsible Hazel, and it was no new experience for Wharton to be very patient with him.

"Anyhow, it doesn't look as if the Bounder is on the high-road to a thumping victory, does it?" grinned Bob Cherry. "He got Hazel to let us down, and he might have known that Hazel would let him down in turn. Nobody seems to be standing by him excepting Skinner and his set, and they're only after what they can get. The old Bounder is getting into the sere and yellow leaf."

Hazel went along to his Study No. 2 in the Remove, where Tom Brown had tea ready.

"I'm in the eleven," was Hazel's first remark.

"Good for you," said the New Zealand junior. "You were a silly ass to get out of it, and a lucky ass to get in again. Hallo! Here's the Bounder!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith looked in. His face was cool and smiling, but there was a glint in his eyes.

"Hazel, old man—" he began. He glanced at Tom Brown, who grinned. "Coming to tea in my study?"

"No, thanks! I'm teeing here with Browney."

"Drop in after tea, will you? I want a little jaw with you about to-morrow afternoon."

"Booked for to-morrow, whole day," said Hazel.

"How's that?"

"Highcliffe match, you know," grinned Hazel.

Having changed sides once more, Hazel was quite keen to impress the Bounder with the value of the ally he had lost.

"You're playing in Wharton's crowd?"

"Yes."

The Bounder looked at him quietly—a look that gave Hazel a little tremor. Tom Brown made a movement forward.

"Chuck it, Smithy!" he said cheerily. "Hazel's done a jolly sensible thing for once. I suppose Wharton knew that you'd been pulling his leg, or he wouldn't have taken him back into the team. We don't want any of your fisticuff stunts in this study, Smithy."

"Any bizney of yours?" drawled the Bounder.

"Yes, lots," said Tom Brown. "You've crooked one man for to-morrow, and you're not going to crook another."

"You're jolly well not going to bully me, Smithy!" exclaimed Hazel, encouraged by the support of the sturdy New Zealand junior. "Go and eat coke, and be blowed to you!"

The Bounder looked at him again fixedly. But if he had been thinking of drastic measures he abandoned the thought. He shrugged his shoulders and sauntered out of the study.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Caught!

WEDNESDAY, the day of the Highcliffe match, dawned bright and sunny. There were no classes that day for the cricketing fraternity, a circumstance at which they rejoiced. Harry Wharton & Co. were in a cheery mood that morning. Courtenay and his men were expected over from Highcliffe in their brake at an early hour, and the Remove fellows were looking forward to a good game and a probable victory.

Cecil Reginald Temple, as he went in to class with the Fourth, frowned. It really was not the right thing, from Cecil Reginald's point of view, that a mere Form team—and a fag team at that—should be playing a whole-day match with a visiting eleven. That match really should have been Cecil Reginald's, with a few humble members of the Remove admitted loftily to his team. Cecil Reginald shook his head seriously over this state of affairs, and wondered, for about the hundredth time, by what means he could contrive to show the Remove fellows their proper place, and keep them in it. No means, however, occurred to his lofty mind that morning, and he went in to class with Mr. Capper frowning.

The Bounder strolled down to Little Side, where he noticed Harry Wharton looking at the pitch.

Wharton did not glance towards him. But the Bounder watched the captain of the Remove with a curious expression on his face.

But for his own reckless perversity, the Bounder would have been a member of the Remove eleven, and a valued member. He would have been meeting the Highcliffe cricketers that day. Now he was out of it, and had been left with the poor satisfaction of seeking to weaken the eleven, and even in that he had failed, so far. His scheme of a rival team in the Remove seemed more remote from success than ever. He wondered whether he had lost his old cunning. He wondered whether his reform, which he had determined to throw aside, had had some deeper effect on his character than he had dreamed of. Something, at least, of his old character was gone. Why had he spared Frank Nugent in that fight in the Rag? He hardly knew.

Skinner had been perplexed, but had finally decided that the Bounder's object had been to humiliate Nugent by sparing him. But the Bounder knew that he had had no such thought. Nugent was one of his enemies. It was Frank's loyal devotion to Wharton that had brought about the fight. Yet the Bounder was conscious of the fact that he rather liked Nugent, and did not want to hurt him. He curled his lip in bitter mockery of his own weakness as it seemed to him. But there it was, and he could not help it.

He had entered into this struggle, and he was already feeling that the game was not worth the candle—that even if he was successful there would be little satisfaction in success. And success was very problematic.

Perhaps it was that consideration that still spurred the Bounder on. The mere thought of defeat was irksome to his arrogant nature.

He would not, and could not, be set aside and disregarded. He would still show all the Remove that he was a fellow to be reckoned with.

Some of the cricketers came down to the ground, chatting cheerily, and they glanced at the Bounder's sombre face as he stood there. Hazel gave him a vaunting look as he passed him.

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Vernon-Smith walked away with bitterness in his breast.

On this day, a day on which he should have distinguished himself, and heard his name shouted on the playing-fields, he was nobody—nothing! Harry Wharton was not even thinking of him. The captain of the Remove had been examining the pitch and had not once glanced at the Bounder. Vernon-Smith knew that Wharton did not even know that he was standing there. He was negligible. Nobody even glanced after him as he went. The fellows there were all thinking of the cricket, and the Bounder was not in the cricket.

"I say, Smithy!" Billy Bunter blinked at Vernon-Smith in the doorway of the House. "Rotten, ain't it? I asked that beast Wharton to give me Nugent's place, and he refused, though I explained that I hadn't done any prep and wanted to cut classes! After all I've done for him, too! What do you think of that?"

"Quite the limit!" said the Bounder, with a sarcastic grin.

"I don't believe there's such a thing as gratitude in this world, really!" said Bunter, shaking his head. "I'm really shocked at Wharton after all I've done for him. I've a jolly good mind—the Owl of the Remove paused. "But the beast would get waxy! I suppose he would find out who had hidden it."

"What?" asked the Bounder idly.

"His new bat," said Bunter, with a grin. "It's in his study, you know. He's going to use it in the match. I thought—" Bunter lowered his voice, blinking round him cautiously. "I say, Smithy, it would be a lark to hide it somewhere, wouldn't it?"

"You silly ass!" said Vernon-Smith disdainfully. "Leave his silly bat alone!"

"Well, it would put him into no end of a bait," said the Owl of the Remove. "Still, I'm not going to touch it. The beast would kick me, and I don't want to have to lick him!"

The Bounder laughed.

"Time for class, Smithy," said Skinner, coming in from the quad.

"Right-ho!"

Skinner walked on towards the Form-room, and Billy Bunter rolled after him with a lugubrious expression on his fat face. Bunter felt that it was really hard that he should be left out of the eleven when his inclusion in the same would have rescued him from Mr. Quelch that morning.

The Bounder stood for some moments in thought. There was a strange glint in his eyes.

He went in at last, but not to the Form-room. Mr. Quelch was there with the Remove now, and he was strict upon punctuality. But the Bounder did not give him a thought. He went up to the Remove passage and looked into Study No. 1.

Wharton's handsome new cricket-bat lay on the table. He might come in for it at any moment, as stumps were to be pitched early for the game. The Bounder picked it up and left the study.

He went up the box-room stairs and came back in a couple of minutes without the bat.

Then he lounged at the window at the end of the Remove passage and stared gloomily out towards the cricket field, where six or seven white-clad figures could be seen.

It was ten minutes later that Harry Wharton came up the stairs and went into his study.

The Bounder waited with a cynical grin on his face.

He heard an impatient exclamation in Study No. 1. Then the captain of the Remove looked out.

There was no one to be seen excepting Vernon-Smith; all the non-playing members of the Form were in class by that time. Wharton was about to call to the Bounder when Smithy looked round.

"Looking for your bat?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Yes. Some silly ass seems to have taken it from my study!" said Harry—"some fatheaded lark, I suppose!"

"Just that, I think."

"Have you seen anything of it?"

"I saw it taken away ten minutes ago," drawled the Bounder. "I suppose I may as well tell you where the merry joker put it. In the top box-room."

"The silly ass!" exclaimed Wharton. "I'll jolly well punch his head! Who was it?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. Without waiting for an answer to his question, however, Harry Wharton ran along the Remove passage and up the box-room stairs. He did not think of looking back, and did not guess that the Bounder was following him.

The top box-room was a good distance from the Remove studies up one of the rambling old staircases that belonged to the most ancient part of Greyfriars. Harry Wharton went up the winding staircase at a run and arrived a little

breathless in the box-room. His bat was not to be seen, and, breathing wrath, the captain of the Remove began to look for it among the empty boxes in the room.

Slam!

He spun round as the door suddenly closed.

"Hallo! What——"

Click!

It was the turning of a key in the lock.

Wharton stood for a moment transfixed. He had not noticed that the key was on the outside of the lock when he had entered. He realised it now. He had just sighted his bat in a corner behind a box. But he did not heed it now. He ran to the door and dragged at the handle.

"Smithy! Is that you, Smithy?"

"Little me!" said the Bounder's cool voice outside the door.

"Have you locked me in?" exclaimed Wharton.

"You've guessed it!"

"You silly duffer! Let me out at once!"

The Bounder laughed.

"Have you come down to playing Third Form fag tricks?" exclaimed Wharton scornfully. "I suppose it was you brought my bat up here?"



Harry Wharton's bat was not to be seen, and, breathing wrath, the captain of the Remove began to look for it among the empty boxes in the room. Slam! He spun round sharply as the door suddenly closed. "Hallo! What——" Click! It was the turning of a key in the lock. "Smithy—is that you, Smithy?" called out Wharton. "Little me!" said the Bounder coolly. "Have you locked me in?" exclaimed Wharton angrily. "You've guessed it!" was the mocking reply. (See this page.)

"Right again!" assented the Bounder. "Open this door at once!"

Another low laugh from the Bounder, and then a sound of receding footsteps on the stairs. Wharton hammered savagely at the door with his clenched fist.

"Smithy, you cheeky cad, let me out at once!"

No answer—and no sound. The Bounder, with the key of the top box-room in his pocket, sauntered downstairs, and into the Remove Form-room. Mr. Quelch met him with a grim frown.

"Vernon-Smith, you are twenty minutes late!"

"Sorry, sir!"

"You will take two hundred lines."

"Very well, sir."

The Bounder went imperturbably to his place. He wondered whether, if Wharton shouted at the top of his voice, anyone would hear him in the remote room in which he was locked. He thought it unlikely. The Remove cricketers were to play the Highcliffe match without the Bounder—and they were to play it without their captain, too!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here we are again!"

