

SUPERB ART PLATE OF THE FASTEST WARSHIP AFLOAT FREE INSIDE!

No. 879. Vol. XXVI.

Week Ending December 13th, 1924.

The Magnet²

Library

Complete School Stories.

EVERY
MONDAY.



Wharton's Triumph — and Disgrace!



THE FALL OF THE MIGHTY!

(Contrasting scenes from this week's amazing story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars within.)

OUR FIGHTING FLEET!

• THIS WEEK •
COASTAL MOTOR-BOATS.

By JACKSTAFF (THE WELL-KNOWN NAVAL WRITER).

THIS week's presentation art plate depicts a Coastal Motor Boat. It may not look like a warship. All the same, it is one—a real sea-wasp, for it carries a sting in its tail. By way of abbreviation, coastal motor-boats are termed C.M.B.'s. "Scouters" is their colloquial name, and they are so described because they "scoot" rapidly over the surface of the water rather than glide through it.

These C.M.B.'s are amongst the navies "war babies"—that is the new types of craft that were brought into the Service to fill a war need, and have been adopted for permanent use. The boat shown in the Art. Plate is 55 feet long. Some kinds have a length of 75 feet, but all follow much upon the same lines in their design. A C.M.B. is really nothing more than a super-motor-boat built specially to fire torpedoes. Broadly speaking, she has an extremely light frail hull into which a tremendous engine-power has been squeezed. This consists of a couple of internal combustion engines which develop not less than 900 horse-power, and drive the boat along at forty-eight miles an hour or more when they are running full speed. In her after-part, just under the flag, the C.M.B. carries a 21-inch

torpedo; some of the newer type have two. When she wants to fire this she simply "kicks it out" astern, then turns quickly aside, and the torpedo runs straight towards its target.

High speed is the C.M.B.'s greatest asset in attack and her only defence. She is so mobile that gunners find it very difficult to hit her. If a shell did strike her she would be blotted out instantly. When a C.M.B. is racing along at full speed about all one can see of her is the forepart of her hull sticking up amidst a smother of flying spray thrown up by the

water she displaces. The screws "dig" the after part of the boat deep down into the water, but all the forepart lifts quite above it. C.M.B.'s came first into use during the war operations along the Belgian coast. The Germans employed them under wireless control from aeroplanes to try and torpedo our ships. This attempt did not succeed, but we capped it by building a whole flotilla of these craft and giving command of them to young officers, mere boys so far as years were reckoned, who did many dashing exploits in their little "scooters" at the famous attacks upon Zeebrugge and Ostend and elsewhere. It was a C.M.B. that dropped the flare that lighted the Vindictive to her last berth at Ostend when she bottled up that harbour.

C.M.B.'s are now a special branch of the Navy, with its own depot in Haslar Creek, Portsmouth. These craft are steadily improved in design with a view to increasing their speed and effectiveness. Always they have been the fastest war vessels in existence, and that honour will be their in perpetuity.



Next Week:
H.M.S. PRINCESS MARGARET.

NEXT MONDAY'S PROGRAMME!

A RECORD-BREAKING CHRISTMAS NUMBER!

MONDAY of next week will be a day dear to the heart of every "Magnet" reader, for our grand Christmas Number will be on sale at all newsagents. Most of you are curious to know what's in store for you. Well, to begin with, there's a special Christmas yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. You have already discovered the differences that have arisen between the captain of the Remove and the rest of the Famous Five—trivial really, aren't they? But to a peculiar character like Wharton these trivialities are magnified a thousandfold. Next week's splendid school story doesn't show the Famous Five "patching up" their petty squabbles—far from it! Although Christmas is almost on them, and with its coming the universal feeling of goodwill towards all men, Wharton still stands aloof; he considers that he is the injured party. Now, then, does Harry Wharton spend the Christmas holidays with his pals or—'Twould be a pity to "let on" at this stage. You'll find a rare treat in

"HARRY WHARTON'S CHRISTMAS!" and you'll emerge from it with a fuller understanding of Wharton's sensitive nature, his failings, his strength. Mr. Richards has written you close on nine hundred stories of good old Greyfriars, and yet I doubt if he has ever written such a powerful yarn as the one due next week. In it we see more than ever the master touch, the genius of the man who occupies a front-rank position amongst the foremost authors of the day.

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BEAUTIFUL PRESENTATION ART PLATE!

It must not be forgotten that, in addition to an extra strong programme of good things for next week, there accompanies every single copy of the "Magnet" a superb art plate, measuring nine and a half inches by six and a half inches. You have all heard of the mine-layer—the pest of the seas, as it was called in the Great War—and yet I'll warrant there are thousands of my loyal chums who have no conception of what a mine-layer looks like. With next week's gorgeous art plate before them, however, their knowledge will have increased. It shows H.M.S. Princess Margaret—the latest type of mine-layer. An excellent photo, this, boys, unique in every way, and a credit to the "Magnet" Presentation Series. Don't miss it!

"THE TEAM FROM CHICAGO!"

That's the title of the long complete Boxing Day footer story Mr. Walter Edwards has written specially for the occasion. The Storrsdene Villa is given the undoubted honour of meeting the finest Soccer eleven in the States. How the "black-and-whites" fare, what underlies the meeting between these two giants of the football world, I will leave our brilliant author to tell you in his own inimitable fashion. He scores a goal in the opening chapter, and continues with the good work until the "long whistle." Mind you're on the field of play next Monday!

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS SUPPLEMENT!

Harry Wharton & Co. have devoted their literary energies to a grand supplement dealing with the festive occasion. That it's up to usual standard goes without saying—the Heraldites are ever consistent. It's a sheer romp of fun and frolic from beginning to end. No Christmas would be complete without Wharton & Co.'s contribution, so take the tip, chums, and order your favourite paper early.

GAMES FOR THE CHRISTMAS PARTY!

I have secured the services of "Entertainer" to write specially for Magnetites a number of parlour games for the Christmas party. As you know, it is a risky thing to let a party "run itself." Sooner or later comes the inevitable "What shall we do now?" Magnetites will find in "Entertainer's" article a number of jolly games suitable for young and old, easily understood, that will provide a real sparkle of harmless fun. Mind you read this full page of games next week, chums.

A FRIENDLY HINT!

I think you will agree that this year's grand Christmas Number beats all previous records. The rush to secure it also looks like rivaling all records of the past. That being so—and your Editor "knows" something—readers are earnestly advised to order next Monday's issue of the "Magnet" at once. A disappointment at this time of the year is something to be avoided. 'Nuff said!

A LETTER FROM LOS ANGELES.

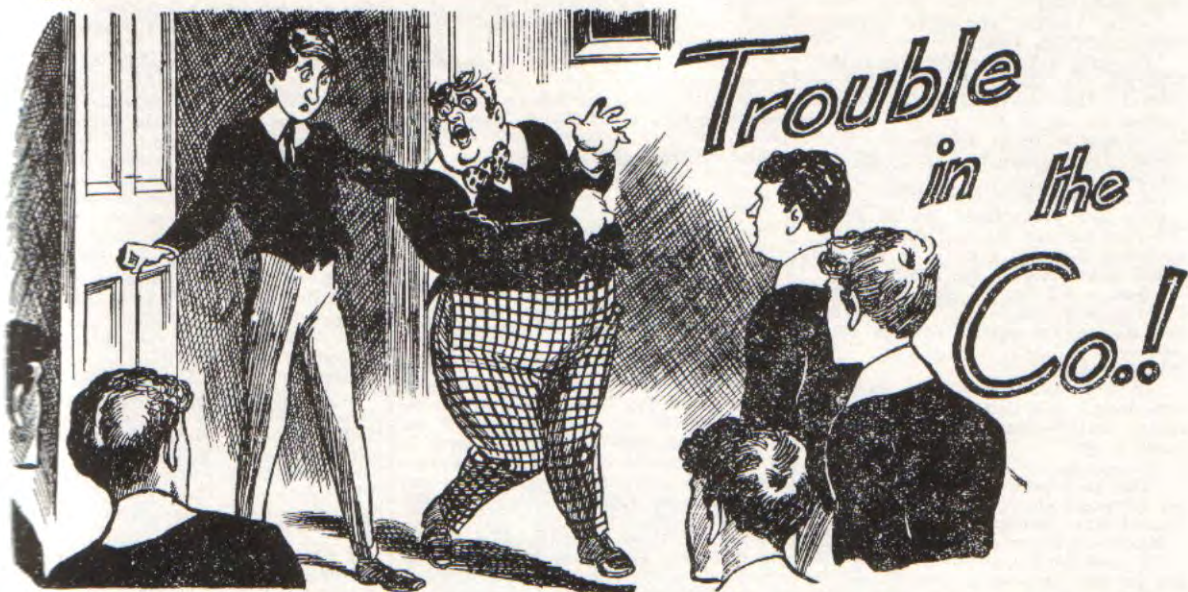
A cheery letter reaches me from Allen C. Cavey, 4218, South Menlo Avenue, Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. This correspondent tells me that he first began reading the "Magnet" when living in Jersey, Channel Islands, where he was born. Then he shipped to Canada, and he is now in Cinema City. He would much like to hear from readers of the "Magnet" and "Gem." I am sure some of my chums will be eager to get in touch with this staunch Magnetite who has seen such a lot of the world.

A REQUEST FROM "DOWN UNDER."

Stanley Cyril Morris, 45, Murphy Street, Richmond, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, asks me if I can find him a few "Magnet" correspondents in the British Isles. Here's a chance for chums this side who would like to hear from the land of the jumping kangaroo.

YOUR EDITOR.

NONE SO BLIND.—A whole series of misunderstandings, for which, in the first place, Harry Wharton is responsible, sees his gradual alienation from that formidable quintet of pals known and respected at Greyfriars as the Famous Five.



**A Magnificent New Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co.
at Greyfriars. By Famous FRANK RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

To Go or Not to Go!

"ROTTEN!"
Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, uttered that ejaculation almost unconsciously.

He stood on the football ground at Greyfriars, with a telegram in his hand. Trotter, the page, had hurried down to Little Side with that telegram. He was just in time to catch the captain of the Remove before the football match began.

The Remove fellows were all ready. The footballers from Highcliffe School were all ready. North of the Sixth, who was referee, was all ready, whistle in hand. But there had to be a pause while Harry opened the telegram. Telegrams to junior schoolboys at Greyfriars were extremely uncommon; obviously the matter was serious.

The footballers waited while Harry Wharton read his telegram. And then he ejaculated:

"Rotten!"

"Not bad news, old chap?" asked Bob Cherry anxiously.

"It's from my uncle," muttered Harry.

"Colonel Wharton?" said Frank Nugent. "Not ill, I hope?"

"Oh, no!"

Harry Wharton looked at the message again, with a knit brow.

"You can read it," he said. "I've got to chuck up the match, that's all. At least, I suppose I must."

"Oh, my hat!" said Johnny Bull, in dismay.

"That's rotten," said Bob.

"The rottenness is great," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But why?"

"Look at it," said Wharton.

The Co. read the telegram. It was brief, but very much to the point:

"Wharton, Greyfriars School, Kent.—See me at Royal Hotel, Ashford, this afternoon.—JAMES WHARTON."

Bob Cherry whistled.
"You'll have to go," he said. "Can't be helped. We shall have to play the match without you, Harry."

"Looks like it," said Johnny Bull. "But—what the thump! Nunky might really have given you a bit more notice. But I dare say he doesn't remember that we play footer matches on half-holidays here."

Wharton frowned.
"It's too bad," he said. "If I'd had a letter this morning I could have fixed up the team. It's too bad. I—I—" He paused, and breathed deep. "I've a jolly good mind to wire instead of going."

"A wire to the Royal Hotel, Ashford, would find him all right and get there sooner than you could," said Vernon-Smith. "Dash it all, a giddy uncle oughtn't to butt in suddenly like this."

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"You must go, Harry," he said. "It's bound to be important. Colonel Wharton isn't the man to send a telegram for nothing. He would feel it, I fancy, if you didn't go."

"Oh, it's a little treat for the afternoon, of course!" said Wharton irritably. "He happens to be at Ashford, and as it's not far from Greyfriars, he's going to give me a spread at the hotel, and so on. It's awfully kind of him but—" He broke off.

"Kind relations are a bore sometimes," remarked Vernon-Smith. "I fancy I'd send a wire. He would understand, if you tell him we're just starting the biggest football fixture of the season."

Wharton nodded.

He was tempted to act on the Bounder's advice. Really, it seemed good enough advice. The Highcliffe match was an important fixture in the Remove list. Wharton was very keen on beating Courtenay & Co., of Highcliffe. And it was very awkward to be called away just before kick off. The captaincy of the team would have to be handed over to Vernon-Smith, who was vice-captain; and a place would have to be filled. Changes had to be made in the team, a new man to be found, at the very last moment—all of which might easily mean defeat. Wharton was very keen to play in the match himself, and extremely indisposed to exchange it for a long railway journey. But that, to do him justice, was not by any means his chief thought. He felt that his sudden departure would be leaving his team in the lurch when they wanted him most.

He stood undecided, his brow knitted.

The Highcliffe fellows waited politely. But it was difficult for the captain of the Remove to make up his mind.

"You might wire, old chap," said Frank Nugent hesitatingly. "If it's only just to see you, and give you a treat; but—"

"But what?"

"It might be something important."

"I don't see how it could be. Nothing important's likely to happen so suddenly that my uncle wouldn't have time to write."

"Well, that's so," assented Frank.

"The colonel wouldn't wire if it wasn't important," said Bob Cherry, shaking his head again.

"Oh! You think so?" said Harry, rather irritably.

"I do, old chap."

"Then what can it be that's so jolly important all of a sudden?"

"Blessed if I know! Can't guess," said Bob. "But I think you ought to

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go. football or no football. We'll try to beat Highcliffe without you."

Wharton compressed his lips, and still stood undecided.

"We're keeping Highcliffe waiting," murmured Peter Todd.

"I'm jolly well not going!" exclaimed Wharton, at last. "It can't be important. How the thump could it be important for me to see my uncle because he happens to be at Ashford this afternoon? It's too late to make changes in the team now."

He looked at his chums.

Four very grave faces met his glance. Wharton was not satisfied with his own decision; but the gravity in his comrades' looks added to his annoyance.

"That won't do, old chap," said Bob Cherry, very quietly. "Colonel Wharton is your guardian, and he has a right—"

"Oh, rot!"

"Dash it all, Harry, you owe him something," said Bob. "Even if it only means that he wants to see you, you ought to go."

"I don't see it."

"The go-fulness is the proper caper, my esteemed chum," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wharton's frown deepened.

"Tea at the Royal Hotel, and a licking for the Remove at Greyfriars," he muttered.

"Perhaps we sha'n't be licked," said Bob cheerily. "We've got a jolly good team, and we're in form. Ogilvy's standing over yonder, and it won't take him long to change, and he's a good man."