Courtenay & Co., of Highcliffe, had arrived. Bob Cherry greeted them cheerily. All was ready for the match, only Harry Wharton, captain of the Remove, was not on the scene.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh cut across to the House to tell Wharton that the Highcliffians were there. It was nearly half an hour since Wharton had gone in for his bat, and his comrades wondered why he did not return.

The nabob looked in the study, and found it empty. He looked along the Remove passage, and then came downstairs again, much perplexed.

Wharton was not to be seen, and the nabob wondered whether Mr. Quelch could possibly have called him to the Form-room for any reason. He decided to look in at the Remove-room.

Some of the Removites, in class, stared as the nabob's dusky face for a moment showed in the doorway. Herbert Vernon-Smith smiled.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh hurried away, and rejoined his friends on the cricket-ground.

"Where's Wharton?" asked Bob Cherry.

Hurree Singh shook his head.

"The knowfulness is not great," he answered. "He does not seem to be in the esteemed House."

"He went in for his bat a long time back," said Johnny Bull.

"He is not there now."

"Then where the thump is he?" exclaimed Hazel. "What does he mean by clearing off when we're ready to begin?"

"Rot!" grunted Bob. "He hasn't cleared off! Quelch can't have chipped in, I suppose?"

"I have lookfully glanced into the Form-room, and he is not there," said Hurree Singh.

"The Highcliffe chaps are ready," said Peter Todd. "Dashed queer of Wharton. I suppose he hasn't forgotten there's a match on."

"Fathead!" said Bob.

"Well, where is he?"

"Better look for him, I suppose."

Greatly puzzled and perplexed, several of the Remove fellows started for the

House to look for Wharton. But they looked for him in vain.

"He's taken his bat, at any rate," said Johnny Bull, as he glanced into Study No. 1.

"But where on earth can he have gone?" exclaimed Bob.

"Goodness knows!"

"I say, the Bounder can't have played any trick on him, can he?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"How could he? Smithy's in class, I suppose?"

"The esteemed and disgusting Smithy is in the Form-room with the rest," said the nabob. "I saw him there!"

"Then what on earth's happened to Wharton?"

The puzzled juniors left the House again, and returned to the cricket-ground, hoping to find the captain of the Remove there. But he was not there.

"Well, this beats it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "He can't have gone out of gates! He must be about the school somewhere!"

"But where?" said Johnny Bull.

"Better scatter and hunt him up."

It seemed the only thing to be done, and a number of fellows started hunting for the missing junior high and low.

"Seems to be somethin' up among our jolly old friends here," remarked the Caterpillar to Courtenay of Highcliffe.

"They seem to have mislaid their skipper. We've got to wait."

"You fellows don't mind hanging on a bit?" asked Bob Cherry, coming up to Courtenay with a rather red face. "Our skipper isn't on the ground yet."

"All serene," said Courtenay. "We'll hang on as long as you like."

"Oh, a few minutes!" said Bob hopefully. And he hurried away to join in the search.

High and low the juniors searched for Wharton. He was nowhere on the playing-fields—nowhere in the quad—nowhere in the Cloisters. It looked as if he must have gone out of gates—and yet that was inconceivable. Bob Cherry and his comrades gathered at the pavilion again, breathless, excited, and disturbed. The Highcliffe fellows had rather curious looks now, but they were waiting patiently for the Remove team to get ready.

"It beats me!" said Bob, rubbing his nose in sheer worry. "Where on earth is he? He can't have gone out!"

"It's the Bounder!" said Johnny Bull, with quiet conviction. "The Bounder's done it somehow!"

"But he's in class," said Bob.

"He wasn't in class when Wharton went in for his bat, perhaps."

"Well, the bell had gone."

"All the same, it's the Bounder. It's just one of his tricks. He would like to dish us over this match!"

"Something in that," said Hazel. "But I don't see what he can have done. He hasn't got Wharton in his waistcoat-pocket, I suppose, and he isn't hiding him under his desk in the Form-room?"

"Oh, don't be a funny ass! He's kept Wharton away somehow. There's no other way of accounting for it."

"The esteemed Johnny has hit the rightful nail on the foot!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The excellent and ludicrous Wharton is being kept away somehow. But howfully, my worthy Johnny?"

Johnny Bull shook his head.

"I don't know. But the Bounder's at the bottom of it. Let's go and make him own up!"

"Kick up a shindy in the Form-room, under Quelch's eye!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "I fancy that wants a little

more nerve than I've got, Johnny. We can't see Smithy till break."

"We've got to find Wharton."

"My esteemed chums," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, "if the excellent Bounder has played some trick on Wharton, he must still be in the House. He could not have got him to go out of gates. Let us go and search for him oncefully more."

"But we've searched," grunted Peter Todd.

"If at first there is no successfulness, the try-againfulness is the proper caper," remarked the nabob.

"Oh, come on!" said Bob. "We can't keep Highcliffe waiting much longer. If we don't find Wharton soon we shall have to play without him."

Half a dozen of the cricketers started for the House again, in a puzzled and angry mood. Some of the team were for beginning the match without their captain, and it looked as if that would be necessary, if the game was to be played at all. The Highcliffe fellows were looking impatient now, and some of them were making sarcastic remarks.

Once more Bob Cherry and his companions mounted the stairs to the Remove passage. That Wharton had gone to his study for his bat was certain, and if there was anything in Johnny Bull's theory, it was in the Remove passage that he had been dealt with by the Bounder. But he was not locked in any study along the passage—every door opened at a touch. From No. 1 to No. 14 the juniors went, trying every door.

"He's not locked in anywhere," said Hazel. "Besides, he wouldn't let Smithy lock him in a study, I fancy. He can handle Smithy."

"It's a trick of some sort," said Johnny Bull.

"Blessed if I can see it! He must be a silly ass if you're right!" sneered Hazel.

"Oh, dry up, and let's find him!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Are we going hunting along the Fifth Form passage, too?" asked Hazel satirically. "Smithy may have locked him in Coker's study, you know."

"Hark!" exclaimed Mark Linley suddenly.

The search along the passage had brought the juniors near the foot of the box-room stairs. Mark Linley held up his hand, and there was silence.

"What—" began Bob.

"Listen!"

The cricketers listened. From somewhere in the distance came a faint sound of knocking.

"What the thump!" exclaimed Hazel. "Someone hammering in a nail! What does it matter?"

"Or knocking at a door," said Mark. Bob Cherry started.

"Try the box-rooms," he exclaimed, and he started for the stairs.

"Oh, my hat!" said Hazel. "You really think Wharton was ass enough to be taken up to a box-room and locked in!"

"Oh, cheese it, Hazel!"

"Well, I'm not going up! I don't think he's such an ass as you fellows do!" grunted Hazel.

Bob Cherry ran up the stairs.

The door of the lower box-room was open; but the sound of knocking was louder now, and it came from above. Bob raced up the second staircase.

"Wharton!" he roared.

Knock, knock, knock! Someone was beating on the door of the top box-room with a heavy implement—probably a cricket-bat. Bob came panting up to the door.

"Wharton!"

"Is that you, Bob?"

It was Wharton's voice, in tones of relief.

"Yes, old man." Bob tried the handle. "Are you locked in?"

"That's it."

"But—but how—why—" gasped Bob in amazement.

"That cad Smithy—he hid my bat here and turned the key on me," said Wharton in tones of concentrated anger. "I suppose the key's not in the lock?"

"No fear."

"Get it, then—Smithy's got it, of course. You can't force that door," said Harry. "Get the key. I suppose the Highcliffe chaps are waiting?"

"They've been waiting over half an hour. I say, Smithy's in the Form-room—" said Bob.

"Get the key!"

"Right-ho!"

Bob Cherry fairly flew down the stairs.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Way of the Transgressor!

MR. QUELCH, in the Remove Form-room, was busy with his class. Billy Bunter had made a lamentable show of his construe, and had been ragged accordingly, and was now sitting in a state of perspiration, wishing he had done his prep.

Skinner and Snoop and Stott had been through it, and driven to the conclusion that a little more work and fewer cigarettes in the study would be wise. Now, Vernon-Smith had been called on, and the Bounder was making a good show, clearing the frowns from his Form master's brow. It was a relief to Mr. Quelch to hear Smithy, after pupils like Bunter and Skinner & Co.

The Form-room door suddenly opened, while the Bounder was in the middle of his construe.

Bob Cherry came in, red and breathless.

Vernon-Smith's voice faltered for a moment, then he went on calmly with his construe. Mr. Quelch turned to the interrupter with a brow of thunder.

"Cherry, you are interrupting the lesson."

"I'm sorry, sir. I—"

"If you are not in the cricket match, Cherry, you should be in your place in class."

"Yes, sir; but—"

"As you have come here, go to your place, Cherry."

"Excuse me, sir; I—I—" stuttered Bob. "I—I've come for the key—I—I—I mean—"

"What do you mean, Cherry?" snapped the Remove master.

"May I speak to Smithy, sir—I mean, Vernon-Smith—"

"Certainly not."

"I—I must, sir!" gasped Bob desperately. "Smithy, give me the key of the top box-room."

Vernon-Smith drew a deep breath. He had failed again!

Failure seemed to be dogging his steps. Had his hand, after all, lost its old cunning? It was check—check all the time—to every move he made against his rivals in the Remove.

Mr. Quelch stared at Bob Cherry blankly.

"Cherry, is it possible—am I to believe that you have come here, interrupting classes, to ask Vernon-Smith for the key of a box-room! Are you out of your senses, boy?"

"I—I had to have the key, sir," stammered Bob. "I—I—"

"And why?"

"Do you call it a 'lark' to keep Wharton away from a cricket match when the others are waiting for him?" asked Mr. Quelch. "Yes, sir," said the Bounder. "Then I do not agree with you, Vernon-Smith. Hand over the key to Cherry this moment, and then I shall deal with you." Slowly, reluctantly, with a bitter face, the Bounder drew the key from his pocket and flung it on the floor of the Form-room. (See this page.)

"Because — because — Smithy knows —"

"You shall certainly have no key—you shall take your place in class and remain here, since you have chosen to enter the Form-room," said Mr. Quelch severely.

"Wharton's locked in the box-room, sir!" gasped Bob Cherry.

There was no help for it; it had to come out, since Wharton could not be released without the key.

Mr. Quelch fairly jumped.

"Wharton locked in the box-room!" There was a buzz in the Remove.

"Yes, sir. Will you tell Smithy to give me the key? The cricket match has been held up over half an hour already, as we couldn't find Wharton."

Mr. Quelch turned a thunderous eye on Herbert Vernon-Smith. The Bounder stood cool and steady, though his heart was thumping.

"Vernon-Smith, have you locked Wharton in a box-room?"

A denial trembled on the Bounder's lips. But the key was in his pocket, and it could not be concealed if searched for.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

"And why have you done this, Vernon-Smith?"

"Only a lark, sir," said the Bounder airily.

"Do you call it a 'lark' to keep Wharton away from a cricket match when the others are waiting for him?"

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder coolly.

"Then I do not agree with you, Vernon-Smith. Hand over the key to Cherry this moment, and then I shall deal with you."

Slowly, reluctantly, with a bitter face, the Bounder drew the key from his pocket, and flung it on the floor of the Form-room. Bob Cherry picked it up and hurried away.

"You will stand out before the class, Vernon-Smith," said Mr. Quelch, taking up his cane.

Swish, swish, swish!

The Bounder returned to his place, white and furious. Bob Cherry's heavy footsteps had died away. The lesson went on, the Bounder sitting silent, savage, malignant. Wharton was being released from the box-room—one more scheme had failed. Now he had rejoined the cricketers—the cricket match was beginning—through the open windows of the Form-room the juniors could hear shouting from Little Side.

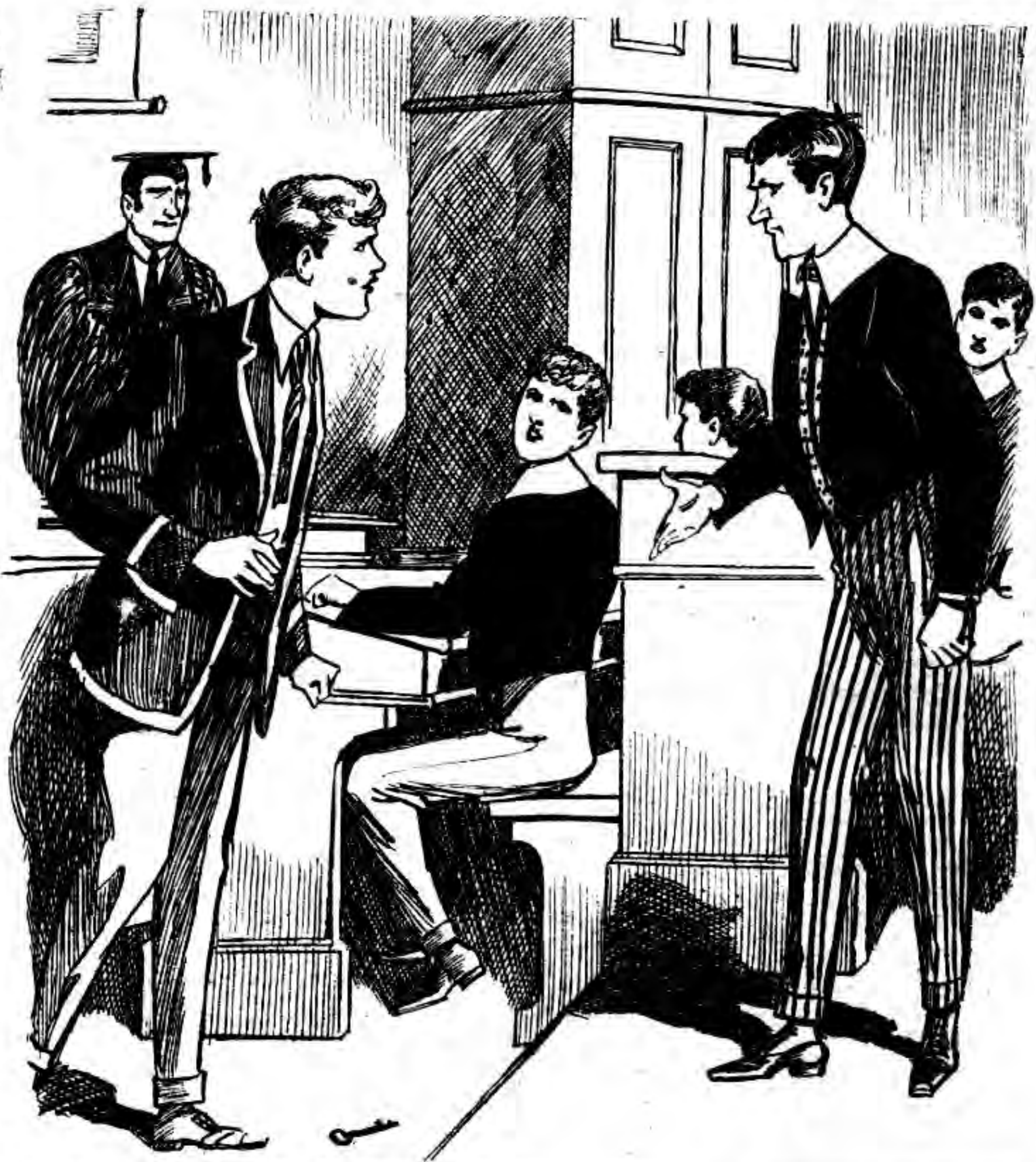
The game was going on. From the distance came a roar, the boom of Bob Cherry's powerful voice:

"Well hit, Wharton! Oh, well hit, old man!"

"Bravo!"

Harry Wharton was batting. The Bounder listened, and he was deaf to Mr. Quelch's voice. The Remove master was speaking an unintelligible drone to the ears of the Bounder.

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Failure — disappointment — checkmate! Was it to be the same story all the time?

In the morning break some of the Remove went down to Little Side to see how the match was progressing. But the Bounder did not go. He loafed about near the House, his hands in his pockets, black sullenness on his brow.

In third lesson the Bounder was in trouble again in the Form-room—carelessness, followed by impertinence, brought down the vials of the Remove master's wrath on his head. Smithy was quite reckless now, and he answered Mr. Quelch as Mr. Quelch had seldom or never been answered in his own Form-room before. But the Remove master was not a master to be ragged or cheeked with impunity.

"Vernon-Smith! You will be detained this afternoon until six o'clock," he said curtly.

"Really, sir?" yawned the Bounder. "You don't say so."

"Another word and I shall cane you, also."

"Please yourself, sir."

Some of the Removites grinned at the Bounder's nerve. Vernon-Smith himself did not grin when Mr. Quelch had finished with the cane.

That afternoon was a half-holiday, and most of the Remove fellows gathered on Little Side to watch the later stages of the match between the Remove and Highcliffe. During those sunny hours, the Bounder sat in the dusky old Form-room, glued to his desk by a detention task.

The long, long hours—short enough to the cricketers—crawled by on leaden wings to the Bounder.

It seemed to him that the hand of the clock would never point to six.

Through the golden afternoon he heard incessant shouts from the cricket ground—the match was going well for Greyfriars. And after dinner a crowd of Highcliffe fellows had come over, on foot or on bikes, to join the throng on Little Side. Highcliffe cheers and Greyfriars cheers rang loudly, with ripples of hand-clapping—cheery sounds to all ears but those of Vernon-Smith, shut in the deserted Form-room, grinding at his dull task.

Six o'clock at last!

Mr. Quelch entered the Form-room, examined Vernon-Smith's paper with a grim brow, and curtly dismissed him.

The Bounder left the Form-room and the House.

In the quadrangle, he stared away towards the crowded playing-fields. There was a roar of voices.

"Greyfriars wins!"

"Bravo!"

"Good old Wharton!"

The Bounder stood very still. From the direction of the cricket ground came a crowd of fellows—he recognised Harry Wharton among them, and his comrades, and Courtenay and the Caterpillar of Highcliffe—a merry, light-hearted crowd. Greyfriars had won the match. Greyfriars had won, while the Bounder had sat alone at a dull task, forgotten by all. The bitterness in his breast was almost beyond expression. He did not move as the crowd surged past him.

"Hallo, hallo! It's Smithy! The cad—"

"Rag him!"

"Bump him!"

"Collar him!"

Black and dogged defiance scowled from the Bounder's brow. But Harry Wharton interposed.

"Let him alone," he said.

"After what he's done—"

"We've won the match! Let the cad alone."

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The crowd surged on, leaving Vernon-Smith untouched. There was to be no reckoning, then, for what he had done; but the severest ragging could not have hit the Bounder so hard as this contemptuous sparing of him by his enemy.

From the Rag, crowded with a jolly party, came merry voices from the open windows. The Bounder, pardoned, disregarded, forgotten, had no place there.

He drove his hands deep into his pockets, and tramped away, into the dusk of the old cloisters, with black, sullen rage in his brow, and the bitterness almost of death in his heart.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Redwing's Resolve!

"REDWING, old man!"

Harry Wharton dropped into Study No. 3 on Saturday afternoon. Redwing looked up from the pages of the *Anabasis*, and nodded, with a faint smile. There was a tired look on Redwing's handsome, sunburnt face.

"Swotting?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"Well, grinding a bit," said Redwing. "You know I'm in for the Greek exam in a few weeks now."

"I know. But I rather think you're over-doing it," said Harry, with a keen look at the sailorman's son. "Swotting is all very well, especially with the examinations coming along. But there's a limit."

Redwing did not answer that.

"You know our next big fixture of the season comes along next week," went on Wharton. "We play St. Jim's."

"I know."

"Well, you know the Bounder's out of it now."

Redwing's face changed in expression for a moment.

"He had to go—but we miss him from the cricket matches," said Harry. "Hazel, luckily, is coming on well, and Ogilvy was turning out remarkably well, too; he showed up rippingly in the Highcliffe game. But as you're in his study, you must have noticed that he got crooked—a crack on the wrist—at the finish of the game."

"Yes," said Redwing.

"That finishes his cricket for a week or two. I want another man for the St. Jim's match next week."

"What about Russell?"

"Russell's not bad, but I want a better man if I can get one. You were picked out for the Rookwood match a few weeks ago, though you never played, owing to that rotten trick Smithy served you. Since then you've given cricket the go-by. Well, I want you to pile in for all you're worth now, and get ready for next Saturday."

"You want me to play against St. Jim's?"

"Just that," said Harry.

Redwing did not speak for some moments. He stared across at the window, without looking at Wharton.

"You're cricket captain in the Remove," he said at last. "It's not my place to make suggestions. But—"

"My dear chap, go ahead," said the captain of the Remove cordially. "If you can point out a good man I've missed, I'll be jolly glad."

"Couldn't you—?" Redwing hesitated.

"Couldn't I what?"

"Play the Bounder?" said Redwing, getting it out with a jerk, and colouring deeply.