"Is Ogilvy anything like my form?" snapped Wharton.

"Of course not! I don't mean that. But he's a good man, and, to cut it short, Harry, you ought to go, even if we're licked by a dozen goals to nil," said Bob, rather warmly.

"Well, I'm not going."

"Wharton—"

"That's settled."

Harry Wharton glanced across to Courtenay, the Highcliffe junior captain.

"We're ready," he said.

"Right-ho!" said Courtenay cheerily.

Bob Cherry looked rather grim.

"If you're not going, you'll send a wire, I suppose?" he said, in a rather cold tone.

"The post-office boy's waiting, sir," said Trotter.

Wharton glanced round.

"Anybody got a pencil?" he asked.

A Remove fellow came forward with a pencil and a pocket-book. Wharton scribbled a message.

"Colonel Wharton, Royal Hotel,

"Ashford.

"Highcliffe match just starting. Shall I come after match? Wire reply."

"HARRY."

"Give that to the post-office kid, Trotter. Give him a tanner for the kid, Russell—I've no money about me now."

"Right-ho!" said Russell.

Trotter walked away.

Harry Wharton looked round at his friends, perhaps hoping to read approval, or at least indifference, in their faces. They looked away from him, but their opinion was plain. They did not approve. A flush came into his face, and a gleam into his eyes.

"My uncle will understand," he said. "He's forgotten that it's the date of the Highcliffe match to-day—though really

he might have remembered. He will understand that I couldn't get away."

"I hope so," said Bob shortly.

"Well, let's get going, as you're staying," said Johnny Bull uneasily.

Wharton's flush deepened.

"Anyhow, it's my bizney, I suppose," he said tartly.

"Quite!" said Bob. "Let's get going—nothing to keep Highcliffe waiting for now."

And the footballers got going.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Winning Goal!

HARRY WHARTON threw himself into the game with even more than his accustomed keenness.

He was in great form; and it was easy to see that at his best he was the finest footballer in the Remove, or in all the Lower School at Greyfriars. And he seemed at his best now. It was borne in upon the minds of his comrades how sorely they would have missed him, had he obeyed the summons from his uncle that afternoon.

Certainly, there was no fellow in the Remove who could have replaced him effectively. The very best of the reserves was nowhere near his form.

The first goal came within ten minutes of the start, and it came from Wharton's foot. There was a roar of cheering round Little Side.

"Goal!"

"Bravo, Wharton!"

"Well kicked, sir!"

"Goal! Goal!"

It was an inspiring sound to Wharton and it helped to drive away the troubled thoughts that thronged into his mind—thoughts that he could not keep away, though he tried to concentrate his mind on the game.

Why had his uncle wired for him?

It couldn't be an important matter—that was absurd. The colonel could not be ill, as he had evidently come to Ashford that day—his sister, Wharton's aunt, could not be ill, or the colonel would have said so; and, besides, in that case the telegram would have called Wharton home, not to Ashford. Obviously, it was not a case of illness. What other matter of importance could possibly have transpired?

Obviously—or it seemed obvious to Harry—some business had called the colonel to Ashford, only an hour on the railway from Greyfriars, and he had taken the opportunity of seeing his nephew. Doubtless time did not allow him to come on to the school; probably he had to catch his train home at a fixed time. His idea, the idea of a kind uncle, was to give the schoolboy a little outing and a treat—as had often happened on previous occasions.

In such circumstances, surely the colonel would not mind if Wharton felt it his duty to see his comrades through the most important football fixture of the season.

If the matter was important, the colonel would wire back, and Wharton would take the train to Ashford after the match; that was simple enough. Even if the meeting was of some inexcusable importance, an hour or two could not make much difference.

That reasoning had satisfied Wharton in making up his mind on the subject. But, somehow, he could not continue to feel satisfied—and every now and then, instead of the football and the footballers, he seemed to see a kind, bronzed old face looking at him, and it troubled

him. From his earliest infancy his uncle had taken the place of the father whom Wharton hardly remembered—he had been a father, and a kind and affectionate one, to the rather wayward boy whose guardian he was.

His lightest wish should have been like the call of duty to his nephew, and in his inmost heart Wharton knew it. The colonel was not the man to act lightly or unreflectingly; if he sent a telegram it was because there had been no time for a letter. And yet, what could possibly have happened—what but a sudden illness, and it was certain that it was not a case of illness.

Wharton was angry with himself for failing to drive the matter from his mind, in the midst of an exciting game.

After the match he would find a telegram waiting for him from his uncle, if the colonel seriously wished to see him at Ashford; he would take the express from Courtfield, and arrive at the Royal Hotel an hour later, and all would be well. Half-consciously, he was feeling a little sore because his uncle had not remembered that this was the date of the Highcliffe match—a fixture to which Wharton had referred often enough in his letters home.

If Colonel Wharton was so near as Ashford, surely he might have come on to Greyfriars and seen the match, instead of calling the captain of the Remove away just before kick-off. Indeed, it had been understood that the colonel would come down to the school for the match, if opportunity offered; and now—

"Wake up, Wharton!" came a yell from behind the goal. It was the voice of Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, Wharton's taking a nap."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On the ball, Wharton!"

Wharton's eyes flashed.

Actually, thinking of his uncle and the telegram, he had let his thoughts stray, and for the moment he had been unconscious of the game. De Courcy of Highcliffe had taken the ball fairly from his foot, and was racing it on to the Greyfriars goal.

There was a roar from a dozen Highcliffe fellows who had walked over to watch the game.

"Go it, Caterpillar!"

"Bravo!"

"Good old Caterpillar!"

Wharton set his teeth. The Caterpillar had seen his chance, and taken it, and he raced the ball on and centred to Courtenay at the right moment, and Courtenay drove it in. Squiff, in goal, failed to save, and the leather reposed in the net.

"Goal!"

"Well kicked, Courtenay!"

"Good old Caterpillar!"

De Courcy, otherwise the Caterpillar, grinned and nodded to Courtenay, as Squiff rather ruefully tossed out the ball. The score was even now.

Wharton's feelings were not pleasant. He had neglected his duty to his uncle, as his conscience told him, in order to lead his followers to victory. And conscience had taken its revenge.

He resolved to dismiss the matter from his mind, and this time he kept the resolve. Haunting reproach was dismissed till after the game.

But great as Wharton's form was, first-class captain as he undoubtedly was, he found the Highcliffians foemen worthy of his steel. The game went on hard and fast; but at half-time, the score was still level.

In the interval there were a good many breathless fellows on both sides;

and the result, as the Bounder remarked, was still on the knees of the gods.

Wharton called to Russell across the touch-line.

"Do you know if there's a wire for me, Russell?"

"Not that I know of. Trotter would bring it along," answered Dick Russell.

"All serene."

After all, there was hardly time for a wired reply from Ashford yet. Wharton rejoined the footballers, but there was not the usual cheery exchange of chat among the Famous Five. The sight of his comrades silenced Wharton, and the Co. were feeling constrained. All of them felt glad when the whistle went for the second half.

Harry Wharton played up at his very best after the interval. He was determined that there should be no more mistakes, no more wandering of his thoughts from the business in hand.

And he succeeded. Again the ball went in from his foot, and Greyfriars were up. But a Highcliffian drove the ball into the home goal a little later, leveling the score again. And then came a stroke of sheer ill-luck—Vernon Smith having to stand out for ten minutes or more from a knock on the knee. When the Bounder resumed play he was visibly limping; it was only the grim determination that was a part of the Bounder's character that kept him going at all.

But with all the Bounder's grim resolution, he was little help to his side after that, and it was a weak spot in the Greyfriars' armour. Twice, and thrice, the Highcliffians came through, and only Swift in goal saved the situation. Between the posts the Australian junior was a tower of strength, and again and again he staved off defeat, till the fellows began looking at their watches, or up at the clock-tower, as the finish drew near. And the score was still level.

Wharton's face was set and hard.

If the match was to end in a draw he might as well have been at Ashford. Without him, the Remove might very well have drawn the game with Highcliff.

It was a bitter reflection, and it made the captain of the Remove go all out to win.

But the minutes were counted now; and though Highcliff could not get through, they packed their goal and defended obstinately; and every second the blast of the whistle was expected. It was almost on the call of time that the Remove forwards broke into the defence, and with a rush of swift, short passing brought the ball up to the visitors' goal. The leather went in from the Bounder, to be fisted out again. And then Wharton, seizing his chance at the psychological moment, drove it in again and beat the goalkeeper.

"Goal!"

It was an ecstatic roar from a hundred Greyfriars fellows.

"Goal!"

"Greyfriars wins!"

"Hurrah!"

"Heep!" The long whistle shrilled out.

On the very stroke of time Harry Wharton had landed the winning goal. Highcliff were beaten by three goals to two; beaten by a narrow margin with only a few seconds to spare, but beaten for all that. Wharton panted, and his face gleamed; at that moment his feelings were of pure elation. There was a shout from his comrades as the crowd cheered, and the captain of the Remove was caught up on the powerful shoulders of Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and carried off the field in triumph.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter Talks Too Much!

"TELEGRAM for me?"

"No, sir."

Harry Wharton's face was a little troubled.

The football match was won and over; the Highcliff crowd had gone. Harry Wharton had changed, and for some time, in the elation following the hard victory over Highcliff, he had thought of nothing else. But the thought of his uncle at Ashford had very soon returned. There had been ample time now for a reply telegram from the colonel, and the captain of the Remove inquired after it. But there was no telegram.

He went up to Study No. 1 in the gathering winter dusk, with a rather moody expression on his handsome face.

Why had not the colonel wired?

It would have meant at the most the difference of an hour and a half to the colonel's train returning to London. If he wanted to see his nephew so particularly that an important football match could be cut for it, surely he could have caught a slightly later train and allowed Wharton to see him when the match was over.

If not, it couldn't matter very much. Wharton told himself moodily. And his regret that he had not obeyed the colonel's summons was now mingled with a moody resentment.

His face was not very bright as he came into Study No. 1, where Frank Nugent had laid the table, and was attending to a boiling kettle and a tin saucepan crammed with eggs for tea.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh were standing about the study doorway, chatting cheerily.



Harry Wharton, seizing his chance at the psychological moment, drove the ball hard for the net. It beat the goalkeeper. "Goal!" It was an ecstatic roar from a hundred Greyfriars fellows. "Goal! School wins!" "Well played, Wharton!" (See Chapter 2.)

Certainly it was rather late in the afternoon for a junior schoolboy to leave Greyfriars to take the train to Ashford. But that could have been arranged easily enough with Mr. Quelch. Wharton had only to show him the colonel's telegram and ask for an exeat, which would have been at once granted.

He was feeling a little tired after a gruelling match, but quite willingly he would have undertaken the journey; and now that the game was over he could have taken his friends with him. His uncle had always been glad to see the cheery Co.

Doubtless the colonel's visit to Ashford had been a hurried one; he had not been staying long enough there to wait for his nephew. Or was it that he was offended, and did not choose to answer and see his nephew at the latter's convenience?

At that thought Wharton's face hardened a little.

Probably they intended to "tea" in Study No. 1—the Famous Five often "tea'd" together.

But after a glance at Wharton's clouded face, Bob Cherry strolled away along the passage, whistling, and Johnny Bull strolled after him. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh lingered.

"There is an esteemed telegram?" he asked.

"No, Inky."

"Then you will not be going depart-fully to Ashford?"

"No."

The Nabob of Bhanipur sauntered away after Bob Cherry. Wharton glanced after him and opened his lips, but closed them again. If the nabob did not choose to "tea" in Study No. 1 he could please himself.

"Nearly ready," said Frank brightly, as the captain of the Remove came in. "Had a wire?"

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"No."

"I suppose your uncle couldn't wait."

"Or wouldn't," said Harry.

"Well, I suppose he would have if he could have," said Frank, taking up the eggs. "He must have wanted to see you."

"I think he may have been offended by my not going earlier."

"Nugent made no reply to that."

"No reason why he should be," added Wharton quickly. "I think I did quite right in staying for the match. Don't you?"

"Well, it's rather too late to think about that, isn't it?" said Frank. "Anyhow, I don't suppose it matters very much."

"Which means that you don't think I did right?"

"My dear chap, you were bound to act according to your own judgment," said Frank. "If you thought it right, all serene."

"I suppose you don't think I should have done it if I hadn't thought it right?"

Nugent gave his chum a quick look.

"Of course not. Don't let's argue, Harry—it's no business of mine, anyhow, and I'm not criticising you."

"It seems to me that you were—and the other fellows, too," said Wharton, flushing. "I think I might be allowed to know best in my own family affairs."

"Of course. Here's the eggs. Aren't the other chaps coming in to tea?" asked Frank, with a glance at the door.

"I don't know—you can ask them if you like."

"Oh, never mind!"

The chums of the Remove sat down to tea rather silently. Both of them were feeling constraint. Wharton was anything but easy with his conscience, and the thought that Frank was blaming him, as he blamed himself, stirred a faint resentment in his breast. After all, he had won the Highcliffe match for the Remove; and there were plenty of fellows in the Form who would have criticised him pretty freely had he gone off at the last moment and left his men in the lurch from whatsoever cause.

Vernon-Smith, too, had advised him to act as he had done; and the Bounder was a clear-headed, sensible fellow. Though Wharton was well aware that he had never, so far, modelled his views upon those of the Bounder—well aware that there was a touch of cynical hardness in the Bounder's character that he had never liked.

It was, as Nugent had said, too late to discuss pros and cons now; what was done, was done. If his uncle was offended with him, and disdained to wait an hour or so to see him, it could not be helped. Yet the thought of having hurt the kind old gentleman made Wharton wince.

He had never had anything but kindness from his uncle. Well he remembered Colonel Wharton's return to England from foreign service, when the old soldier had found a wayward, discontented boy left on his hands—a boy with a passionate temper, spoiled by an indulgent aunt, rebellious to the kindest authority. With what infinite patience and kind affection the colonel had borne with him and brought him to a better understanding Harry knew only too well. Reflection had opened his eyes to many things.

He knew that but for the colonel's kind patience he might have been still the peevish, discontented boy, dissatisfied with himself, dissatisfying others—and yet there had never been anything like severity, anything like stern reprimand. In his uncle he had found a father and

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a friend, a kind adviser and a faithful guardian, and well he knew that for a long time he had been indifferent, if not ungrateful, till understanding had come to him.

Now, truly, there was not indifference or ingratitude. He loved and respected the man who was his ideal of what a man and a soldier should be. Little of it showed on the surface; Wharton was not a fellow to wear his heart on his sleeve. But it was there, and the colonel knew it. And yet he had neglected the colonel that afternoon. Howsoever excellent his reasons seemed to him that was the truth, and the half-conscious realisation of it made him moody and miserable and irritable. Suppose, after all, that the appointment had been an important one—

But it could not have been. It was only a schoolboy treat the old soldier had intended. Wharton was sure of that. Still, he could not feel easy in his mind.