"My dear man, of course not," said Wharton. "He was sentenced by the

whole Form to be barred from Remove cricket for the rest of the season. Dash it all, Redwing, you've broken off your friendship with him on account of his trickery."

"I—I know. But—he's a good man in a cricket match, and you want to win matches. I never wanted Smithy to be punished for the trick he played on me Rookwood day."

"Very likely. But a thing like that couldn't be passed over."

"He's been punished, too," said Redwing, in a low voice. "He had six in the Rag, and he was left out of the Highcliffe match. He's been in trouble with Mr. Quelch, as well. Don't you think he's had enough, Wharton?"

The captain of the Remove looked at Redwing curiously. It came into his mind that on Redwing's side, at least, the old friendship was not dead; somehow or other, with all the Bounder's faults, Tom could not forget that Smithy had been his best chum, and had stood by him many a time when he sorely needed a friend. He no longer spoke to the Bounder—he passed him with averted face in the passages and the quad—but he had not forgotten.

"You see, it's a difficult matter," said Harry slowly. "Goodness knows, I didn't want the trouble to start. I tried every possible way to stop it. I can say that honestly. But—Smithy deliberately kept a member of the eleven away from a cricket match. That's too jolly serious."

"He's been punished for it."

"Yes, that's so, but he's gone from bad to worse," said Harry, rather hotly. "He's tried to make a rival team in the Remove—trying to get the reserves to desert the Form eleven. He crooked Nugent for the Highcliffe match—it was a big chance for Frank, and Vernon-Smith knocked it on the head. It's too jolly thick."

"He never meant that," said Redwing earnestly. "I'm absolutely certain that he never wanted trouble with Nugent—never dreamed of keeping him from playing by hammering him. A lot of fellows who saw the fight say that he let Nugent off lightly."

"I saw that myself, but he damaged him enough," said Wharton with a dark frown. "If he wanted trouble with us why couldn't he pick on Bob or me, or Johnny Bull? Frank's not up to his weight, and the Bounder knew that jolly well."

"But did he pick the trouble?" said Redwing. "I know that what he did was cheeky—tearing up the cricket-notice. I know Nugent did right. He was angry at the insult to you, his chum. But I'm sure that Smithy did it thinking he would have to deal with you, not with Nugent."

Wharton nodded slowly.

"I dare say that's right," he said. "But—but dash it, Redwing, there's a lot of buts. You know he tried to keep me from playing in the Highcliffe match—locking me up in a box-room. I've let it pass, but a fellow who plays such tricks—"

"I'm not excusing him. Only—" Redwing paused. "The longer this quarrel goes on, Wharton, the worse it will be for him. Skinner's doing him no good."

Wharton's face broke into a smile. Redwing's concern, unconsciously, even, was all for his estranged friend and his welfare.

"He's had his punishment," went on Redwing. "Couldn't the fellows look over what he did—give him a chance to make good?"

"I'd like to. But—"

"I'm sure he'd make the best of it. Wipe out the sentence of the Form, and play him against St. Jim's."

There was a long pause.

"It's too thick," said Wharton, at last. "The Bounder's gone too far this time, Redwing. I'm sorry, but there it is. Why, you're asking me to look over what he's done, and you're not doing so yourself, and you were his closest chum. If you can't get over it, how can you expect other fellows to do so?"

Redwing started a little. The distressed look deepened on his face, and he did not speak.

"Leave the Bounder out of it," went on the captain of the Remove. "Look here, Redwing, Smithy's a back number now, and it can't be helped. We want you on Saturday. Will you play?"

Tom Redwing shook his head.

"My work," he said slowly.

"Cut it out," said Wharton sharply. "I know you're working for an exam. But I know jolly well you're keen on cricket, and you'd work better if you played more. You know that too. You've got some other motive."

Redwing flushed.

"What do you mean?"

"You don't want to figure in the Remove matches while the Bounder's left out. I fancy that's it."

Redwing lowered his eyes.

"It's all rot!" said Wharton. "You're wanted in the cricket, and you ought to play up. The Bounder's done harm enough. Look here, I shall count on you for St. Jim's."

"You don't think it's possible to—give old Smithy another chance?"

"You don't seem to think it possible yourself," said Wharton grimly. "You've turned him down and cut him. If you want other fellows to forget his offences you'd better set an example."

And with that the captain of the Remove left the study, frowning.

Redwing rose from the table.

He was not heeding Xenophon now. As a matter of fact, Wharton had correctly guessed the reason of his recent devotion to hard study. It was his selection for the Remove eleven, when the Bounder was left out, that had started the trouble. No longer friends with Smithy, Redwing was still resolved not to give him any further cause of offence, even at the cost of giving up the game himself.

Tom Redwing stood at the study window and stared out into the green old quad.

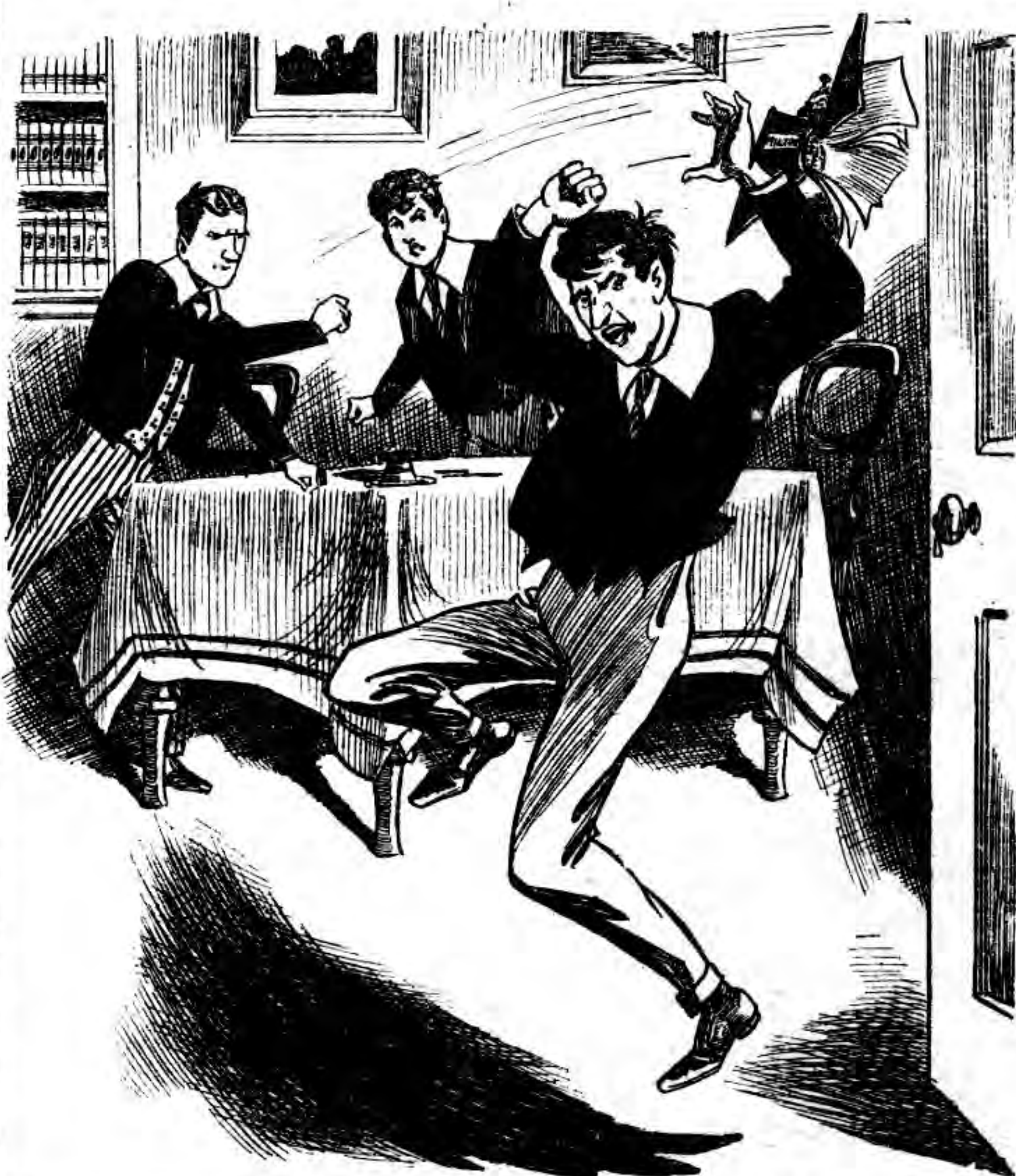
He wondered whether he had been too hard. The Bounder's conduct had wounded him deeply. He bore no malice, but he had felt that it was better that they should part.

Friendship could not exist without trust; and how could he trust the Bounder after what he had done? And yet—

A party of juniors crossed the quad towards the gates, evidently going out for the half-holiday—Skinner and Snoop and Stott and the Bounder.

Redwing watched them out of the gates.

He could guess where they were going. The Bounder was in the old bad company—falling into his old evil ways. But for the rivalry in the Remove the Bounder would have been at games practice that afternoon. Skinner & Co. would have gone on their own dingy blackguardly way without his company.



"What the thump!" exclaimed Skinner savagely. "What's Redwing doing here?" "Prep," said Smithy. "Bill Bailey's come home again, as it were!" Skinner breathed hard. "So that's it!" he exclaimed. "You're turning soft again and that cad—" Skinner did not finish. Milton suddenly flew through the air, and Skinner sat down in the passage under the impact of the great poet, and roared. (See Chapter 13.)

Had he remained Redwing's friend, at least he would have been saved from the company of the black sheep of Greyfriars.

Redwing felt a twinge of remorse.

Vernon-Smith was going from bad to worse, falling more and more into his old evil ways, becoming more and more the "old Bounder," whose reputation had once been a byword in the Lower School.

His friend could have saved him from that, at least.

And Wharton's words had struck home. Redwing asked that others should forgive, when he was not forgiving. It was he who was standing in the way of a reconciliation. How could he expect of others what he was not capable of himself?

Long the sailorman's son stood at the window, looking out into the sunny quad, thinking. Herbert Vernon-Smith, passionate, headstrong, vindictive, capable of blackguardism and wrongdoing, was still the old Smithy who had stood by him in difficult days; still the old Smithy whom Tom had sorely missed in these days of estrangement.

If he could help to set Smithy right with the Form, if he could help to heal the breach in the Remove, if he could help Smithy back to the right path, that was worth making some sacrifice for. Long the sailorman's son stood thinking. But his mind was made up at last.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

At Last!

"LEAVE me alone!"

Skinner sneered.

Herbert Vernon-Smith had thrown himself into the arm-chair in Study No. 4 with a black brow. The afternoon's expedition had been quite a success, from Harold Skinner's point of view. There had been billiards, there had been cards, there had been a motor-car and a visit to the races at a safe distance from the school. There had been a handsome feed and smokes galore. Skinner & Co. had returned tired, but satisfied, and feeling that the good old times had really come back at last. The Bounder had returned not in the least tired, but far from satisfied; indeed, in one of his blackest and most savage moods.

His eyes gleamed at Skinner as the cad of the Remove lingered in the study doorway.

"Get out!" he said.

"You're gettin' jolly polite," said Skinner. "What's the matter with you now, Smithy? We've had a jolly day."

"Jolly?" The Bounder's lip curled sardonically. "Oh, no end jolly! Well, I'm fed-up, so leave me alone!"

"Jolly glad to in your present happy temper," yawned Skinner, and he left the study; but he scowled as he went.

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The Bounder had returned to the fold, as Skinner regarded it; he was the old Bounder again. But there was a difference. More than once Skinner realised that Vernon-Smith was with them, but not of them, so to speak. More than once during the period of the Bounder's reform Skinner had sneeringly wondered how long it would last. Now he found himself unexpectedly wondering how long his fall into blackguardism would last.

Vernon-Smith kicked the door shut after Skinner, and threw himself into the chair again.

He drew a cigarette from his case, but did not light it. After a minute or two he threw it unlighted into the grate.

His scowl grew blacker.

He was angry with Skinner and the rest, angry with himself, angry and irritated with all things.

Life seemed to have lost its savour, somehow, for the Bounder of Greyfriars.

The truth was, as he was slowly realising, that he had changed.

He had believed that it was his friendship with Tom Redwing that kept him from his old ways, from the reckless blackguardism that had at one time brought him near expulsion from the school. But now that he had sunk into it again, he knew that he had lost the taste for it. It was idle and foolish, unworthy of a fellow of his character—worst of all, it bored him. What a fool he had been—that was his governing thought.

He had tried to find comfort in his schemes against the captain of the Remove—in his plans for contesting the captaincy, and crushing his rivals. He had failed because he seemed to have lost his old cunning and resource. But he knew, with his clear insight, that he failed because his heart was not in it.

He did not want the quarrel—he did not want the dispute and its bitterness. He did not want to "down" even Wharton.

What did he want?

He knew very well. He wanted all that he had lost by his outbreak of headstrong and passionate temper—all that his perverseness had cost him. He wanted his friend back—the tried and trusted friend whom he had cast aside—he wanted the care-free life of a fellow who did not trouble his head with plotting and scheming—he wanted to meet the Famous Five on the old friendly terms—he wanted to have done with Skinner & Co., and their shady, surreptitious ways.

And he had left himself no retreat. Either he must sink ignored, disregarded, forgotten, or he must persist in a conflict which had no interest for him, for the outcome of which he cared less than nothing. That was what it had come to, and the Bounder of Greyfriars realised it clearly at last.

But there was no retreat. Once he had humbled himself to Tom Redwing—never again! At least, he could go forward on the reluctant path, with a smile and a sneer, never allowing anyone, friend or foe, to guess his real thoughts. At the very least, he would never wear his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at.

There was a tap at the door.

The Bounder snapped his teeth angrily. It was Skinner, or Snoop, he supposed—coming to propose a game of banker in the study, or a cigarette. He scowled at the thought.

The door opened.

"Can I come in, Smithy?"

The Bounder started. It was Tom Redwing's quiet voice.

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"You!" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

Redwing stepped in.

Herbert Vernon-Smith rose to his feet. His keen, mocking eyes searched Redwing's sunburnt face with a strange expression.

"What do you want?" he asked roughly.

"Only a few words."

"You can come in, I suppose," said the Bounder ungraciously.

Redwing came farther into the study. His cheeks were red, and his manner hesitating. The Bounder smiled sardonically. He could see that his former chum did not know whether to expect from him a burst of passionate temper. He broke into a harsh laugh.

"You look like Daniel stepping into the lion's den," he scoffed. "This study isn't a wild beast's cage. I'm not going to row with you, Redwing. What do you want?"

Tom Redwing was silent for a moment. Then he spoke out, quietly and calmly.

"You asked me once, Smithy, to make it up."

"I know I did; and I was a fool for my pains," sneered the Bounder. "I'm not asking you again."

"I'm asking you."

"Oh!" exclaimed Smithy.

"You did a rotten thing, Smithy, and you did it against a fellow that trusted you," said Tom. "But when you told me you were sorry, I think I ought to have put it out of my mind. I ought to have remembered how you'd stood by me, lots of times, when I needed it. But for you I'd never have become a Greyfriars chap at all. I owe you too much to forget about it."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"That's all rot!" he snapped. "You owe me nothing. And if you did, I shouldn't remind you of it."

"I know you wouldn't, Smithy. But—"

"Then cut it out." The Bounder sneered. "You think I'm down on my luck, and you want to hand out a helping hand, is that it? Well, there's no takers. I can go on my own way—and I'm going!"

"You mean you want it to go on?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

Tom Redwing looked at him in silence, watching the hard, sardonic face. Then he turned away.

"Very well," he said. "I—I thought I'd come. No harm done."

His hand was on the door when the Bounder spoke again—in a changed voice.

"Tom, you ass—"

Redwing turned quickly back. The dogged sneer was gone from the Bounder's face. He was smiling.

"You old duffer!" said Smithy. "Come back! Of course I want to make it up—I've wanted to all the time. I want you to try to forget what I did. Do you think I don't know it was rotten? Let's start afresh, old chap, and forget that there ever was any trouble."

"Smithy, old man!"

Tom Redwing's face was very bright.

"I—I say, I'm jolly glad, Smithy."

"So am I, old fellow! You're coming back to this study." The Bounder heaved a sigh of relief. "Shall I come and help you move your traps from Study No. 3?"

"Will you, old scout?"

"What-ho!"

An hour later Skinner of the Remove came along to Study No. 4, hoping to find the Bounder in a more amenable mood, and ready for a game of banker.

He stared as he opened the door.

Prep was going on in Study No. 4—Sunday prep. With a volume of Milton propped against the inkstand, Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing were "mugging" up that great poet together.

Skinner fairly blinked.

"Wha-a-a-at?" he ejaculated.

The Bounder glanced round.

"Hallo! That you, Skinner?" Certainly the Bounder was in a better temper now, but that promised little for Skinner.

"What the thump?" exclaimed Skinner savagely. "What's Redwing doing here?"

"Prep," said Smithy, and Tom Redwing laughed.

"I mean, what's the game—what—"

"This is Redwing's study," explained the Bounder. "Bill Bailey's come home again, as it were."

Skinner breathed hard.

"So that's it!" he exclaimed. "You're turning soft again, are you, Smithy, and that cad—"

Skinner did not finish. Milton, suddenly detached from the inkstand, flew through the air with deadly aim. Skinner sat down in the passage, under the impact of the great poet, and roared.

Skinner returned to his own study a sadder if not a wiser Skinner. The "old Bounder" was the old Bounder no longer—that was clear; and whatsoever might be the outcome of the rivalry in the Remove, Skinner's influence in Study No. 4, at least, was at an end.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

Pax!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Bosh!"

"But, I say—"

"Hook it!"

"But, I say, you fellows, they've made it up!" hooted Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove had news to tell, and he was not to be denied.

"Who and which?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Smithy and Redwing!" said Bunter.

"I thought it was all off—and so did Skinner—he, he, he! But they've made it up! They've just gone out for a Sunday walk together, as thick as thieves."

"Glad to hear it," said Frank Nugent. The Famous Five walked on.

(Continued on page 28.)

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INTRODUCTION.

Story is staged over the period when Richard Lion Heart, the king, was away in Palestine on the Third Crusade.

TOM HADLEIGH—a youth of sixteen, who was found as a babe by the monks of Hadleigh Priory deserted in Sherwood Forest. Brought up by the good monks and apprenticed to a goldsmith, Simon Rye, Tom discovers in Simon Rye an unscrupulous and slave-driving master. He breaks away from him, determining to seek fortune under more savoury conditions, and throws in his lot with

LANTERN—a care-free adventurer of diminutive stature, but withal a sterling swordsman.

ROBIN HOOD—chief of the band of outlaws whose headquarters are in the depths of Sherwood Forest. A good friend to the poor and needy, and a source of continual worry to **EARL HUGO** of **CHARNDENE**—an unprincipled vassal of Prince John, known to the people of Nottingham as the Black Wolf.

FRIAR TUCK, ALAN-A-DALE, LITTLE JOHN, etc.—members of Robin Hood's band.

LON—once jester to Earl Hugo, but now the friend of Tom Hadleigh and Lantern. Lon tells Tom that the peculiar talisman in his possession—a half circle of polished horn upon which are the words "The cave betwixt—a split oak—follow the water—Gold," which was found near Tom by the good monks of Hadleigh when the former was a babe—would reveal the whereabouts of a wondrous treasure could the other half of the talisman be fitted to it. Lon declares that the other half of the talisman is in the possession of the Black Wolf.

Alan-a-Dale and Tom are captured by Earl Hugo's men and taken to the castle of Charndene, while Lantern, who was with Tom and Alan-a-Dale at the time of their capture, is thought to have deserted them. At the castle, Earl Hugo provides "sport" for his guest, Prince John, by causing Tom, Alan-a-Dale, and one of his own pikemen, who has offended him, to be bound to a screen, whilst three archers are instructed to send their shafts as near the prisoners as they possibly can without actually striking them. In the midst of the "sport" Robin Hood and his band invade the castle. Soon a wild and whirling fight is in progress. The prisoners are released, and Tom, inch by inch, fights his way over to Earl Hugo, determined to engage him in combat.

(Now read on.)

In the North Tower!

"**A** RT shriven, young fire-eater?" sneered Hugo as he swung his flail above his head.

For answer, I raised Little John's big sword. 'Twas just such a weapon as I loved—too big and heavy, perchance, for the taste of some men; but my arms were strong, and one can get rare force of stroke with a weapon of good weight.

I whirled the mighty blade on high. Hugo sprang aside only just in time, as the steel sang through the air, but swiftly converting the stroke, I turned the blade sideways at him. His deadly flail was whirling down upon my head, but ere it could land he gave a scream and staggered sideways, and his weapon flew from nerveless fingers. He clutched his thigh where my blade had smitten deep, and at that moment I was swept away from him by a surge of fighting men.