"It's all rot!" he broke out suddenly, as if Nugent had accused him—answering, perhaps, the thoughts he guessed were passing in Frank's mind. "Utter rot! As if it matters, anyhow!"

"I dare say it doesn't," said Frank amicably.

"I'm sure it doesn't!"

"Good!"

"I think he might have remembered that it was the Highcliffe match to-day," muttered Wharton. "I've told him a lot about it in my letters, and it was half agreed that he'd come down to Greyfriars if he could. Being as near as Ashford, I don't see why he couldn't have come on!"

Frank nodded, but did not answer.

As a matter of fact, he knew that any answer was likely to irritate. And Frank had learned to bear with his best chum's sometimes unreasonable ways. Silence is golden sometimes.

There was a sound of laughter in the Remove passage, and voices floated in through the half-open door. Billy Bunter's squeak was heard.

"I say, you fellows, I tell you it's so! I haven't exactly seen the telegram—"

"Why haven't you?" came Hazeldene's voice. "You generally manage to pry into anything you want to see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Hazel—"

"Shut up, Bunter!" said Peter Todd.

"Sha'n't!" said Bunter. "I think it's awfully rotten myself! Chap gets a telegram saying his uncle's ill—at the point of death, in fact—and plays football instead of going to see him! I can tell you, I'm shocked!"

Wharton's face became crimson.

Frank Nugent hardly dared look at his chum as the Owl's fat voice floated into the study.

It was like Billy Bunter to get hold of the incident and let his fat imagination play on it. Bunter was already making one of his celebrated "yarns" out of it.

"Fathead!" said Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Toddy! You mayn't be shocked, but I am! I've got a sense of the fitness of things, I hope! Playing football while his uncle's lying on his death-bed—"

"Ass!"

"Lying in awful agony, perhaps!" said Bunter impressively. "Calling for his nephew, you know, in an expiring voice, and the hard-hearted blighter refusing to go! It's really too thick, in my opinion! I've never thought very much of Wharton! Only this morning he refused to cash a postal-order for me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But this really is too thick!" went on Bunter virtuously. "Hard-hearted and

undutiful, and all that! I've a jolly good mind to speak to Wharton about it and tell him what I think of him!"

"Well, here's your chance!" grinned Hazeldene. "Here he comes!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Billy Bunter spun round at a hurried footstep behind him. Harry Wharton was emerging from Study No. 1, his face in a blaze of fury.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He ran for it.

"You—you fat rotter!" roared Wharton.

He rushed after Bunter and kicked. There was a terrific yell from the Owl of the Remove as he sprawled on his hands and knees.

"Yarooooooh!"

"Man down!" chuckled Toddy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then it isn't true, Wharton?" asked Skinner of the Remove blandly—with the genial blandness Harold Skinner knew well how to assume when he wished to be particularly unpleasant.

The captain of the Remove turned on him.

"What isn't true?"

"That telegram was from your uncle, who's sick—"

"Of course it isn't true!" roared Wharton. "Do you think I'd have stopped here playing footer if my uncle had been ill and asked for me, you silly dummy?"

Skinner shrugged his shoulders.

"Haven't thought about it at all," he answered airily. "I only know what Bunter says—"

"Yaroooooh! I didn't say anything! Keep him off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton's eyes flashed at the group of juniors in the Remove passage. Friends were there as well as foes, but he was not in a mood to distinguish.

"You shouldn't be listening to Bunter's tattle! Might have something better to do, I think—all of you!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Peter Todd coolly. "Nobody was really taking any notice of Bunter's rot—except yourself!"

"Seemed to touch you rather!" murmured Skinner.

"What's that Shakespeare says about a guilty conscience?" inquired Sidney James Snoop, addressing space.

Wharton gave the Remove fellows a fierce look. But he controlled his anger, and strode back into Study No. 1 and closed the door—hard.

"His Lofty Magnificence is wrathful!" yawned Skinner. "This is where we tremble!"

Some of the juniors chuckled, and the group broke up. A little later Billy Bunter, whose fat chin was the most active and untiring part of him, was "at it" again, spreading his latest yarn. But he was very careful to keep at a safe distance from Study No. 1, and to keep a very wary eye open for the captain of the Remove.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Shake for Skinner!

"HARRY, old man," Wharton looked up moodily. Prep was over, and most of the Remove were gathered in the Rag. At either end of that long apartment a big fire blazed, and most of the fellows had gathered round the blaze, for the evening was cold. The Remove fellows chiefly congregated at one end, the Fourth Form fellows at the other. The Third were also entitled to congregate in the Rag if they liked. But

generally they did not like; they preferred their own Form-room, where they were not overawed by the two Fourths, Lower and Upper.

From the Remove group glances were occasionally cast at Harry Wharton, who was seated in the big, deep window-seat, about midway between the two groups. The captain of the Remove had a "Holiday Annual" on his knees, open, but he was not reading. Skinner winked at his comrades and made humorous signs, keeping Snoop and Stott and Fisher T. Fish in a continuous chuckle. Skinner was slyly drawing attention to Wharton's moody, thoughtful face, and intimating that the great man was wrathful, and that it was therefore time for the skies to fall—or, at least, to mind what they were about. The humorous Skinner extracted unlimited fun from Wharton's supposed lady and dictatorial temper, and there was just enough truth in his gibes to give them a sting.

Wharton was fully conscious of Skinner's humorous proceedings, and of the chuckles of his comrades, and a faint flush was in his cheeks. But he took no heed. He disdained to quarrel with a fellow like Skinner. Besides, it was rather difficult to quarrel with a fellow for winking at his friends. Bob Cherry came into the Rag and looked round, and came across to Harry Wharton with his usual heavy tramp. He dropped into the window-seat beside him, and spoke cheerily.

Wharton's glance was not cheery in response. But Bob was resolved not to see that his chum was a little "edge-wise."

"Harry, old pippin, give it a miss," said Bob.

"What do you mean?"

"We've been pals a long time," said Bob in his direct way. "What's the good of scowling at one another because we don't see eye to eye. I'd never have given you my opinion to-day about that telegram if you hadn't asked me. You did, you know."

"I know I did."

"Well, very likely you were right," went on Bob. "You ought to know best. But if you ask a chap his opinion, you want to know what he really thinks, don't you?"

"Of—of course!"

"Anyhow, it's over, and it's no business of mine," said Bob. "So let's forget all about it, old chap!"

A smile broke out on Wharton's face. It was difficult to resist Bob's cheery good humour, and Wharton did not want to resist it. He was feeling moody and depressed; but he was not sulky.

"That's all right," he said; "only I had an impression that you fellows were down on me. I acted for the best, as I thought."

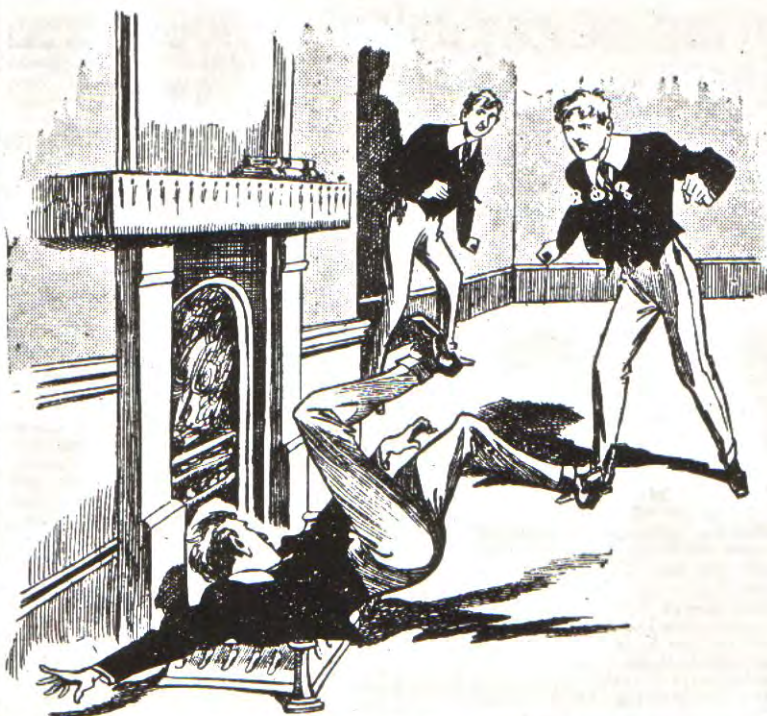
"Of course you did!"

"Only"—Wharton's colour deepened—"I—I wish I hadn't now, Bob. I—I wish I'd gone over to Ashford when my uncle asked me."

"Well, you saved the match for us by staying," said Bob. "That's something, you know. You stayed for it, and you did it."

Bob Cherry was the last fellow in the world to say "I told you so." He was quite prepared to hear that Harry had repented of his hasty and self-willed decision; but his only thought now was to offer such consolation as he could think of.

"After all, it's one of our big fixtures," said Bob. "It ranks with the St. Jim's and Rookwood matches. We didn't want Highcliffe to beat us. I think very likely your uncle will think



Bob Cherry gripped Skinner by the collar and shook him like a rat. "Ow! Leggo! Yooop!" howled the cad of the Remove. "Let go, you rotter! Ow!" Bob Cherry let go rather suddenly, and Skinner sat down on the fender with a bump and a wild roar. "Yaroooh!" (See Chapter 4.)

the same. Anyhow, there's nothing for us to rag about, is there?"

"Nothing at all," said Harry, with a smile.

"Nugent showed up jolly well in the game to-day," went on Bob. "I was jolly glad of that. You might do worse than play him against Rookwood when they come along."

"I'm thinking of that," said Harry, quite brightly now. "Frank has picked up a lot this season, and he hasn't had a chance in the Rookwood match yet. It looks as if we're going to be jolly successful with the football this season, Bob."

And the talk ran on, on the topic of football, and Wharton's depression left him; and the threatened rift in the lute among the Famous Five was forgotten and done with. But when Bob Cherry left him, the Remove captain's face clouded again, as he found troublesome thoughts coming back into his mind.

Bob Cherry joined the group by the fire.

He glanced in some surprise at Skinner & Co., wondering what the joke was—Skinner & Co. appearing to be in a highly merry humour.

"Putting your head into the lion's mouth—what?" said Skinner, as Bob leaned on the mantelpiece near the merry group.

"Eh, what?" said Bob, puzzled.

"You weren't bitten?" continued Skinner, while his comrades chortled explosively.

"I don't catch on!"

Skinner made a gesture towards the captain of the Remove, at a distance in the window-seat.

"We're keeping a safe distance," he explained. "When we have to pass him we go right round the table, and keep the table between us and him. He is

cross! When Wharton is cross, as you probably know, it's time for the whole universe to sit up and take notice. Wharton would be offended if it didn't."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bob gruffly.

"We've all been admiring your nerve at bearding the lion in his den," went on Skinner imperturbably. "I shouldn't venture near him at present. I should expect a bite, or a bark at least."

"He, he, he!" cackled Billy Bunter. "If I were an astronomer," continued Skinner, "I should look through my telescope and see whether the solar system has jolted out of gear. I'm sure Wharton expects it to do so when he frowns. Like jolly old Jove frowning in Virgil, you know, and giving the universe a shake!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheese it!" snapped Bob.

Bob resisted the inclination to grin. Skinner's exaggerations were absurd, of course; and yet there was just an atom of truth at the bottom of them.

"After all, who's Wharton?" said Snoop.

"Yes; who the thump is he?" said Stott. "It's pretty well known that the Boulder could have given him a fall last time they had a row if he'd chosen. We'd have backed him up, too!"

"Too jolly swanky, in my opinion," went on Snoop. "What do you think, Cherry?"

Bob glared at him.

"You want to know what I think? I think you're a silly ass, Snoop, and a good bit of a worm!"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Wharton may have his faults; but his little finger is worth more than the THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 879.

whole lot of you!" growled Bob. "That's what I think, as you've asked me."

"Look here—"

"Oh, rats!"

"I'm surprised at you, Cherry!" said Skinner in his blandest tone.

"What the thump do you mean?"

"I mean your saying that Wharton may have his faults. I'm sure Wharton wouldn't agree with you there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Isn't he our perfect character—a model for all the Remove?" went on Skinner. "Isn't he the just man just made perfect?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yet Cherry can see faults in this really flawless character!" said Skinner sorrowfully. "I'm really surprised at you, Cherry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Snoop & Co., greatly tickled by the expression on Bob Cherry's face.

"You cheeky chump!" exclaimed Bob angrily. "You know I didn't mean—"

"I know what you said!" interrupted Skinner. "Now, as one of Wharton's humble admirers, I want to know what fault you find with him? Give it a name!"

Bob Cherry breathed hard. He was no match for Harold Skinner in wordy warfare, and he was well aware of that fact. But there were other ways of dealing with Skinner.

Bob grasped him by the collar.

There was a yell from Skinner. His airy badinage vanished at once, along with all his blandness, as he was shaken.

"Ow! Leggo! Yoop! Let go, you rotter! Ow!"

Shake!

"Yarook! I'll hack your shins!" yelled Skinner. "Let go, hang you!"

Bob Cherry let go—rather suddenly, and Skinner sat down on the fender.

"Now shut up!" said Bob grimly. "You can cackle as much as you like, but if you don't know that you shouldn't run down a fellow to his pal, it's time you learned!"

And Bob stamped away, leaving Skinner gasping for breath, and his airy blandness quite gone.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Letter from the Colonel!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came up to the Remove dormitory together, on the best of terms—rather to the disappointment of some fellows who had seen signs of trouble in the Co. and had hoped to see more. The slight disagreement, such as it was, had blown over, and the Famous Five were as good pals as ever. But after lights were out, and the rest of the Remove were asleep, Harry Wharton lay awake for some time, watching the stars at the high windows of the dormitory.

He was thinking that certainly there would be a letter from his uncle in the morning—at least, if the kind old gentleman was not offended. And it was not likely that he had taken offence. It was more likely that he would be hurt if he felt that he had been treated with slighting indifference; and that was a more painful thought to Wharton.

Clearly enough now he realised that what he had done was a slight to the man who had treated him with unvarying kindness ever since he could remember—and clearly, too, he realised that all that was left to him was to make what amends he could. There would be a

letter from the colonel; and in answer to it he would confess that he had acted thoughtlessly and hastily, and ask pardon humbly enough. He could, at least, own up to his fault, and let his uncle know that he was sorry.

There was comfort in that reflection, and he fell asleep at last, easier in his mind.

Harry Wharton was first up in the Remove dormitory when the rising-bell clanged out on the following morning.

The post, of course, was not yet in; but he came down earliest of all the Remove, before even Bob Cherry was ready to go down.

Letters for junior schoolboys had to pass the inspection of their Form-master, and generally were not placed in the rack very early. It was quite possible that if a letter came by the early delivery it would not be handed out till after classes—and Wharton would not see it until the recess before third lesson. He did not want to wait so long as that, and his intention was to meet Boggs, the postman, on the road, and get the letter from him—if there were indeed a letter.

Only early housemaids were about when Wharton came down in the sharp winter morning; but the great door of the School House stood open, letting in the keen breeze and a flood of winter sunshine. Harry Wharton went out into the quadrangle, which was still deserted, save for the portly figure of Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, taking a constitutional before breakfast.

The school gates were still locked, and Gosling was not likely to open them before the usual time at a junior's request. But Wharton did not go down to the gates. At a certain spot behind the elms, well known to adventurous juniors, he climbed the school wall, and dropped into the road.

Then he walked swiftly along the road to meet Boggs, who was almost due at Greyfriars by that time.

Half a mile from the school he came in sight of the plump postman, puffing along with his bag, his heavy breathing making a kind of halo round him in the frosty air.

"Mornin', Master Wharton!" said Boggs cheerily.

Wharton stopped.

"You've got a letter for me, Boggs."

"I dessay, sir."

Boggs made no motion to open his sack, however. He was not supposed to hand over letters direct to schoolboys at Greyfriars.

"I want it specially," explained Harry. "You can stretch a point for once, old man. No harm in it—it's from my uncle, Colonel Wharton, and you know his fist."

"That's so," assented Boggs, rather dubiously.

A shilling changed hands, and Boggs, who was an obliging fellow, set down his sack and opened it. He had delivered a good many letters at Greyfriars in Colonel Wharton's handwriting, and he knew the old military gentleman's "fist" well enough. The letter was sorted out, and handed over to Wharton.

"Course, you won't mention this, sir," said Boggs. "No 'arm in it, as the letter's from your uncle; but it's agin instructions, you know."

"Of course—not a word," said Harry. "Mornin', sir!"

And Boggs shouldered his bag and tramped on.

Wharton's heart was lighter as he stood with the letter in his hand. His uncle had not been offended, then; he was sure that he would read only kindness in the letter. He glanced round him, and

crossed to a stile beside the road, and sat on the stile to read his letter.

He read it—his face changing as he did so, the colour fading from his cheeks, and his lip quivering.

The letter had evidently been written at the hotel at Ashford the previous afternoon, after the colonel had received Wharton's telegram. And it ran:

"Hotel Royal,
"Ashford.

"My dear Harry,—I am sorry you were unable to come across this afternoon. Had it been possible, you may be sure that I should have come to Greyfriars; but I was only able to break my journey at Ashford for a couple of hours, and then take the train on to Dover.

"I am leaving England for some time. I had not forgotten, my boy, that to-day is the date of the Highcliffe match at Greyfriars, but I know you would have put this, or anything else aside to come and say good-bye to me, if you had known how matters stood.

"I shall be away from England for a few months, probably. I am going to Russia. An old comrade-in-arms, who was with me in Flanders, is there, and has fallen foul of the Bolsheviks. He is a prisoner in the hands of those scoundrels, and needs my help. I hope to be able to save him. You need have no fear for my safety, my boy. It is an affair of tact and management, and, I fear, bribery; though I suppose I ought to be glad, in the circumstances, that the Bolshevik officials are as corrupt as the old Tsarist officials before the revolution, as the only way of saving my old comrade is to make it worth their while to let him go.

"After receiving news of him I prepared at once to start, and broke my journey to Dover at Ashford, to say good-bye to you. By the time you receive this I shall be across the Channel, as I am travelling by the Continental route.

"Good-bye, my dear boy,

"Your affectionate uncle,

"JAMES WHARTON."

At Greyfriars morning roll-call had been taken, and the fellows were going in to breakfast. At the Remove table there was a vacant place—the captain of the Form was missing.

Harry Wharton was not thinking of school or of school bounds, as he sat on the stile under the leafless trees, with his uncle's letter in his hands, and the tears heavy in his eyes.

So that was it!

No fears for his safety, the colonel had said—his safety, in that land of blood and terror, governed from of old by fear and cruelty, where nothing changes but the name and title of the tyrant.

The tears ran unchecked down Harry Wharton's cheeks—seldom or never so wetted.

So that was it! His uncle, on a mission of danger, leaving his native land perhaps never to return, had still thought of him—had wished to say good-bye to the nephew he might never see again. And he had not seen him—he had not said farewell to the man who, for friendship and duty's sake was going into a lair of wild beasts.

Already the wintry seas rolled between him and the colonel; already the swift Continental express was bearing his uncle away across foreign lands—to the land of fear and mystery and brooding death; there to share, perhaps, the fate of the comrade he had gone to save.

A cart came jolting along the rutty, frosty lane. The carter stared curiously at the white-faced boy on the stile, with

a letter in his hand and tears wet on his cheeks. Wharton did not even see him.

The junior shivered at last, and slipped from the stile. He remembered Greyfriars—he looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. Long ago the Remove fellows had gone into their Form-room. What would the Remove master say?

Wharton cared little. Fear for his uncle's safety, bitter self-reproach, drove other considerations from his mind. But he had to return to the school. He thrust the letter into his pocket and started towards Greyfriars.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Trouble!

THE door of the Remove Form room opened, and Harry Wharton came quietly in.

Every eye in the Form room was turned upon him.

It was close upon the end of second lesson—in ten minutes more the Remove would have been dismissed for morning "break."

Fellows had been late for class before; and even a few minutes' tardiness was sufficient to call down the wrath of Mr. Quelch. And Wharton had cut a whole lesson and nearly another.

Harry's friends looked at him very anxiously as he came in. They had not seen him since he had left the dormitory—they knew that he had not breakfasted at the Remove table, and they had wondered what could possibly have become of him. Wharton had intended, of course, to return in time for breakfast; but that, as well as everything else, had been driven from his mind by the colonel's letter, and the self-reproach and remorse it had caused him.

Mr. Quelch laid down his book, and fixed his eyes on the late-comer.

"Wharton!" The Remove master's voice resembled the growl of distant thunder. Wharton stopped.

"Yes, sir."
"What does this mean?"
"I am sorry I am late, sir," said Harry, respectfully and sincerely enough. He had had time to pull himself together now, and he realised that Mr. Quelch, like the prophet of old, had cause to be angry.

"No doubt," said the Remove master. "But that is scarcely sufficient, Wharton. Why are you late?"

"I—I—" Wharton paused.
"Have you been out of gates?"
"Yes, sir."
"Have you breakfasted?"
"No, sir."

"Indeed! It seems that you went out of the school precincts before the gates were opened this morning."

"Yes, sir," said Harry. There was no help for it now; the confession had to be made that he had broken bounds.

"And you have remained out of gates until now?"

"Yes, sir."
"And why?"
"I—I forgot—"

The captain of the Remove paused again. He had told Boggs that he would not mention the handing over of the letter, and he was bound not to mention it. He could not, therefore, explain that he had been upset by news from his people. Neither was he inclined to allude to that matter in any case. Wharton was reserved—perhaps too reserved; and what he might have said to his Form master in private, he certainly would not have said in the Form room before all the listening Remove.

Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows.

"You forgot!" he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"You forgot classes?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is a very extraordinary statement, Wharton."

The captain of the Remove coloured deeply.

"I'm sorry, sir! I—I was thinking of something—I'm really sorry that I came in late, sir."

"You are head boy of the Remove, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch. "In that position you have some responsibilities, and are expected to set some sort of an example to the Form. Yet you break school bounds, you come in to class more than an hour late, and your only explanation is that you forgot classes—a statement which it is very difficult for me to believe."

Wharton stood silent.

He was quite aware how the matter must look to his Form master, and he did not expect to be let off lightly.

As a matter of fact, he did not care. Self-reproach was a harder and more bitter punishment than any that Mr. Quelch could have inflicted.

"I should be justified, I think, in dealing very severely with this, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch slowly, and his eyes rested on his cane for a moment. "But as this is your first transgression of the kind, I shall be as lenient as possible. I shall not cane you."

"Thank you, sir."

"But your action proves that you are unfit for your position as head boy in my class. You will go to the bottom of the class, Wharton."

Wharton compressed his lips.

"Very well, sir."

So far as Mr. Quelch was concerned the incident closed there. He had, in fact, inflicted a punishment more severe than a caning, to a proud spirit like Wharton's.

The captain of the Remove went quietly to his place. Billy Bunter, who had the honour of being at the bottom

of the class, grinned and shifted along the form to make room for him.

Wharton was quite conscious of the derisive grinning of Skinner & Co., and the smiles of a good many more fellows much better than Skinner & Co.

His own friends were troubled and sorry, and their looks showed it. But a good many fellows in the Remove were not at all displeased to see the Form captain's pride taken down a peg or two. Even fellows who liked him sometimes thought that Wharton carried his head a little too high.

Mr. Quelch took no further heed of Wharton, who sat silent in his place, his cheeks burning.

Harry was glad enough when the Remove were dismissed for morning break, and the juniors poured out of the Form room.

He wanted to get into a quiet place, to read his uncle's letter over again; but the Co. joined him at once in the corridor.

"Hard cheese, old man!" said Bob Cherry. "But what the thump is the matter? There's something you didn't tell Quelch, of course."

"Yes," said Harry.

His chums looked at him. They naturally expected him to tell them why he had incurred his Form master's wrath.

Wharton did not speak, and there was an awkward silence.

Bob Cherry broke it.

"Look here, Wharton, is it some secret?"

"Oh, no!"

"Well, then—"

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"I don't mind telling you fellows, though it's jolly unpleasant. But, of course, it's among ourselves, you won't mention it."

"Of course not."

"I went out to meet the postman, and got a letter from him—from my uncle. It would get Boggs into a row if I told Quelch."

"I see—you couldn't tell Quelch that,



Bunter, cunningly affecting to be making notes from his Latin grammar upon a sheet of impot paper, turned his eyes upon the letter and read it.
(See Chapter 7.)

of course," said Johnny Bull. "The Head's mighty strict about fellows not getting letters till they've been passed by the Form masters."

"Bad news in the letter, I suppose?" asked Frank Nugent quietly.

"Yes."

"Sorry, old man!"

"I don't want to make a mystery of it," said Harry. "You fellows can see the letter—it's not a secret, only, of course, I don't want it chattered about in the Form and the passages. I'd rather you saw it, really—only not a word about it."

"Right-ho!"

Wharton passed the colonel's letter to his comrades, and they looked at it.

"That's rather rotten," said Bob.

"But, of course, you couldn't guess anything of that kind yesterday, old man. I shouldn't worry about it too much, if I were you."

Wharton nodded; the words were kindly spoken to comfort him, but there was little comfort in them for the captain of the Remove. He put the letter back in his pocket.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Roll away, you bothering barrel!" snapped Johnny Bull.

Bunter blinked inquisitively at the pocket in which Wharton had placed the colonel's letter.

His very spectacles gleamed with curiosity.

Bunter was in his usual state of wanting to know. He was assured that there was "something" on, and he wanted to know what that something was. It was no concern of his, and, therefore, extremely interesting to him.

"Did you get that letter from Boggs, Wharton?" he asked.

"Find out!"

"Well, I'm trying to find out, ain't I?"

"Fathead!"

"There wasn't a letter for you in the rack," said Bunter. "If you got that letter this morning, you must have got it from Boggs. I say, that's against the rules, you know."

"Oh, dry up!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Harry Wharton turned his back on the Owl of the Remove, and walked out into the quadrangle. His chums went with him, and Billy Bunter was left blinking after them, greatly disappointed.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter. "Now, what the thump is there in that letter to make him go out and meet the postman? Something jolly secret—Yaroooh!" howled Bunter, suddenly, as a slap came on his fat shoulder.

"What are you mumbling about fatty?" asked Skinner genially.

Bunter blinked at him.

"I say, Skinner, it's queer, ain't it?"

"Queer that you're not at the bottom of the class?" asked Skinner. "Yes, old man, it is! But it's only temporary, you know."

"Beast! I mean about Wharton."

"How are the mighty fallen!" sighed Skinner. "Fancy his Magnificence taken down a whole peg before all the Remove! He must have thought it an awful nerve of Quelch!"

Bunter giggled.

"I know why he was late," he said.

"You know everything, don't you, old fat bean," said Skinner, eyeing the Owl of the Remove curiously.

Skinner, like a good many other fellows, was very curious to know why

the captain of the Remove had cut class that morning. That he had "forgotten" was a statement much too steep for Skinner to swallow it.

When Skinner offended against the rules, it was generally for some reason that would not bear the light; and Skinner had no belief that there existed in the Remove, or in the wide world, any fellow better than himself. He was quite assured that Wharton had been "up to something," and had told his Form-master the clumsiest lie a fellow could possibly have told. That was Skinner's charitable view of the affair.

Bunter smirked.

"I generally get to know things," he remarked.

Bunter was under the delusion that that was a cause for pride and satisfaction.

"You do, old fellow," said Skinner amicably. "So why did his lordship cut class, if you know all about it?"

"That's telling!" said Bunter mysteriously.

Skinner grinned.

"You mean, you don't know," he said.

"Don't I?" said Bunter, falling blindly into the trap. "I jolly well do. He went out to get a letter from the postman before the man delivered them here."

Skinner's eyes gleamed. He had seen the letter in Wharton's hand, as he passed it to his comrades. He guessed at once that Bunter had got at the facts, so far.

"Sure of that, Bunt?" he asked.

"Of course he didn't own up," said Bunter. "But I'm jolly sure of it. He didn't deny it, anyhow. Wharton never tells lies like you, Skinner."

"What?"

"I—I mean, like some fellows. I say, old chap, I wonder what's in that letter, you know?"

"Something he didn't want Quelch to see," grinned Skinner—"something that would have got him into trouble, I fancy."

Bunter's eyes opened wide behind his spectacles.

"But what, then?" he exclaimed.

"He's been up to something," said Skinner sagely. "He's getting a letter from somebody shady!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He keeps up appearances jolly well, but, after all, we're all tarred with the same brush, ain't we?" said Skinner.

"Yes, rather!" agreed Bunter.

"I had a letter once, from a man who was giving me some tips about a horse," grinned Skinner. "I knew when it was coming, and waylaid old Boggs, and got it off him for a bob. Of course, our respected Form-captain wouldn't do anything naughty like that."

"That's it!" gasped Bunter.

"I wonder?" yawned Skinner.

He walked on, smiling to himself. Whether his surmise was correct or not Skinner did not know, and cared little. But he knew that the suggestion had excited Bunter's curiosity to burning-point. If it was within Bunter's power to get at that letter, Bunter was quite certain to get at it, and to make its contents common property in the Remove.

Skinner was prepared to let Bunter take the risk of that proceeding, charitably hoping that he would bring something shady to light.

In the quad Harry Wharton was walking under the leafless old elms, his hands in his pockets, a deep line in his brow. His chums were punting about a football; but Wharton did not join them.

To Bunter, and certainly to Skinner, he gave no thought at all—he had forgotten their existence. He was thinking of the kind old colonel on his way at express speed to the land of violence and crime, and his heart was heavy.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Wants to Know!