I had to fight on to defend myself, caught unawares as I was in this fresh eddy of that grim struggle that swirled throughout the great hall; but Hugo was the man I sought. I felt a sword-blade pierce my left shoulder, 'twas struck by a man with a red beard whom I knew to be De Blois, a vassal baron of Hugo's, and I cut at him and missed, for my eyes had turned for the instant elsewhere.

Hugo, like a wounded wolf, had staggered aside from the fray. I saw him vanish through a low-curtained archway, and in a moment I fought my way past De Blois, and was after him.

Now was my chance! Now I would wrest his precious talisman from the Black Wolf!

In an instant more I was through the

arch, past the curtain, racing in pursuit of Hugo!

A dim passage lay beyond that curtain, and at the farther end of it I saw my quarry.

He was limping, and I could hear his muttered curses as he went. Then he heard me, and turned.

That snarl of his came upon his face when his eyes rested upon me. For a moment I thought he meant to draw his sword. But then he seemed to realise that with his wound and loss of blood, he was no match for any man, and in another moment he stumbled to one side and vanished 'neath an archway to his left.

I raced after him. The archway opened upon the foot of some narrow, winding stairs, leading I knew not whither, and I could hear him staggering up into the darkness.

Up I went after him.

'Twas a strange chase enough. Utter darkness hemmed us in for the most part, though as we drew higher, here and there the stairs were dimly lit with pale moonbeams that fell through the long slits that pierced the wall on every third twist.

And 'twas in the light of one of these narrow windows that I came up with him.

He faced round when he knew that he must, and his eyes glimmered savagely. His sword was drawn, and he struck down at me. But he was too weakened to make much use of his superior position on the stairs, and soon after our blades had crossed in vicious combat, I was able to spring up past his guard. The point of my blade was at his heart, pressing him back 'gainst the stone steps. His sword—so steep were

those stairs—went clattering down into the darkness, and the echoes of it rang noisily.

Another moment, and I was kneeling upon his chest, my sword slipped into my belt.

"Nay, 'tis not your life I want, 'tis the talisman!" I told him with a little laugh of triumph.

Wounded though he was, my words seemed suddenly to lend him new strength. He all but threw me off, but I held him, and soon, with a hand of mine upon each wrist, he lay panting, but motionless. He was a wounded man, 'tis true; but the memory of the torture he had inflicted upon us three who had been in his power that night was too fresh in my memory! I had no pity for such a man as Hugo.

I shifted one knee to his left arm, and then, with my free hand, I groped for and found the chain around his neck.

At that he struggled again. But I was too strong and heavy for him, weak as he was with loss of blood, and this time I had no difficulty in holding him down. With a laugh, I whipped the chain over his head.

And the talisman was mine!

What a thrill that moment held! 'Twas in my hands at last, that little piece of broken horn that was so precious and meant so much.

A snarl of impotent fury rattled in Hugo's throat, and his breath came whistling through tight-clenched teeth. His lips were drawn back like some wild beast's—the man was mad with rage. Never before had I seen him look so utterly wolfish as he did then. I could see his eyes, like flaming coals of hate,

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burning up at me. And just to torture him, I laughed again.

"Gramercy for this fair gift, Hugo!" I cried.

And I held up the talisman in the shaft of moonlight that fell upon us, to read the words that were inscribed thereon.

But though I could see that some words were indeed scratched there, as upon mine own, a far better light was needed for human eyes to decipher them. With an exclamation of impatience and disappointment, I gave up the fruitless attempt.

'Twas then, as I was wondering where to dispose of the precious thing about my person, that a startling thing happened!

A faint whisper of movement came to my ears, as though someone were stealing up the stairs behind me. And an instant later, the talisman was snatched from my hand!

A startled cry broke from me, and at that moment I was sent reeling back by a terrible blow upon the side of the head. All but stunned, I only glimpsed the dark shape that leapt past me and on up the stairs. As I staggered to my feet, a queer shadow vanished round the twist above.

Who could it be? I heard a cry from Hugo, and some instinct told me that he could guess as little as I who was this strange shadow-shape that had snatched the precious talisman we both coveted.

It had all been so swift and unexpected that a moment or two had gone ere I could collect my scattered wits. Then I was past Hugo in a flash, racing up those winding stairs.

So eerie had his coming been, so shadowy his going, that this silent, mysterious figure of the darkness brought to me a sudden memory of another shadow I had once pursued—the Blind Man of Tarn, the old man in Sherwood Forest who had known my name.

But only for a moment was the thought of the blind man in my mind. This was too quick and strong a figure for that of the old blind man, even if the other's presence in the castle had been possible, which I did not believe it to be.

Up, up I raced—the stairs seemed never-ending, winding higher and higher into the darkness till I was giddy. Ahead of me I could hear the soft, swift footsteps of the Shadow, neither nearer nor farther than when our chase began. Behind me rang the echoes of my own footsteps, like a phantom army on my heels. Though I believe Hugo had made at first to follow us, he was too weak for the effort, and I knew that I need take little further reckoning of the Black Wolf to-night.

Still the stairs twisted up into the blackness, lit but here and there, and that but dimly. I realised that I must be in one of the four great towers of Charndene—the north tower, I judged it to be; and so it was, as I found after.

Up, up, up, those soft, elusive footsteps ever just ahead. Round every twist of those stairs I hoped to catch a glimpse of the one whom I pursued, but was ever, it seemed, just too late.

Sick at heart I was, filled with rage and chagrin to feel that I had been so easily robbed of the fruits of my victory; that the mysterious, shadowy unknown had found it so simple a matter to snatch from my very fingers that precious thing which I and my companions had planned so much and suffered so much in order to obtain.

"I and my companions——"

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The phrase, as it crossed my mind, brought a sudden pang of memory. 'Twas like the opening of a wound afresh.

In the excitement of all that had happened in the castle, I had forgotten Lantern—Lantern, who in an hour of peril had deserted us at the Red Inn.

But roughly I shook the thought of him from me as I ran on. And then, all suddenly, when my heart felt as though it were about to burst with the strain, I found myself at the end of a broad, moonlit gallery, with low oaken doors upon my right hand and the cool breath of night fanning my left cheek through a long, double-arched window.

And the gallery was empty!

I came to a standstill, listening. No sound broke the silence, save my own panting breath and the dim tumult that still filtered up to me from far below.

I peered around in the misty moonlight. Great, dark shadows lay upon the stone floor and walls, and in the black recesses I thought perhaps to see my man. I took a pace forward, and then some lucky instinct sent me swinging round.

Not a moment too soon!

There was that mysterious shape—the figure of a man, clad, as I could see now, in a long, hooded cloak. The hood might have been empty of a face, so black was the shadow cast by it. And yet I had a queer feeling that were that hood drawn back I should know the face within.

Ay, there was something vaguely familiar in the strange figure that was already leaping upon me, one arm upflung, with a poniard gleaming in the hand. Not even time to whip out my sword. My left arm shot out, and I gripped the wrist of the hand that held the knife even as it struck at me.

In horrid silence, we strove together. His left hand found my throat, and I felt strong fingers digging deep into the flesh, throttling me. My right arm was twisted about him, striving to throw him to the floor, while all the while I strained to keep that gleaming streak of steel from my breast.

Though I could feel his breath hot upon my cheek as we struggled together, swaying and staggering in the moonlight, I could not even now see his face. The hood was drawn so far over the fellow's features that even had the light been streaming upon it, I think the hood would have obscured the greater part of his face. But as it was, he was turned from the light, and all I could see was a black well of shadow from which two baleful eyes, just discernible, glimmered dimly.

And all the while his fingers dug into my throat, choking me. I fought for breath, but already I could feel my senses swim.

Dizzy and all but suffocated, the blood in my ears throbbing like the tolling of a bell, I put every ounce of strength into a last desperate effort to throw him off. Inch by inch I twisted his wrist back, till the long knife tinkled to the floor from his helpless fingers; and then I flung him from me.

He staggered back 'gainst the little centre pillar of the double-arched window, a horrid, hooded shape, outlined black as sin 'gainst the moon.

I stooped to snatch up his knife. But as my fingers closed upon it, he was on to me again and sent me hurtling sideways. With a crash, I reeled 'gainst a door that stood already a little ajar. Back I went, staggering into the chamber beyond, and the door slammed.

I heard a key turn.

Desperately, I flung myself upon it; but the heavy oak door scarcely shook. Soft, swift footsteps died away in the

distance; the mysterious hooded man was gone. And with him the talisman.

I beat in hopeless, childish fury upon that door with both my fists. 'Twas this drumming on the oak that drowned for me at first a sound that a minute later took me swift to the window of the bare stone chamber that formed my prison.

And as I stared down in the moonlight a startled cry broke from me.

That little window overlooked the courtyard by the drawbridge. Far below a grim fight was waging.

The outlaws of Sherwood fought desperately, gallantly. But now that the first surprise of their attack was over, the full strength of Charndene had been brought to bear upon them. The barons and nobles, too, were no longer partly stupefied with wine. By sheer weight of overwhelming numbers, inch by inch, the outlaws were being forced back.

Ere long the men in Lincoln green must be driven across the drawbridge, and in all likelihood they believed me still to be fighting in their ranks. I should be left—imprisoned helplessly in that little chamber high in the north tower, with no one to know what had become of me.

Ay, I was trapped in the heart of that great castle, out of reach of all help, hemmed in upon all sides by my foes!

The Grinning Nine!

A Y, trapped like a wild thing in a snare!

'Twas a rare unpleasant moment as I stared down into the great courtyard far below and saw the outlaws slowly falling back before the overwhelming numbers of their foes. Useless to cry out; they would never hear my voice above the clamour, so high up was I. Besides, if 'twere possible, as likely that I should draw notice from foe as from friend; and I had no wish for Hugo's party to learn of my whereabouts.

Who had been the hooded man who had thus imprisoned me I could not remotely dream, though still I felt that there had been something vaguely familiar in the mysterious figure. And I had little enough inclination to rack my brains now concerning that strange puzzle when I was in a plight so fraught with peril.

I crossed again to the door, and attacked it fiercely with my sword. But I could have continued to scar that door for many a day without breaking through the thick oak of which it was built.

"'Tis no use," I muttered helplessly—"no use!"

The din of the struggle in the courtyard came drifting up to me, and I was soon drawn back to the window.

The outlaws still held their own, and the sudden hope came to me that perchance they had noticed my absence from their ranks and were holding out till the last to give me chance of rejoining them if I were so able.