BILLY BUNTER, in the Remove Form that afternoon, was in a remarkably unquiet state.

The fat junior seemed really to be sitting on pins.

Next to him—the only fellow lower in the Form than Bunter at present—was the captain of the Remove.

In Wharton's pocket was the mysterious letter; Bunter knew in which pocket.

Instead of thinking of his lessons, which would have been judicious under the gimlet eyes of Mr. Quelch, Bunter was thinking of that mysterious letter, with which he had no concern whatever.

The letter was not, in point of fact, mysterious at all. But it seemed so to the inquisitive Owl.

Skinner's malicious suggestion had been dropped into Bunter's mind, like seed in fruitful soil. Something "shady" was going on—Bunter was absolutely certain of that.

Why had Wharton walked out before the gates were opened to get that letter away from the postman? Why couldn't he wait for it till letters were handed out in the usual way? Because there was something in it that he dared not risk his Form master seeing.

That the letter was from Wharton's uncle, and that Harry had been very anxious to hear from his uncle was a simple explanation, which was unlikely to occur to either Bunter or Skinner. Certainly Bunter would never have taken the trouble to walk a dozen steps to anticipate a letter from any relation.

There was something mysterious and shady about that letter, Bunter was convinced of that.

Even so, it would have been no business of Bunter's. But the Owl's interest in matters that did not concern him was deep. He was feverishly anxious to know what was in the letter, and he had no scruples about making the discovery.

What worried him was the fact that Wharton was quite certain not to let him see the letter if he could help it, and how to get at it without the Form captain's knowledge was a problem.

Wharton paid no heed to the Owl of the Remove. He was trying to give his attention to the class work, and it was difficult, in his present mood, to put his mind into it. He was quite unaware that Bunter was thinking about the letter in his pocket at all.

The Remove were busy with Latin prose, or, at least, were supposed to be. Billy Bunter was thinking of anything but Latin prose. His paper was not likely to satisfy Mr. Quelch when it was handed in. But Bunter had no time to think about trifles like that.

Wharton finished his Latin paper, and sat idle while the rest of the class went on. Then he drew the colonel's letter from his pocket, to read it over again.

Bunter almost trembled with eagerness.

The letter was actually in Wharton's hand, spread out over his Latin grammar, and he was reading it; but his shoulder was in Bunter's way, and the fat junior could not get a glimpse of it.

And Bunter realised that if he peered

over Wharton's shoulder the beast would know what he was at, and would cover up the letter at once.

"Wharton!"

It was Mr. Quelch's sudden, sharp voice.

Wharton started, and hastily slipped the letter out of sight under his Latin grammar.

"Yes, sir!"

"Collect the papers."

"Yes, sir!"

That was the usual task of the head boy of the Form, and Mr. Quelch was kindly overlooking the fact that Wharton was no longer head of the Remove. This was a sign of relenting, and Wharton understood it. For a moment he had supposed that the Form master had spotted him reading a letter in class, and was calling him to account. But Mr. Quelch had not noticed.

Leaving the letter under the grammar on his desk, Harry Wharton went along the forms, collecting the papers to take them to Mr. Quelch's desk.

Bunter's fat heart thumped.

The letter was there, under the grammar. Bunter dared not lift the volume and take the letter. He could not have done so without being observed—and even his burning curiosity did not tempt him to face the inevitable kicking afterwards.

But curiosity quickened Bunter's faculties. He simply had to see the letter now.

He picked up his pen and reached over to dip it into Wharton's inkwell, as if his own had run dry.

In doing so he shifted the Latin grammar with his elbow.

The letter was revealed.

Bunter, cunningly affecting to be making notes from his Latin grammar upon a sheet of impot paper, turned his eyes upon the letter now revealed.

He dared not reach out to touch it—he had to be satisfied with reading the top page.

And—after all his curiosity on the subject, and his deep conviction that there was something "shady" in the letter—this is what he read in disappointment and disgust:

"—how matters stood. I shall be away from England for a few months, probably. I am going to Russia. An old comrade-in-arms, who was with me in Flanders, is there, and has fallen foul of the Bolsheviks. He is a prisoner in the hands of those scoundrels, and needs my help. I hope to be able to save him. You need have no fear for my safety, my boy. It is an affair—"

That was all that Bunter could see. The letter, which was written on four pages, was folded open, and only one page was visible as it lay on the desk.

Bunter could not see the rest without picking up the letter.

But he was not tempted to do so now.

He knew Colonel Wharton's handwriting, and knew that the letter was from Harry's uncle. And it contained nothing but the information that the colonel was going to Russia.

Bunter's disgust was too deep for words.

He did not care twopence whether Colonel Wharton was going to Russia, to Timbuctoo, or to Jericho for that matter.

Why the thump Wharton should have been anxious to get that letter, why its reception should have disturbed him to the extent of making him cut class, was a mystery to Bunter. Bunter had several uncles, and all of them might have gone to Russia or to the Cannibal Islands



"I am waiting, Cherry," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "What was the remark you just made?" "I—I—I—I said that Quelch's bark is worse than his bite, sir," gasped Bob, desperately. There was a moment's hush in the Form-room, while Mr. Quelch stared, and then a howl of laughter from the Remove. "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 7.)

without disturbing William George Bunter in the very least.

Bunter really felt that he had been swindled.

If that beast Wharton found out that he had spied into the letter a licking was certain and inevitable—and all for nothing. He had only found out that the letter was from Wharton's uncle, and that Wharton's uncle was going to Russia—two facts in which he did not take the slightest interest.

It really was sickening.

Inquisitive as he was, Bunter would scarcely have taken the trouble to finish reading that letter now, had it been safe to do so.

He actually did not want to touch it.

Wharton had gathered up all the papers from the Form and was taking them to Mr. Quelch. A minute or two more and he would be back in his place. The Latin grammar had to be shifted back over the letter, unless Bunter's trickery was to be discovered.

The fat junior reached across to Wharton's inkwell again, and his fat elbow slid the volume back over the letter as he drew back his podgy arm.

Then he sat jabbing his pen-nib into the oaken desk, disappointed and disgusted.

"Thank you, Wharton!" Mr. Quelch was speaking. "You may resume your place at the head of the Form, Wharton."

"Thank you, sir!"

Harry Wharton came back to Bunter's form for his books. He picked them up, and the letter along with them. It was still hidden from sight as he had left it.

"Good egg, old man!" Bob Cherry whispered as Harry passed him with his books. "All serene again! Quelch's bark is always worse than his bite!"

Wharton smiled and nodded.

Mr. Quelch looked up from a stack of Latin papers. Perhaps Bunter's paper, which he was glancing at, affected his temper a little and made it tart. Bunter's Latin was quite enough to make any Form master tired and cross.

"Did you speak, Cherry?"

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

"I believe I have told you before, Cherry, that you should not chatter in the Form-room."

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Had you forgotten, Cherry, that I had told you so?"

"Nunno, sir!"

"Then doubtless you had something very important to say, as it led you to disregard what I have told you."

Some of the Removites grinned, and Bob Cherry shifted uncomfortably in his seat with a red face. Mr. Quelch's sarcastic ways were really hard for his pupils to bear sometimes.

"N-n-no, sir!" stammered Bob.

"Indeed! What did you say, if I may inquire?" asked Mr. Quelch, with polished and deadly politeness.

"I—I said—"

"Well?"

"N-nothing, sir!" gasped the unfortunate Bob.

"You said nothing? How could you speak and yet say nothing, Cherry?" asked the Remove master.

"I—I mean—"

"I am waiting to learn what you mean, Cherry."

"I—I said—"

"Well?"

"J-j-just a remark, sir!"

"Was it a remark that you cannot venture to repeat in your Form master's

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 879.

hearing?" demanded Mr. Quelch thunderously.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"What was it, Cherry? Tell me immediately."

"Oh dear!"

"I am waiting, Cherry," said Mr. Quelch, laying down Bunter's Latin paper and picking up his cane.

"I—I—I said that Quelch's bark is worse than his bite, sir!" gasped Bob Cherry desperately.

There was a moment's hush in the Form-room, while Mr. Quelch stared, and then a howl of laughter from the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bless my soul!" said Mr. Quelch. "Silence, please! Really, Cherry—Silence! I shall cane the next boy who laughs! Cherry, you will take fifty lines!"

"Yes, sir!" said Bob meekly.

Mr. Quelch laid down the cane, much to Bob's relief.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Not Shady!

"TROT in, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter blinked at Skinner through his big spectacles in surprise.

Prep was over in most of the Remove studies that evening, and Billy Bunter was rolling along the Remove passage, looking into the studies, in the hope of discovering a supper going on in one of them.

Bunter did not exactly expect to be asked into a study where supper was going on; but he was prepared to ask himself.

He did not hope much from Study No. 11, which belonged to Skinner, Snoop, and Stott. But as it happened it was into Study No. 11 that he was asked.

Skinner was lounging in the doorway, and he gave the Owl of the Remove quite a genial nod.

"Trot in!" he repeated.

"Anything on?" asked Bunter.

The proverb says that one should not look a gift-horse in the mouth. But Bunter knew Skinner's brand of hospitality; and he did not want to waste time. A stale bun in Study No. 11 was not worth missing chances in other studies for.

"I've been making toffee," said Skinner blandly.

"Oh, good!"

Bunter rolled in.

There was quite a large chunk of toffee; and Skinner could make toffee well. Bunter lost no time in getting to business on the toffee, surprised as he was by Skinner's unaccustomed hospitality.

"Seen it yet?" asked Skinner, as Bunter's plump jaws went to work.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Seen what?"

The Owl of the Remove had already dismissed from his mind the incident of Wharton's letter. He had been deeply disappointed about that, and it was not a matter worth remembering, as it had turned out.

"Hasn't Wharton shown you his letter?" asked Skinner.

"Oh, no! This is good toffee!"

"But you've seen it?"

"How could I see it if he didn't show it to me?" asked Bunter, blinking at Skinner loftily. "I hope you don't think I'm the sort of chap to look at another fellow's correspondence."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Snoop. And Stott stared at Bunter.

THE MIGHTY LIBRARY—No. 579.

"Look here, Bunter, if you've seen that letter, there's no need to keep it dark," said Skinner irritably. "We're all friends here, and you can tell us what it's about."

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Wharton ought to be shown up, if he's really up to some shady game, you know," said Snoop.

"Oh, that's rot!" said Stott in his slow way. "He isn't! I'll bet you there's nothing of that sort in his letter!"

"Fat lot you know about it!" sneered Skinner. "My opinion is that the quiet ones are a good deal deeper than the other sort. Everybody knows when the Bouncer kicks over the traces, or that ass Hazeldene. Wharton's a bit more circumspect about it, that's all."

"I don't think so," said Stott.

"My dear chap, you don't think at all—you can't," said Skinner. "Bunter knows what's in the letter by this time—"

"I'll have some more of that toffee," said Bunter. "There's nothing in the letter, Skinner. It's a swindle!"

"What the thump do you mean?"

"It's from Wharton's uncle," explained Bunter, his mouth full of toffee. "You were quite wrong about it."

Sidney James Snoop whistled, and Stott grinned. Skinner gave the Owl of the Remove a scowl. He was by no means pleased to discover that he had been wrong in his surmise.

"Look here, Bunter, no gammon!" he growled. "Wharton was showing that letter round among his pals, and he shoved it into his pocket mighty quick when you came by—I saw all that. That shows it wasn't just a letter from his dashed old uncle!"

Bunter grinned. He had been disappointed in the letter, and he was quite pleased to share his disappointment with Skinner. Skinner, indeed, was more disappointed than Bunter had been. He was still clinging to the hope that there had really been something "shady" in the letter—something, he hoped, to do with racing, or betting, or something of the kind.

"It was, all the same!" grinned Bunter. "Blest if I know why it should have upset Wharton. Just a silly old letter from a silly old uncle about the old scout going to Russia."

"Going to Russia?" repeated Skinner.

"That's it—some pal of his in Russia, in trouble with the Bolshies, and old Wharton is going to fish him out of it, or something. Nothing to interest a chap."

Bunter helped himself to toffee again. Skinner regarded him thoughtfully.

He believed Bunter's statement now. He knew that the Owl of the Remove would never have thought of details like these in spinning one of his "yarns." Skinner, too, understood why Wharton had been upset by such a letter, though the fatuous Owl did not.

"So the old scout's gone to see the Bolsheviks," said Snoop. "But wasn't he at Ashford yesterday? I heard about a telegram—"

"Bunter was telling the fellows that the old scout was sick, and wired for Wharton, and he wouldn't go," said Stott.

"It wasn't that," said Skinner. "I knew that was only Bunter's rot—"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

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"He must have broken his journey at Ashford to see Wharton," said Skinner shrewdly. "It's on the Dover line, you know. He hadn't time to look in at Greyfriars, and wired Wharton to see him there. That's what it comes to."

"Pretty clear," said Stott. "I jolly well told you that there was nothing shady in that letter. I don't like Wharton; but he's not the sort of chap to have letters from bookmakers or racing sharpers—it's all my eye! That's more in your line, Skinner."

"Just what I was going to say!" remarked Snoop agreeably.

And Billy Bunter chuckled.

Skinner gave his friends an unpleasant look.

"It looked suspicious," he said. "He went out to meet the postman—and anybody but Quelch's favourite would have got caned for missing breakfast and cutting class. Wharton risked that, to get his uncle's letter. How the thump could anybody guess that, after the way he treated the old man only yesterday?"

"That's so," agreed Snoop. "Rather rotten of him to let the old man slide like that, if he's really going into a dangerous country."

"Wharton couldn't have known that yesterday, if it was only written in the letter he got this morning," argued Stott.

"Oh, shut up, Stott!" growled Skinner. "My opinion is that Wharton has acted heartlessly."

"But if he didn't know—"

"Cheese it!" snapped Skinner.

Stott looked at him, puzzled. Stott was rather slow of comprehension, and he did not see what Skinner was driving at.

"Nothing's been said about it," went on Skinner. "Wharton's friends know about it, but it's not been mentioned in the Form that Wharton's uncle has gone looking for trouble in Russia. The fact is, Wharton's jolly well ashamed of giving him the go-by, I should say, in the circus."

"That's why he was upset," said Snoop, with a nod. "I thought he really looked as if he'd been blubbing when he came in this morning."

Skinner laughed.

"Guilty conscience, you know," he said. "Bit thick, to let the old man rip, on a dangerous journey, without taking the trouble to say good-bye to him. No business of ours, of course; we're bound not to say a word about it."

"Oh, you're not thinking of scoring over Wharton on this?" asked Stott, still slow of comprehension.

"Silly ass!" said Skinner contemptuously, while Snoop chuckled. "Of course, if this was talked about in the Remove, it would worry Wharton a lot. And, as his well-wishers, we don't want that."

Chortle—from Snoop.