"And I will—I must! There is some way out! There must be some way out!" I cried aloud.

My voice echoed eerily in that little room. Away above the eastern horizon dawn was breaking, and somewhere on the hillside a bird broke into bubbling song. I gazed around with weary, burning eyes.

On the flagstones by the door lay the poniard with which the hooded man had attacked me in the gallery, and this I picked up. 'Twas a knife of unusual design, for each end of the cross-piece of the hilt was formed like a human hand.

I stared down at it curiously for a moment; then slipped the thing into my belt.

How long I paced the narrow confines of my prison I know not. I was like a caged beast, and in the same savage mood. Sometimes I renewed my attack upon the door, though in my heart I knew 'twas useless, and more often I would hurry to the window to watch the progress of the struggle below. The men of Sherwood seemed still to hold doggedly; but if I could not escape soon—

And then at last, all suddenly, an idea came flashing to my brain.

I might yet be able to smash down the door, thick and heavy though it was, if I could arm myself with one of the great flagstones of the floor.

One of these, I had noticed, trembled a little when I stepped upon it, as though loosened in its bed; indeed, 'twas this stone that first set the idea running in my head. With the poniard I hoped to be able to scratch away the mortar around and so raise it.

Mighty eager, I crossed to the centre of the floor, where was this stone that I had noticed, and fell upon my knees.

"Ay, 'tis loose sure enough!" I whispered.

But I was surprised to find how easy it was to raise it. I had it up in a very little while; and then a swift cry broke from me as I stared down into the shallow place where the thing had been.

For a big square stone, just a trifle smaller than that which I had raised, was there revealed; and set in it was a rusty ring of iron!

A wild excitement seized me. 'Twas sure enough, I felt, that I had stumbled upon a great find! This stone, intended to be raised, as the ring testified, must clearly lead somewhere. What if a way for my escape would be revealed?

Thrilled with eager hopes, I raised the ring in its setting, taking a firm grasp upon it. Then I strained upwards with all my strength.

I thought at first that I was powerless to raise it. Then at last, when the sweat was streaming from me and my heart seemed like to burst, there came a scraping of stone, and with a little jerk I had freed it from its setting—'twas clear that it had not been stirred for many a day. With a gasp I had to let it fall again, but the greater work was done.

Setting myself squarely above the hollow, I stooped again. With both hands clutched within the ring, slowly I raised the great stone and lifted it aside on to the floor—to find myself gazing down into a fathomless square of darkness.

A chill, dank smell rose to my nostrils—a foul reek of things long decayed.

Throwing myself full length, I peered down. I began to think that I could distinguish dim shapes below me, but I could not be sure of this. Then, to judge the distance, I tossed down the poniard I carried. I heard it tinkle almost upon the instant; but with the sound came echoing up an eerie rattle, like nothing I had ever heard before, followed by a queer noise as of something rolling.

"What can it be?" I muttered.

The dawn was already flooding the outside world with grey, and now the pale light began to stream in through the window of my prison. A golden bar shot to the farther wall and rested on the scars my sword had put upon the locked door.

I moved aside to allow the dim light to fall through the hole into which I peered. And then there broke from me a sharp cry.

For the dim, dawn light revealed to



"Art shriven, young fire-eater?" sneered Hugo, as he swung his flail above his head. For answer, I raised Little John's great sword on high. Hugo sprang aside only just in time as the steel sang through the air. (See page 23.)

my startled eyes what lay in a room below.

A table—a rotting, mildewed thing—nine goblets set upon it! And seated round this table, in a horrible array, nine grinning skeletons!

The Iron Casket!

A HORRID thrill ran through me, and instinctively I drew back.

If escape indeed lay below, I felt at that moment that 'twas barred as with a barrier of iron. For I could never descend into that grim chamber, where in horrid merriment the dead sat at wine.

Decaying shreds of garments hung from their white ribs, and here and there I saw a tarnished ornament of gold.

Some lolled back and laughed at the ceiling, with outstretched arms and hands clawed upon the table, or fingers clutching at the goblets that for many a year had been filled with naught but ghostly wine. Some leaned forward upon their arms, and one there was that sat with arms hanging at his sides as he stared straight to the opening through which I spied upon their dread secrecy. And one there was—

I knew now what had been that odd rattle and the rolling sound. For he, the ninth, was but a broken thing—the poniard had struck the skull and sent it rolling on the table, and the bones had tottered from the rotting chair to lie upon the floor, a dreadful headless pile.

I shuddered as I looked upon them. And then, as my eyes roamed round, I espied at the farther wall a door, and in it was a key.

My gaze was set upon it hungrily. If I only dared disturb the grinning nine, I felt confident that the door of their chamber would open; for since that rusty key was upon the inside, that 'twould be locked or barred from the outer side was vastly unlikely.

I shook myself impatiently. I could look upon a dead man without fear. Why should I fear nine sets of bones?

In another moment I had leaped down into the room below.

There was no window in that room—what dim light there was streamed down through the gaping hole above. I shuddered. The foulness of the air was heavy in my nostrils, and I felt my flesh grow chill as I found myself so very near the nine. And then my eyes rested upon something that held them curiously.

One of those gaunt shapes, seated at the table-head, with a golden chain that had once been about his neck now hanging 'midst his bones, had one arm stretched out before him; the hand was clutching down at something that I saw to be a little casket of rusted metal, and my curiosity was aroused.

What did this casket, guarded by a dead man's hand, contain?

Nothing, perchance; perchance something strange and rare!

My first fears were passing now, and my curiosity, I say, was mighty strong
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upon me. Whose would not have been in like circumstance? I thought of the years that must have passed since last that casket had been opened by the man who now sat in leper-white decay! Or had he opened it? I could picture the scene—his eight companions waiting, eager for what the opening of the casket should reveal; and death coming, so that they never knew. Death to all the nine! I wondered if I should ever know how that strange thing had come to pass—that all died together thus, and not one so much as started to his feet in horror at a comrade's fate!

I picked the poniard from where it lay upon the table, then went slowly down, past them all, to where sat he who held the casket in his finger-bones.

I own I hesitated ere I reached out to lift aside that hand. But I did so at last, though foolish all the while with childish fears lest he might stir. I took the casket from him, and found that I was trembling strangely. Then, drawing back, I examined my prize.

A little box of iron with a rounded lid, and locked; no key was there to be seen upon the table, but my fingers were strong, and at last the catch within, weak and rusted as it must have been, broke beneath the pressure. I raised the lid and, very eager, peered inside.

A parchment lay there, partially eaten away by insects, which part powdered into dust as I set the box upon the table and drew the contents forth.

Unfolding it, I saw that to the parchment was attached a seal bearing the device of a leopard's head, and 'neath it the motto, "Audeo"—Latin, I knew, for "I dare!" The light from above was growing swiftly stronger with the glow of sunrise, and I could just read the words written above that seal, broken and interrupted as they were by decay:

"I, Edward Athelstane, Earl of Charndene, the . . . soon sailing from England upon the King's affairs, and fearing treachery, leave this evidence . . . my son . . . upon his chest a birthmark in the rough form of a falcon . . . the saints, and the curse of Heaven upon any that shall usurp—"

That was all that was decipherable, but for a date, 1176, but 'twas enough to fill me with a rare curiosity. I looked around upon that grim assembly, and wondered what this parchment had to do with them. What if one of these was this same Edward Athelstane, overtaken, perchance, even ere leaving England, by the treachery he had foreseen!

"I, Edward Athelstane, Earl of Charndene . . ." If one Edward Athelstane, with the coat-of-arms of a leopard's head, had been Earl of Charndene but sixteen years ago, how came it that Hugo, of the black wolf's head, now flaunted his accursed banner at Charndene?

"Ay, the pikeman called him usurper," I muttered.

And then there came to me another memory. What was it, now? Something said to me about the leopard triumphing over the wolf.

"'Twas the Blind Man of Tarn, in his mad mutterings, who spoke of that," I whispered aloud, mighty puzzled. "Ay, 'When the leopard finds its strength and strikes its enemies to the dust!' he said. 'Tis strange—strange!"

I stared down at the parchment and the words written upon it and the seal. Dimly I began to see—to piece together those queer scraps of knowledge my brain held. And as this thing grew clearer I thought I saw it all—the earl who feared that his son might never inherit his right, and the death of this same Edward Athelstane, and then the coming of the usurper, when the banner of the leopard's head was dragged down, and the black wolf's head flaunted in its place—an evil shadow o'er the fair demesne of Charndene.

And the rightful earl—

"If he still lives, what would I not give to join him, to fight with the party of the leopard's head 'gainst the Black Wolf, the tyrant, the usurper!" I muttered. "If he still lives! I should know him, too, by this same sign of the birthmark of a falcon. But that gallant pikeman, who would not slay Alan-a-Dale, said that he was at Charndene ere Hugo came. He will tell me—"

And that brought me back swift enough from my romancings. Here was I wasting the precious minutes when every moment might mean life or death! Little enough time had I to waste in that eerie company if I could escape from it. Slipping the parchment 'neath my jerkin, I crossed swift to the door.

'Twas not even locked. It opened, with many a creak and groan, straightway, though mighty heavy, and I found myself staring out cautiously on to the same narrow, winding stairway up which I had pursued the hooded man who had robbed me of the talisman.

In a moment I was through, with the door closed behind me. Glancing round, I was amazed to see that no door was visible from whence I came. 'Twas as though I had stepped forth from a solid wall.

I knew now why the nine had been undisturbed so long. For the door was covered with a thin layer of stone upon the outer side—a secret door, which no one without the secret might find. No handle, no visible lock, no projection of the stone wherewith to open that hidden portal. Doubtless some secret spring was there which would swing it open; but, if so, 'twas well concealed.

I had no time to pause and wonder, however. I drew my sword, that which Little John had lent me, and down those stairs I crept as silent as a rat. Somehow I must gain the courtyard, and that, too, ere the outlaws were forced back across the drawbridge. Little time enough.

Down, down through the gloom, past the splashes of gold where the new-born morning flooded in through the tall slits of windows. All was very still in the tower. There was no sign of anyone; and at last, with beating heart, I was all but at the bottom of those stairs.

And then, when a bare half-dozen steps still descended to the corridor that led, as I knew, to the great hall, I heard a sudden shout.

My heart leapt, and my fingers gripped my sword-hilt tight. Swift I drew back into the shadow—swift indeed, but yet too late!

Emerging from a curtained archway across the corridor they were—a group of mail-clad men, their crimson surcoats emblazoned with the black wolf's head. With hoarse shouts they raced t'wards me.