The toffee was finished, and Bunter blinked round the study, apparently in search of fresh worlds to conquer.

"Any more toffee, Skinner?"

"Lots."

"Trot it out, old chap!"

"I think your friends will be waiting for you, Bunter. You're so much sought after, you know; you've often told me so. They'll miss you. Don't keep them waiting any longer."

"Look here, Skinner—"

"There's the door," said Skinner politely.

He had done with the Owl of the Remove now.

"Why, you beast—"

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY PRICE 2:

"And here's my boot."
 "Beast!"
 Bunter did not wait for Skinner's boot.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Bitter Taunt!

"COMING, Hazel?"
 "No."
 "Better come," urged Bob Cherry.

Hazel grunted.
 It was a half-holiday a few days later, and the Famous Five were going over to Cliff House to tea.

Chief among the attractions at Cliff House School was not the tea or the cake, but Marjorie Hazeldene, who dispensed hospitality in the school-room by permission of Miss Primrose.

It was understood that Marjorie's brother was going; but when the Famous Five were ready Hazel was not to be seen, and they looked in at his study for him.

Hazel was there, loafing over the fire. It was a drizzly afternoon, and there was no football on, and any out-of-doors occupation did not seem very enticing. Still, a walk in the keen air of Cliff House was better than "frowsting" about over a study fire, that was certain. The Famous Five considered it very lucky that that invitation to tea at Cliff House coincided with a rainy afternoon when other occupations were "off."

Hazel evidently did not agree.
 "I'm not coming," he said, from the depths of the armchair. "What's the good of slushing along through miles of mud!"

"Marjorie will expect you," said Harry Wharton.
 Hazel yawned.
 "Tell her I'm coming over next week," he said.

Harry Wharton frowned.
 It was a mystery to the Co. that a really charming girl like Marjorie should possess a brother so singularly lacking in charm as Hazel. And knowing that Marjorie would be disappointed if her brother did not come, and knowing that Hazel was aware of it, they wondered why the selfish fellow did not make an effort to play up. It was fairly obvious that some other attraction was on; for Hazel, slacker as he often was, was not really given to "frowsting" in the style of Bunter and Snoop.

"You don't want to stick indoors all the afternoon," urged Nugent.
 "I do!" said Hazel coolly.
 "Slacker!" grunted Johnny Bull.
 "Thanks!"

"Look here, Hazel," said Harry Wharton abruptly, "you jolly well ought to come and you know it."

"What rot!"
 "Your sister expects you, and you arranged to come," said the captain of the Remove sharply. "Dash it all, a fellow ought to take a little trouble to please a sister like Marjorie. I know I would if I had one."

"Rot!" said Hazel. "Marjorie and I are enough of one another in the holidays. I'm jolly well not going through this rain."

"That's not the reason."
 "Isn't it?" said Hazel, with a sneer.
 "Well, whether it is or not, that's my theory. I suppose you happen to know that Skinner's asked me to tea. Well, I'm going to tea with Skinner, and you can tell Marjorie so if you like; I don't care."

"Certainly I shouldn't tell Marjorie anything of the kind!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "It looks to me as if you're playing the goat again, Hazel."

"Does it?" yawned Hazeldene.
 "I know what tea in Skinner's study means—cigarettes after tea, and nap or banker."

"Well, I sha'n't ask you to pay my losses, if any," sneered Hazel. "You needn't worry about that."

"You'll ask Marjorie, likely enough; it wouldn't be the first time that you'd done so!" exclaimed Harry angrily.

Hazeldene sat up in the chair with a gleam in his eyes.

"That's not your business, Wharton! Mind your own affairs, hang you! I'll jolly well do as I like!"

"Oh, come on!" said Bob Cherry.
 "He won't come, and it's time we were off."

"The timefulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, rather anxiously. The Co. scented a "row" in the air, and they did not want trouble with Marjorie's brother, irritating as he was.

Harry Wharton's temper was not quite under its usual control. His friends had noticed that he was often moody and even irritable since the unhappy affair on Wednesday, when he had failed to heed his uncle's wishes, and had learned, too late, that the colonel was gone on a journey of danger from which he might never return.

His uncle's peril and his own short-coming combined to trouble Wharton's peace of mind, and his chums willingly made allowances for any little fault of temper at such a time. But they realised that in Hazel's present quarrelsome mood it was better for the captain of the Remove to have as little as possible to say to Marjorie's brother.

Hazel, having made friends once more with the black sheep of the Remove, was quite prepared to quarrel with the Co.—quite certain to quarrel with them if they made any attempt to keep him from "playing the goat."

"Let's get out!" growled Johnny Bull.
 "Let Hazel slack if he likes, and smoke cigarettes till he's sick. Come on."

But Wharton did not go.
 He calmed his irritation, however, and spoke very quietly to Hazel. He was concerned about the foolish fellow chiefly for Marjorie's sake.

"Look here, Hazel, old chap—" he began.

"I've asked you to mind your own bizney, haven't I?" said Hazel.

Wharton breathed hard and deep.

"Never mind that! Look here, come along with us. You'll feel a good bit better after a walk to Cliff House than frowsting in Skinner's study along with those seedy slackers."

"You needn't run down Skinner to me," said Hazel. "Much better to tell him personally what you think of him, in my opinion."

Wharton's eyes blazed.
 "Why, you—" he began hotly.

"Oh, come on!" said Bob. "What's the good of chin-wag? Hazel won't come, and there's an end."

"The endfulness is terrific."

"He ought to come!" exclaimed Wharton. "He's no right not to come after saying he would come. He knows jolly well that Marjorie will be disappointed."

"You're jolly particular about my relations," sneered Hazel. "You're not so jolly particular about your own. It isn't as if Marjorie was just starting off to Russia. I dare say I'd go over then, even if I had to go as far as Ashford and give up a football match for it."

Wharton stood quite still.
 The taunt struck home, and struck hard.

It was an unworthy taunt, for Wharton's motive on the day of the Highlife match had been a good one—to stand by his comrades in a hard tussle. Hazel's motive was shady enough.

"You rotter!" burst out Bob Cherry angrily.

Hazel coloured; perhaps he repented of the bitter words as soon as he had uttered them. But he was not the sort of fellow to confess to a fault.

"Well, it's true," he said. "What right has Wharton to preach to me after his own way of acting? Check, I call it!"

Wharton drew a deep, quivering breath.

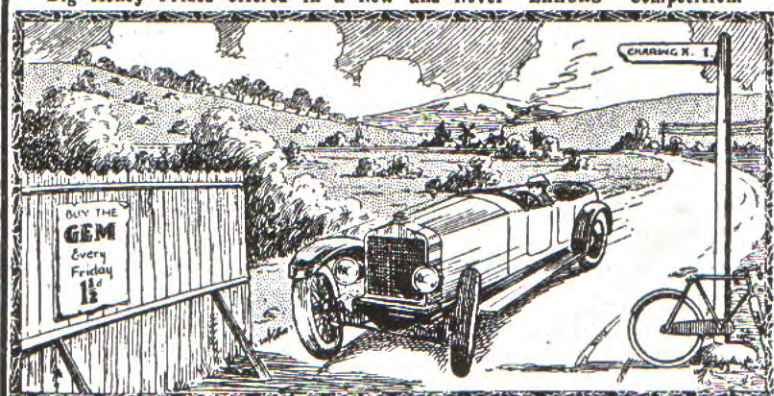
"Perhaps you're right, Hazeldene," he said very quietly. "I didn't mean to be preaching, as you call it; and I admit I've no right to preach to any chap. I suppose all the Remove knows that I acted disrespectfully to my uncle the other day. But nobody knew, so far as I'm aware, that he was going to Russia excepting my friends here. How did you know that?"

"I heard it somewhere."

(Continued on page 16.)

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Supplement No. 203.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON

Week Ending December 13th, 1924.



The Grate Rebellion!

A Stirring Story of St. Sam's;
By Dicky Nugent.

"IT'S a shame!"
"It's a skandle!"
"We won't take this lying down!"
"We'll stand up for our rights!"
"And we'll make the Head sit up!"
Angry voices rang through the dining-hall of St. Sam's. The fellows had just come in to dinner. They were ravenously hungry, and they had hoped to find it was roast chicken and plum pudding for dinner. But alas for their hopes!
On each plate there was a small portion of pressed beef, about an inch square. There was also a hunk of bread and a mug of water. And the sight of cold water failed to wet the fellows' appetites.
"They call this a dinner!" growled Jack Jolly of the Fourth. "Why, it's not enuff to feed a starving sparrow!"
"Shut the windows, in case it blows away!" said Merry, with crushing sarcasm.
"I'm not going to eat mine," said Bright, in disgust. "They can feed it to the kitchen cat."

From all parts of the hall an angry babble of voices arose.

For some time past the food at St. Sam's had left much to be desired. The Head had been cutting down the supplies, and it was whispered that he was putting a lot of munny into his own pocket by so doing.

Instead of eggs and bacon for breakfast, the fellows now had bread-and-scraps. Instead of nice hot dinners, with pudding to follow, they had to content themselves with a square inch of pressed beef, or else a plate of thin soup. Instead of a tasty, tempting, topping tea in hall, they had to provide tea themselves in their studdies. Instead of a hot supper before retiring, they went to bed supperless.

"It's really too bad!" declared Swotter of the Sixth. "Our parents pay the enormous sum of five guineas a year for us to be here, and yet we're not properly fed. The grub is rotten, both in quality and quantity. There will be something like a mewtiny at St. Sam's if the Head duzzent improve the standard of the grub."

Even as Swotter spoke the door opened, and Mr. Lickham strode into the dining-hall with ruffling gown.

"Any complaints, my boys?" he asked mildly.

There was a roaring response from three hundred throats.

"Yes!"

"Call this a dinner?"

"Beestly pressed beef?"

"Send it back to Chick-cargo!"

Mr. Lickham frowned.

"Silence!" he thundered. "You have no caws to complain of the school fare. Pressed beef is a fine, newtrishus, body-building food; it contains twenty per cent of vittemeens."

"I don't know what vittemeens are, and I don't care!" growled Jack Jolly. "This is what I think of the beestly stuff!"

And he picked up his plate, and sent it crashing to the floor.

That was the signal for a jenneral outbreak. Every fellow in the hall—with the exception of Tubby Barrell of the Fourth—hurled his plate of pressed beef to the floor. But Tubby Barrell, who was on the verge of

starvation, felt that a square inch of pressed beef was better than nothing. He popped it into his mouth, and it was gone after a few chokes.

Meerwhile, there was a terribul crashing and clattering going on. The floor was littered with fragments of plates, and peaces of pressed beef.

Mr. Lickham, snorting with rage, danced two and fro like a cat on hot brix.

"This—is this monstrous!" he spluttered. "Such a seen has never been seen in the dining-hall before! I call upon the captin of the school to assist me in preserving order!"

But the captin of St. Sam's had already left his seat, and was striding towards the door. The rest of the school followed suit. The fellows had got completely out of hand, and the long-expected mewtiny had broken out at last!

Mr. Lickham, who attempted to check the exodus, was bowled over like a ninepin, and the fellows marched over his prostrate form, and flocked out into the quad, where they held a mass meeting in order to decide what to do next.

As soon as he had sorted himself out, Mr. Lickham rushed wildly to the Head's study, and in a few breathless sentences he told him the news.

"There has been a riot in the dining-hall, sir!" he panted.

"My hat!" gasped the Head.

"The boys have refused to eat their dinner. They have thrown down their plates, and stampeded out of the hall!"

"Great pip! Lickham, old bean, you amaze me!"

"I was powerless to cope with the situation, sir," said Mr. Lickham. "One man is no match for three hundred hot-bluded rebels. What are you going to do about it, sir?"

The Head frowned.

"I'll jolly soon put a stop to this nonsense!" he said. "I will put the whole school on a bread-and-water diet for a week, and if that duzzent bring them to their senses I'm a Dutchman!"

Shortly afterwards the following announcement was posted on the notiss-board:

"NOTISS!

"In konsequence of the unseemly disturbance in the dining-hall to-day, the whole school will be placed on a diet of bread and water for one week from this date. That'll learn you, you brats!"

(Signed) I. BIRCHEMALL,
Headmaster."

When the fellows read that announcement they "saw red." If anything was still needed to rouse them to a state of rank rebellion, that did it!

Seniors and juniors and fags were equally furious. There was another mass meeting in the quad, and it was universally agreed to kidnap the Head, and shut him up in the punishment-room at the top of the tower, until he agreed to the terms of the rebels.

Kidnapping the Head was a serious business, but in their present mood the fellows didn't stop to count the cost.

A party of seniors, aided by Jack Jolly & Co. of the Fourth, made their way to the Head's quarters.

Dr. Birchmell was just sitting down to dinner. Not a dinner of pressed beef, but a six-course meal known at "table dote." He was just lapping up his soup, when the party of invaders trooped into his dining-room.

The Head sprang to his feet, his face livid.

"What the merry dickens—" he began.

"Collar him!" roared Swotter of the Sixth.

The Head fairly choked with rage.

"I will flog—I will expel—" he began wildly. But the rest of his words were wasted on the desert air, so to speak. He was seized by many hands, and marched away to the lonely room at the top of the tower. He was bundled inside, and a key grated in the lock. The Head was a prisoner!

The captin of St. Sam's addressed him through the keyhole twenty-four hours later.

"You will stay there until you consent to our terms," he said. "These are our terms. We want eggs and bacon for breakfast, and a 'table dote' dinner like you have yourself, and a jolly good tea, and as much supper as we can eat. Until you agree to this—and also agree not to punish us—you will stay there, and bread and water will be brought up to you three times a day. Guards will be stationed outside the door, and it will be impossibul for any of the masters to reskew you."

"I give in!" called the Head through the keyhole. "Let me out! I feel half dead!"

"Do you consent to our terms?" asked the captin of St. Sam's grimly.

"Yes. I'll consent to anything, so long as I can get my freedom."

So the door of the punishment-room was unlocked, and the Head came staggering out.

From that time fourth there was a vast improvement in the school fare. The St. Sam's fellows lived on the fat of the land, and the Grate Rebellion was declared at an end.

THE END.

EDITORIAL!

WE once had a ballot to decide which was the most popular place at Greyfriars. The dining-hall came first. The Remove Form-room came last!

Undoubtedly the dining-hall is a popular place—tremendously popular with such a valiant trencherman as William George Bunter, and scarcely less popular with the rest of the Greyfriars fellows. For it is in the dining-hall that we fill the aching voids inside us, and satisfy "that sinking feeling."

I think most of my schoolfellows will agree with me that the grub we get at Greyfriars is, on the whole, good and wholesome. The cook and her assistants know their job. They sometimes strike a bad patch, and serve up a meal which is not altogether appetising; but we cannot expect everything to be "just so" in this imperfect world. I've no quarrel with the cooks and the catering myself. I consider we are a well-fed community. Billy Bunter will tell you otherwise; but you should never believe the fatuous Owl, who is a lineal descendant of Ananias. However, Bunter admits that he has a warm place in his heart for the dining-hall. You can always get a meal there without having to pay for it; but at the tuckshop you've got to show Dame Mimble the colour of your money before she will serve you! Her tuckshop, as she never wearies of telling Bunter, is not a "tuckshop."

HARRY WHARTON.
[Supplement i.]



Saved at the Finish!

An Amusing Story of BILLY BUNTER
By A. VERNON SMITH.

A FIRST-RATE feed is what I need!" Billy Bunter spoke in rhyme unconsciously, for he was not a poetical youth.

Bunter was rolling along Courtfield High Street in the gathering dusk, when the brilliant lights of the Elysian Cafe glittered at him from the other side of the thoroughfare. Like a fat moth attracted by a candle, Billy Bunter instinctively crossed over to the cafe.

He was hungry, and the pleasant odour of roast beef that was wafted out to him flattered his mouth water. How could he possibly tramp all the way back to Greyfriars until he had refreshed his inner man?

Bunter was "broke," and therefore he ought to have banished all thoughts of a dinner at the Elysian Cafe. But that delightful odour of roast beef was not to be resisted. Broke or not, Bunter was determined to satisfy the pangs of hunger that gnawed at his vitals.

"Here goes!" muttered the fat junior. And he rolled into the cosy and comfortable cafe.

"I shall be all right," he reflected. "They never ask you for money in advance. You feed first, and pay afterwards. And by the time the waitress brings me my bill, I shall say some Greyfriars fellows will have turned up, and they'll come to my rescue."

Bunter seated himself at one of the little tables, with a shaded electric-lamp, which he switched on. Then he blinked at the bill of fare.

A bobbed-haired waitress drifted up. She was a new member of the staff, which was rather fortunate for Bunter. Another waitress might have recognised him, and recalled the occasions on which he had consumed a big dinner without being able to pay for it. But the new waitress smiled sweetly at Bunter.

"Yes, sir?" she queried. "What can I get for you?"

"I want a full-course dinner, please, starting with soup, and then going on to horse d'oeuvres—"

"You mean hors d'oeuvres, surely?"

"That's what I said. And then I'll have some filleted plaice, and roast duck, and apple dumplings—"

"One of our six-shilling dinners, sir?"

"Yes. That will do me nicely, for a start."

The waitress stared. Most people were quite prepared to start and finish with a six-shilling dinner. It was a hefty meal, and left no room for anything more, as a rule.

"Buck up, miss!" said Bunter. "I'm jolly hungry!"

The waitress flitted away, returning in a few moments with the soup.

Billy Bunter spread a serviette on his knees and got busy. The soup was gone in a flash. The hors d'oeuvres were consumed in another flash. And by the time Bunter got to the roast duck, he was well in his stride.

There were other people in the cafe, and they glanced curiously at Bunter, who seemed to be trying to devour his dinner in the fastest time on record.

But no Greyfriars fellows had turned up so far, and Bunter was beginning to feel a trifle uneasy on the subject of the bill. After the feast came the reckoning, and Bunter lacked the wherewithal to settle up. The only thing for it was to hang out time until some of his schoolfellows came in. Then they would feel obliged to come to Bunter's rescue in the matter of squaring up.

The apple-dumpling was so delicious that Bunter asked for another.

"That will be extra, sir," said the waitress. "The six-shilling dinner only includes one dumpling."

"All serene, miss!" said Bunter cheerfully. "Stick it on the bill!"

The second apple-dumpling was merely the forerunner of a third.

By this time Billy Bunter was beginning to swell visibly like a balloon. But he was not finished yet.

Supplement ii.]

"Got any fancy cakes?" he inquired of the waitress.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I fancy cakes!" said Bunter, with a feeble attempt at being funny.

The waitress fetched a dish of assorted cakes, and Bunter pecked at them. It was necessary to go very slowly now, for there was still no sign of any Greyfriars fellows.

Bunter waited and waited, and his uneasiness grew into alarm. Presently the alarm grew into panic.

Why didn't somebody come along? At any moment he might be presented with his bill. And what was he to do then?

It would be no use telling the waitress the old, old story of an expected postal-order with which he would square up in due course. The Elysian Cafe did not allow that sort of thing. All bills had to be settled on the spot.

Presently the dread moment arrived. The waitress bore down on Bunter, and handed him a bill for ten-and-sixpence.

Bunter shuffled nervously in his seat. "Dud-dud-dud I pay at the desk?" he stammered.

"No, sir. You pay me."

And the waitress held out her hand expectantly.

Billy Bunter made a show of going through his pockets. He pulled out all sorts of odds and ends, but the only item of coinage was a French copper. And a French copper was of little use in settling a bill for ten-and-sixpence.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Bunter. "I—I say, miss, I'm afraid I must have left my wallet up at the school!"

The cheery smile faded from the face of the waitress. She was looking very grim now.

"I will fetch the manager!" she said curtly.

"Nunno! Don't do that! The manager's a beast! I know that from past experience! He'll think I've been trying to get a dinner on the nod!"

"Which is precisely what I think myself!" said the waitress.

And she bustled away.

Billy Bunter looked round wildly. If only Harry Wharton & Co. would come in, or Coker of the Fifth, or some other fellow who would extricate him from his present sorry plight! But the only faces Bunter beheld were those of strangers. Everybody seemed to be eyeing him accusingly, too, as if they knew the awful truth that Bunter was broke.

Then the manager swooped down upon the fat junior. Like the Ancient Mariner, he held him with his glittering eye.

"So you are up to your old tricks, Master Bunter?" he said.

"Oh, really—"

"You have come here and run up a bill of ten-and-sixpence, knowing full well that you were not in a position to pay!" said the manager. "But you shall not leave this cafe until the account is settled! I will telephone to your headmaster, requesting him to send a responsible person here to pay the bill, and to deal with you as you deserve!"

Billy Bunter pleaded and protested, but in vain. And the manager strode away to the telephone. A moment later Bunter could hear him in conversation with Dr. Locke.

The fat junior was quaking with apprehension. Probably the Head would send one of the masters over to Courtfield to settle the bill, and to bring Bunter back to Greyfriars for a flogging.

In desperation, Bunter began to go through his pockets once more. There seemed precious little hope of his finding any money apart from the French copper. Still, he would make absolutely certain.

Presently he came across an unopened letter which had arrived for him by the midday post. The reason it was unopened was that it was from his Uncle Claude. And as Uncle Claude never enclosed a remittance with his letters, they were of no interest to Bunter. This was probably a letter of advice, and Bunter needed something more useful than advice at this moment.

However, he jammed his thumb into the flap of the envelope and tore it open. Then he pulled out the letter, and as he did so something fluttered out on to the table. Bunter blinked at it in speechless amazement. Joy of joys! it was a Treasury note for one pound!

At long last Uncle Claude had opened his heart and sent his plump nephew a remittance. And never did a remittance turn up at a more opportune moment!

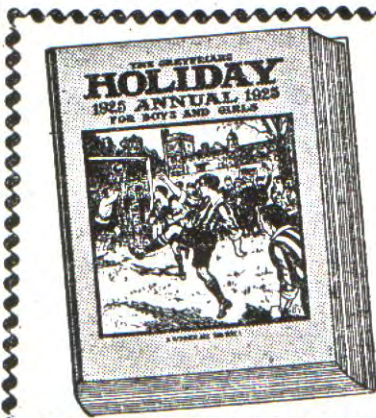
Almost sobbing with relief, Bunter placed the Treasury note on top of his bill. Neither the manager nor the waitress saw him do so. And when Mr. Quelch arrived on the scene, half an hour later, the manager had the shock of his life. Bunter pointed coolly to the Treasury note.

"There's your money!" he said. "I'm sorry you wouldn't wait while I went through my pockets! I knew I had some money somewhere. And now you've brought Mr. Quelch here on a wild-goose chase! I should tick him off, sir, if I were you!"

And Mr. Quelch, who was greatly incensed at being brought over to Courtfield on a fool's errand, told the astonished manager, in blunt language, exactly what he thought of him.

Mr. Quelch and Billy Bunter walked back to Greyfriars together. And as they walked Bunter breathed a blessing on his benevolent Uncle Claude!

THE END.



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(Continued from page 13.)

"That won't do," said Harry. "Nobody know excepting these four chaps—nor could they know, except by spying somehow into a letter that's in my pocket."

Hazel crimsoned.

"Do you think I've been reading your letters, you cad?"

"I don't see how you could, as that letter's never been out of my hands since I received it," said Harry. "But you've found out somehow a thing I never mentioned, and I want to know how you know."

Hazel laughed angrily.

"I suppose you've been chattering about it, or one of these fellows has. I heard it mentioned."

"Who mentioned it?"

The Co. looked extremely uncomfortable. There had been enough talk about the telegram from Wharton's uncle on Highcliffe day—too much, in fact. Wharton had been very careful to let nothing leak out regarding the colonel's journey to Russia. It would have been extremely unpleasant for the full story to have become known in the Form.

He had, indeed, hesitated to tell his own chums, lest some thoughtless word should have let the matter out. But he had told them—and he had told no other.

Yet, according to Hazel, the matter was already common knowledge in the Remove.

"Who mentioned it, Hazel?" repeated the captain of the Remove, as the junior did not answer.

"I forget."

Wharton made a step towards him.

"Think again," he said. "I want to know, and I've a right to know. I mean to know, Hazel. You don't forget—you can't stuff me with rot like that. Who was it?"

Hazel eyed him uneasily.

"Do you want to find out the fellow and pick a row with him?" he sneered.

"I want to know who has been spying into my private affairs," said Wharton, his voice trembling with anger.

"Rubbish! Nobody has!"

"Well, who was it you heard it from?"

"I heard Smithy mention it," said Hazeldene sullenly. "Now get out of my study. I'm fed-up with you."

Wharton did not answer that. He left the study at once, Bob Cherry and his comrades exchanged rather dismayed glances, and followed him. The fat was in the fire now.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Wharton on the Warpath!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH was standing in the big doorway of the School House with his chum, Tom Redwing. He was watching the rain that drizzled down on the leafless trees in the quadrangle. Redwing was urging a walk, in spite of the rain: the Bounder seemed doubtful.

"Smithy!"

"Hallo!" said Vernon-Smith, glancing round as Harry Wharton came up, with the Co. following him. "Going out to brave the giddy elements?"

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Then he started a little, as he noted the expression on Wharton's face. The captain of the Remove was pale with suppressed anger, and there was a glitter in his eyes.

"Anything up?" asked Smithy, with a yawn—rather an affected yawn, which was intended to show "His Magnificence" that Smithy, at any rate, was not abashed by his wrath.

"Well, yes," said Harry.

"Dear me!"

"I'm not looking for a row, Smithy," said Harry, forcing a smile.

"Glad to hear it," said the Bounder calmly. "You looked as if you were."

"I just wanted to ask you a question."

"Go ahead. You want to know the name of a really good man for the Rook-wood match? H. Vernon-Smith!"

"You told Hazeldene that my uncle was going to Russia the other day when I didn't go to Ashford to see him—"

"I don't remember doing so."

Wharton breathed hard.

"Then he was lying! He would! Sorry, Smithy."

"Hold on," said the Bounder coolly. "I didn't tell Hazel about it. I don't talk much to Hazel. But he may have heard me mention it."

"That's what I mean. He said you'd mentioned it," said Harry impatiently. "How did you know anything about it?"

"Is it a secret, then?"

"Not exactly a secret," said Wharton, colouring, "but I didn't want it to become a topic in the studies and the passages. Nobody likes his private affairs chattered up and down the Remove passage, I suppose."

"Quite so," agreed the Bounder. "Then why the thump didn't you keep it dark?"

"I did keep it dark. Only these four fellows knew, as well as myself, and they promised to say nothing about it."

"Well, I heard it in the Rag," said the Bounder. "Two or three fellows were talking, and I happened to hear them. That's all."

"Then it seems to be common talk."

"Seems so," assented the Bounder.

"What does it matter?"

"It does matter," said Harry between his teeth. "It matters a lot. Will you tell me the names of the fellows you heard talking about it?"

The Bounder reflected.

"Skinner was one, and Russell another, and Mauleverer."

"Thanks!"

Harry Wharton turned away. The Bounder closed one eye at Tom Redwing, who was looking troubled.

"His Highness is on the giddy warpath," yawned Smithy. "Trouble for somebody with a capital T."

Redwing nodded.

"After all, it was a bit thick, not going to see his uncle at such a time," said the Bounder.

"Smithy, old man, you advised him not to go," said Redwing.

"I know I did. I was thinking of the match. But I didn't know that the jolly old colonel was just off to get chopped up by the Bolsheviks," said Vernon-Smith.

"If a man goes looking for trouble in Russia in these days he's not likely to come back again. If I'd known that I'd have told Wharton to go, and let the Highcliffe match go to pot."

"Perhaps Wharton didn't know."

"Perhaps not," agreed the Bounder.

"If he knew, he acted jolly badly, and I suppose that's why he doesn't want the fellows to know. No business of ours, though. Are we going out?"

"Let's!" said Redwing.

And the two juniors donned their rain-coats and sallied out into the drizzle. Meanwhile, Harry Wharton was looking into the Rag, and his comrades followed him there. There were several juniors in the Rag, but Skinner, Russell, and Lord Mauleverer were not among them. The Co. were getting a little restive by this time.

"Harry, old man," said Nugent, "we've got to get off to Cliff House, you know. We can't be late."

"You fellows had better go," said Harry. "You can make some excuse for me."

"But you're coming," exclaimed Johnny Bull.

Wharton shook his head.

"I've got to sift this out," he said.

"It can wait."

"It can't wait," said Wharton shortly.

"I don't see it," answered Johnny Bull coolly and doggedly. "The matter's got out somehow, and I don't see the use of kicking up a shindy about it. It's out, and how it got out doesn't seem to me to matter very much."

Wharton's eyes flashed.

"Doesn't it?" he said savagely.

"Well, I told no one outside you fellows. You promised to say nothing."

"And we said nothing," said Bob Cherry.

"The nothingfulness was terrific."

"What does it look like, then?" exclaimed Wharton. "It's a rotten affair I'd give anything to keep dark; and I trusted you fellows with it. Now it's being chattered up and down the Remove. I want to know how it got out. If you fellows haven't been talking about it, somebody has spied it out somehow. I want to know which."

Bob's eyes gleamed.

"You've no right to say anything of the kind, Wharton. You know jolly well that we haven't spoken about a thing we promised to keep dark—or you ought to know."

"I'm not saying you did. But I want to know who found it out."

"Better let it drop," said Johnny Bull in his slow, stolid way. "What's the good of stirring it up? It will only make more talk, and there's been enough of that already."

"Anyhow, we've got to get off now," said Bob.

"Get off," said Harry. "I'm staying in till I get to the bottom of this. I can't come."