Another moment and I was fighting for my life 'gainst that swarm of Hugo's men-at-arms!

I was lucky to be in the narrow opening to the stairs when they saw me, or I should have been in sorry plight indeed. As it was, only two of them could attack me at once, and that gave me breathing space.

Two black-haired villains were thrusting at me, but the good broadsword I wielded kept them back. The others pressed eagerly behind them, driving them forward rather nearer to my blade than the two foremost fancied, but they could scarce help themselves without appearing cowardly. One tried to slash my leg, but I was quicker than he. My sword came sweeping down upon his steel



A startled cry broke from me as the talisman was snatched out of my hand. I was sent reeling back by a terrible blow upon the side of the head. All but stunned, I only glimpsed the dark shape that leapt past me and on up the stairs.

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cap, and the force of that heavy blade bit through steel and bone.

The fellow crumpled up, a lifeless heap, and I gave a fierce shout.

"One!" I cried savagely.

And soon another fell with Little John's trusty sword through his heart.

"Two!" I cried.

But, though the two foremost were down the others pressed upon me hard. My left shoulder was mightily paining me where De Blois the Red had struck me in that fight in the great hall, and my limbs were weary. But I had no choice but to fight on, and another of the villains fell at my feet.

"Three!" I told them.

And then a sword-thrust opened the calf of my right leg, and I all but fell. I stumbled back 'gainst the wall, and their fierce shouts of triumph rang out as they leapt forward.

But too eager were they to believe me down. A fourth tasted the steel of Little John—the last thing he did taste upon earth!

Wounded though I was, a wild exultation swept through me, and again I drove them back. They tell me I was born a fighter, and so I must believe, for my own heart tells me that. But never before had I felt quite the same joyous thrill, the feeling of strength and power, the feeling of how good it is to be big and strong and nimble and swift of eye. Every man worth the name must have known that same thrill for at least one moment of his life.

But I was bleeding fast, and I felt myself grow weaker as I struggled on against the evil swarm. There were still nigh half a score, and, though I still held them, I knew that ere long I must go down before them.

I felt that the great broadsword was less steady now in my weakened grasp. And then, all suddenly, I heard light, running footsteps, at the same moment that a sword slashed my wrist, and with a cry I let my weapon fall from my hand.

Unarmed I was now—unarmed and at their mercy! I had no strength to fly back up the stairs; they would soon have overtaken me. A silent prayer I breathed, for I believed truly that my last hour had come.

And then, as they were about to rush upon me like the pack of wolves they were, they turned their heads, uncertain, in the direction from whence those running footsteps came.

There came a murmur of alarm, and then from one big fellow a sneering laugh.

"'Tis but one man. And he, i' faith, doth seem so mighty small!"

My knees tottered under me, and down I sank upon the stairs. But, though a mist was swimming in my brain and my eyes were strangely clouded, I saw the swordsman who a moment afterward came leaping swift upon them—a man whose blade flickered and darted and drove here and there like some dragon-fly upon the wing. Already he was through them, and no less than three men had fallen at his passing.

"Stab me!" cried a merry voice. "May my blood turn to sap if I have not found you at last, young golden head!"

And, though this was the man who had deserted us at the Red Inn, as he stood above me now, his slender sword flashing nimbly, my eyes were filled with a wondrous light as I murmured joyously:

"Lantern!"

'Gainst Heavy Odds!

AY, 'twas Lantern himself!

He stood above me with his legs thrust wide, the point of his slender sword dancing in the air like some silver butterfly, as he held back



My knees tottered under me, and down I sank upon the stairs. Dimly I saw the swordsman who a moment afterward came leaping swift upon them—a man whose blade flickered and darted and drove here and there like some dragon-fly upon the wing. "Stab me!" he cried merrily. "May my blood turn to sap if I have not found you at last, Tom." "Lantern!" I murmured joyously.

(See this page.)

the evil brood that pressed upon him. His gay, handsome face was set grim and firm, but, though 'twas hidden from where I lay, I knew well the wondrous twinkle that would now be dancing in his eyes.

I lay back upon the stone steps, panting a little, but, strangely enough, with no impulse to rise and fight beside him. I felt very safe with Lantern's nimble blade flickering above me, and very weak as I was with my wounds, I suppose the loss of blood had brought on that strange apathy that dulls one's senses to full realisation of happenings around.

Ay, I was content to watch him fight for me. Another of Hugo's men had fallen before the wondrous skill of Lantern's sword, and now a quick step forward, and a dexterous twist, sent one more staggering back against the farther wall.

A faint, puzzled frown was upon my face. Never had I found it easy to believe that Lantern had deserted us at the Red Inn, yet Alan-a-Dale had had perforce to believe that also, for what could we do other than judge by the evidence of our senses? But now that he was with me, fighting for my life—slender and nimble, light of foot and swift of blade, gay and brave as of old—I was still more loth to believe this thing of him.

And yet—

Lantern did desert us at the Red Inn. 'Twas vain denying it.

But I shook the thought from me wearily. That apathy I speak of was stealing gradually over me, and I felt too tired to worry now over that strange puzzle.

But mighty hard pressed was Lantern, with seven of those mail-clad men-at-arms striving to beat down his guard, and he but dressed in the jerkin and hose he had worn 'neath his armour at the tourney. Had it not been for our position in the narrow opening on the stairway, 'twould have been well-nigh impossible to hold them so long.

But Lantern fought on grimly, and again his point slipped in betwixt the mail of one of them. The villain crumpled up before him, but in falling, sword still grasped in dead fingers, the blade struck 'gainst Lantern's knee.

The little swordsman staggered for a moment. 'Twas an ugly wound, and our foes let forth a shout to see it.

Lantern gave a merry laugh.

"How dogs do howl at the smell of blood!" cried he gaily.

But nevertheless, I could see that he was in pain, and that 'twas hard for him to keep steady upon his legs.

(Don't miss the continuation of this powerful story in next week's MAGNET, chums.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 860.

VERNON-SMITH'S FEUD!

(Continued from page 22.)

"The gladfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton nodded.

He was glad to hear it, too; he knew that it would be a good thing for the Bounder. Bitter as the dispute in the Remove had become, Wharton did not want to see the Bounder sacked from Greyfriars, and he knew that Smithy was going that way fast.

The Bounder was too prominent a figure in the Greyfriars Remove for his proceedings to fail to excite notice and comment. That Sunday the chief topic in the Remove was the reconciliation of Smithy and Redwing. It was observed, too, that Skinner & Co. were no longer "thick" with the Bounder.

During the following days other changes were observed. The meetings that had been so frequent in Smithy's study no longer took place. The discontented members of the Remove, who had found a chief in the Bounder, found that they had lost their chief. The scheme of a rival cricket eleven seemed to have been completely dropped. The Bounder, with his old cunning, his old resource, his old unscrupulousness, would have been a dangerous enemy to the captain of the Remove—a thorn in his side at every step. Wharton had been prepared for it, but it did not come. There was no further hostile move from the Bounder, and the fellows in the Remove who had hoped that the Bounder would "give Wharton a fall" had to admit that their hope had been delusive.

The St. Jim's match was drawing near now, and Wharton was giving the matter a great deal of thought.

Schoolboy memories are naturally short, and the Bounder's offence was weeks old now. And Redwing, the chiefly-offended party, had evidently forgiven, if not forgotten. Some of the fellows, especially the cricketing fraternity, began to wonder whether the sentence of the Form had not been a little too severe.

That was what Harry Wharton was beginning to wonder, also. If the Bounder had persisted in the war the Famous Five were ready for it—war to the finish. But when bitterness disappeared from one side, it naturally died away on the other.

Of his exclusion from Remove cricket the Bounder said no word. He was regular at games practice, and he was in great form. More and more the Remove fellows realised that the Remove could not afford to leave such a man out of the team in the last big fixture of the season. There was a general feeling that the Bounder had had enough.

"After all," said Harry Wharton, in Study No. 1—"after all, you chaps—" He paused. "It's all ended in smoke. The old Bounder's playing the game all right now. He had to take his gruel for what he did, but there's such a thing as letting a chap down lightly. What about letting Smithy off?"

Bob Cherry grinned.

"I was thinking the same, and wondering how long it would be before you came to it," he said.

"The thoughtfulness of my esteemed self was also terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The excellent and ludicrous Smithy has had enough, and it is up to us to tell him so soonfully. The stitch in time saves ninepence, as the English proverb remarks."

The Co. chuckled at the English proverb.

"I could call a Form meeting, and put it to the Remove," said Harry Wharton. "I'd like to see the old Bounder playing for Greyfriars in our next big match."

"Hear, hear!"

"Jolly good idea," said Johnny Bull. "If Smithy had kept on the giddy war-path it would have been different. But he hasn't."

"That's so," said Nugent. "Go it, Harry!"

And in the Rag that day there was a meeting, at which the Bounder was not present. But after the meeting Harry

Wharton strolled along to Study No. 4 in the Remove. He found Vernon-Smith and Redwing there.

The Bounder eyed him as he entered. His face expressed nothing, but Tom Redwing's was bright.

"Smithy, old man," said Wharton, plunging into the subject directly. "we've had a Form meeting, and the sentence is knocked on the head. I'm sorry it ever came to that."

"So am I," said the Bounder. "I'm not grumbling; the sentence was fair enough for what I did."

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton. "You see that?"

"I'm not a fool," said Vernon-Smith composedly. "I was let off lightly. That's a fact."

Wharton smiled.

"Well, it's all over now," he said. "Nobody wants to keep you out of the cricket; and, if you're willing, we'd like to blot out what's happened, and let it be forgotten."

"I'm your man!"

"Good!" exclaimed Wharton. "And that means that your name goes down for the St. Jim's match."

"Right-ho!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Redwing. "That's jolly good news!"

"And there's room for Redwing, too," said Harry. "The list goes up to-day, Smithy; and I don't mind saying that I'm jolly glad your name's going to be in it!"

And the captain of the Remove went down to the Rag to post up the list.

The feud in the Remove was over.

When Tom Merry & Co. came along from St. Jim's for the big match, Herbert Vernon-Smith turned out with the Remove team. It was a great game, and Tom Merry and his men upheld their reputation, but victory rested with Greyfriars; and the two chief contributors to that victory were Harry Wharton and the Bounder, once the rivals of the Remove.

THE END.

(There is another long complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next Monday, entitled: "TRUE BLUE!" This is a great yarn, boys, featuring a new boy in the Remove who has a secret to keep. Make sure of your copy of the MAGNET by ordering it NOW!)

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