"Well, as you like," said Bob. "But—if you'd let a pal advise you—you'd chuck it. Least said soonest mended. If you make a lot of fuss about it, it will look—"

He paused.

"It will look—" repeated Wharton.

"Oh, nothing! Let's get going!" said Bob.

"We shall be rowing ourselves if we jaw much longer!"

"The go-fulsness is the proper caper!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But the esteemed and ludicrous Wharton should come also."

Wharton shook his head.

"Can't you fellows see how it is? It will be a topic in all the studies—fellows saying that I wouldn't even take the trouble to say good-bye to my uncle when he was going, perhaps, to his death—" He choked. "It was bad enough, I know, but it wasn't so bad as that. Nobody has a right to know anything about it or to say anything about it. I'm jolly well going to find out the tattler, and give him something else to think about!"

"I wish you'd come over to Cliff House," said Bob.

"Well, I won't!"

"All serene!"

And the Co. started without their

leader, in a rather troubled frame of mind.

Harry Wharton did not heed them.

His anger was intense. All the anxiety, all the irritation, all the distress of the past few days were concentrated now in a deep anger against the unknown fellow who had pried out the unfortunate story and tattled it up and down the Remove.

The bare idea of being held up to judgment in the Remove studies was bitter to the captain of the Form. He would be judged and condemned, and the extenuating circumstances would not be known, for he was far too proud to think of defending himself. Nothing would have induced him to explain to a crowd of indifferent fellows exactly what had occurred, and how he had been remorseful when he found out the colonel's real reason for wishing to see him that day. He would have bitten out his tongue rather.

But if he did not explain, the worst construction would be put upon the story; and certainly he would be regarded as an ungrateful and unfeeling fellow. And, worst of all, his personal affairs would be a subject for tattle in the studies. Certainly it was too late to stop that now; but it would be something, at least, to find out who was to blame. For deep in his heart was a black and bitter suspicion that one of his friends had failed him. How else could the facts have become known, when the colonel's letter had never been out of his possession?

As his chums left the House, Wharton ascended the stairs to the Remove passage. Skinner was not in his study, and Russell, he knew, was out of gates with Ogilvy. But he found Lord Mauleverer in Study No. 12; the slacker of the Remove was not likely to be out that many days.

"Don't come in!" called out Mauleverer, as Wharton tapped and opened the door of Study No. 12.

"What?"

"Oh, I thought it was Bunter!" said his lordship cheerily. "Trot in, old man! Glad to see you!"

Wharton came in.

"Who told you about my uncle going off to Russia last Wednesday, Mauly?" he asked abruptly.

"Nobody, dear boy."

"But you knew?"

"Yaas."

"Well, you heard it, then, I suppose?" said Wharton impatiently.

"Yaas. Must have, you know," said Lord Mauleverer. "Couldn't have guessed, could I?"

"No, ass. Well, where did you hear it?"

Lord Mauleverer reflected.

"Some fellows were talking in the Rag," he said. "Let me see. Toddy was sayin' somethin' about it, I think, and I think Skinner was. Any harm done, old bean?"

"Yes!" grunted the captain of the Remove; and he left the study, with that, and went along to Study No. 7 to speak to Peter Todd.

He found Peter at home, conning over his law books—what Peter was pleased to call his legal studies. Toddy waved a hand to him.

"Don't interrupt! Busy!"

"Oh, never mind that rot!" said Wharton. "I won't keep you a minute. Who told you about my uncle going to Russia?"

Peter stared at him.

"Blessed if I know! I heard it spoken of in the Rag or the passage. What the blamp does it matter?"

"It does matter!" growled Wharton.

"I've asked fellow after fellow, and got

to you now. Who told you? Somebody who's seen my uncle's letter must have told! Who was it?"

Peter Todd looked at him very steadily and quietly. Wharton did not intend to be overbearing in the least, but there was no doubt that his manner was unpleasant, and that he rather demanded than asked the question. His temper had been sorely tried.

"I've said I heard it," said Peter icily. "Nobody told me specially. I don't see that it matters at all. I've heard it spoken of several times, I believe, by a dozen different fellows at least."

"It's only just reached me, through Hazeldene," said Wharton bitterly. "But it seems that it's common talk up and down the Form!"

"Exactly—it is," assented Peter. "That's how I came to hear it, I suppose. What the dickens does it matter?"

"It does matter!"

"Then you should have kept it secret if you wanted to keep it secret. I was rather surprised at your letting it out, in point of fact."

"I never let it out, but somebody else has!" said Wharton savagely. "I told my friends, in confidence, when I showed them my uncle's letter—"

"Then they never mentioned it," said Peter.



MIND YOU GET IT, CHUM!

"Then how did it become the talk of the Remove?"

"Blessed if I know! Things do get out. The less you kick up a shindy about it the better, I should say."

"And why?" demanded Wharton fiercely.

"You know why, I fancy, if it's true. According to what I've heard round and about, your uncle wanted to say goodbye to you before he left for Russia, and you refused to see him. If that's the case, you acted jolly badly, and if you know your own interests you'll let the matter die away as soon as possible."

Wharton trembled with anger.

"And you think that's the truth of the matter, Todd?"

"I don't think anything at all about it, as I don't know the facts. But I know that that's what the fellows seem to think."

"The fellows might have something better to do than tattling about what doesn't concern them!" said Wharton bitterly.

"If that applies to me, I haven't tattled," said Peter coolly. "And if you're looking for trouble, Wharton, you can go and look in some other study. Whatever the truth of it may be, you don't show up well, and I fancy that's why you're so rattled. Shut the door after you!"

Wharton clenched his hands.

Peter smiled cheerily.

"I'm not going to fight you, old bean!" he said. "I'm busy with my jolly old studies! Shut the door, won't you?"

Wharton's eyes blazed, but he controlled his temper. He left Study No. 7 and shut the door hard, with a crash that rang along the Remove passage from end to end.

Peter Todd shrugged his shoulders and returned to his "legal studies." But, after a time, the schoolboy lawyer raised his eyes from his books, and he sat for some time with a very thoughtful expression on his face. Wharton had irritated him deeply: and Peter's impression was that there was going to be trouble between Wharton and his friends. His disposition was to let him "get on with it." But Peter was a good-natured fellow, and he could be tolerant even towards a fellow who irritated him. And he was wondering now whether he would be able to pour oil on the troubled waters.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

High Words!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry threw open the door of Study No. 1 in the Remove, and looked in, his face wet and ruddy and cheery.

The chums of the Remove had returned from Cliff House: Wharton had not joined them there. The winter dusk was thick in the quadrangle, and the rain was still falling.

The juniors expected to find Wharton in the study; but he was not there.

Bob Cherry tramped in, and tramped out again.

"Gone out, I suppose," he said.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, fatty!"

Billy Bunter appeared in the passage.

"Seen Wharton?"

Bunter grinned.

"He, he, he! Yes, rather! He's gone out—looked in an awful temper, too. He, he, he! Skinner says it's time we all began to tremble. He, he!"

"Fathead!" said Bob.

Frank Nugent turned on the light in the study, and began to make a fire in the grate. Wharton could not remain out much longer, as the gates were closed at dark. Bob and Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull came in to lend a hand, and the study was looking quite bright and cosy when Harry Wharton came in at last.

He came in, looking damp and tired. He had had a long walk in the rain—he had not cared to join his friends at Cliff House, and walk home with them. He was depressed and moody, and his look showed as much as he came into the study. Billy Bunter was hovering round the door, but after one blink at Wharton's clouded face, the Owl of the Remove decided to clear.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are!" exclaimed Bob Cherry cheerily—all the more cheerily because he was determined to take no notice of Wharton's clouded looks.

"Been for a tramp?" asked Nugent.

"Yes."

"Well, we've made a jolly good fire. Come and warm yourself!"

"I'm warm enough, thanks!" Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh rose, and Johnny Bull followed their example more slowly.

"We'll be getting along," said Bob carelessly. "It will be roll-call in a few minutes now."

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Wharton glanced at them with lowered brows.

"Hold on a minute or two," he said. "Certainly!"

Wharton closed the door. There was an awkward and rather tense silence in the study, and all the fellows there felt that there was trouble in the atmosphere. And they were conscious of rising anger. Wharton's look was that of a fellow who was going to call his friends to account; and the Removites did not like the idea. They were patient with Wharton, all the more patient because they knew of his anxiety for his uncle. But there was a limit. Yet every fellow there, mindful of what might be the result of a dispute, was trying hard to keep amicable.

"I've been up and down the Remove trying to find out who started that tattle," said Wharton abruptly.

"Any luck?"

"No. It seems to be known generally about—about my uncle going to Russia, and—and the rest. It's impossible to trace it to any special fellow—it's common knowledge."

"Well?" said Bob.

"Well," said Wharton gruffly. "I've got my uncle's letter in my pocket now; it's never been out of my hands. Only you fellows knew what I told you. One of you gave it away."

"Wharton!"

"It couldn't have become known otherwise!" exclaimed Harry passionately. "You can see that for yourselves!"

"It looks like it, I know," said Bob. "It beats me how it got out. But you've no right to suggest that we've talked about it."

"That's the truth, all the same," said Wharton, "and I call it rotten! Now I'm held up before all the Remove as a fellow who was ungrateful and disrespectful to a man who's done everything for him. Every cad, like Skinner or Snoop, and even Bunter, has the right now to sneer and criticise, and I can't say anything. I call it rotten!"

"You've got yourself to blame for all that," said Johnny Bull stolidly.

"What!"

"I don't know how the thing got out. I never said a word. But it couldn't have got out if it hadn't been there. You've no right to complain of the fellows knowing. They only know the truth."

"Why, I—I—"

"You shouldn't have done what you did last Wednesday," added Johnny, in the same stolid way. "Then there could have been no harm done. I'm sorry it's being talked about in the Remove; but that's only a detail after all. It was the thing itself that mattered, and that was your doing."

Wharton stared blankly at Johnny Bull.

Johnny was generally a plain speaker, but Wharton had not looked for speech quite so plain as this.

"So that's what you think?" he almost gasped, at last.

Johnny Bull nodded.

"Yes. You've no right to call us over the coals like this, Wharton. The fact is it's your own conscience that's at the bottom of the trouble."

"Wha-a-at!"

"You know you did wrong—and it's worrying you, as it ought," said Johnny Bull. "I don't want to rub it

in, but there it is. Let the matter drop."

The other fellows were silent. They would not have spoken as Johnny had done, but undoubtedly they agreed with him.

Indeed, at the very bottom of his heart, Wharton probably knew, or half realised at least, that it was the troubling of his conscience that made him so bitterly resentful of the betrayal of the secret.

But he was not in a mood to realise that fully, or to think of it at all if he could help it.

"That's all very well," he broke out savagely. "I'm not on my defence here, anyhow!"

"And we're not on our defence," said Johnny Bull tartly. "Let's say no more about it."

"That won't do. I want to know which of you broke his word and told this rotten yarn in the Remove."

"And what are you going to do if you find out that it was one of us?" asked Johnny, with angry sarcasm. "Tell us to bend over, like a prefect?"

"At least I shall never speak to the fellow again," said Harry, trying to control his temper. "I want to know which it was."

"So we're up for judgment, are we?" exclaimed Johnny Bull scornfully. "You ask us which of us played a dirty trick, and expect us to answer? Well, I've got no answer to make to a question like that!"

"My esteemed Johnny!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Rats!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Harry, old man—" began Nugent, in distress.

Wharton's face hardened.

"One of you gave the thing away," he said. "There isn't any doubt about that. And the fellow who chattered might have the decency to own up to it."

"Bosh!" retorted Johnny Bull.

"Dash it all, that's too thick, Wharton!" exclaimed Bob. "You've no right to call us over the coals, like a prefect talking to fags!"

"I've a right to know the name of a fellow I've trusted, and who has let me down like a rotter!" said Wharton.

"There's no fellow like that here—and it's right what Johnny says, too—you're slanging us because you've done wrong yourself!" exclaimed Bob hotly. "I told you that day that you ought to go to see your uncle when he asked you, and if you'd done so there wouldn't have been any trouble. Slang yourself, if you want to slang the right party."

Wharton's face blazed with anger.

"That will do!" he exclaimed. "You all think the same—and no doubt all of you found it amusing to tattle about my affairs up and down the passage. We know where we stand now!"

"That's not true, and you know it!" said Nugent.

"My esteemed Wharton—"

"Oh, give us a rest!" said Harry bitterly. "I'm fed-up! I thought I could trust you! I'd have said nothing about the matter if you hadn't asked me. I shall know better another time."

And with a set, savage face the captain of the Remove turned to the door. His hand was on the knob, when the door opened from the outside, and Wharton started back with an angry exclamation.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Divided Chums!

"BUNTER, old fat man!"

Billy Bunter blinked at Peter Todd, as he rolled into Study No. 7. He blinked discontentedly at the study table, which was cluttered with Peter's legal volumes, instead of the tea Bunter had hoped to see ready.

"I say, Peter, what about tea?"

"Never mind tea now—"

"But I do mind," exclaimed Bunter warmly. "It's past tea-time, isn't it, fathead—roll-call jolly soon—"

"Never mind. Have you heard the yarn that's going up and down the Remove about Wharton?"

Bunter grinned.

"He, he, he! Rather thick, isn't it, Toddy—refusing to go and say good-bye to his jolly old uncle, when the old scout was just off to Russia to get chopped up by the Bolshies. Skinner says it's shocking."

"Skinner's easily shocked, I know," said Peter, with a nod; "but how did it get out, Bunter?"

"Eh? How should I know?" asked Bunter.

"Wharton says it was being kept dark; he told only his friends," said Peter. "It's in a letter he's got in his pocket, too; but he thinks nobody has seen the letter. Did you bag it somehow, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Wharton thinks one of his pals has been chattering—I could see that in his face. I don't think so myself. I fancy somebody's seen his uncle's letter," said Peter, his eyes searching the fat face of the Owl of the Remove.

"What rot!" said Bunter uneasily.

"If you think I've seen his silly letter, Peter, you're practically insulting me. You ought to know I'm too honourable."

"Yes, I know just how honourable you are, old fat man," agreed Peter. "You could put all your honourableness into a thimble, and there would still be room for a finger in it."

"Beast!" said Bunter. "Look here, blow Wharton and his silly letter! I want my tea. I'm fed up with Wharton, I can tell you. He's too jolly ill-tempered for me. Besides, I'm shocked at him. He's ungrateful. Just as ungrateful to his old uncle as he is to me."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Only to-day he refused to cash a postal-order for me," said Bunter warmly. "After all I've done for him, too! Serve him jolly well right to be shown up!"

"You've read his letter?"

"No!" roared Bunter. "Don't I keep on telling you I haven't? I wouldn't have taken the trouble to look at it at all, if I'd known it was from his uncle. How was a fellow to guess he went out of bounds, just to get his uncle's letter a little sooner? I know I jolly well wouldn't. Skinner thought—"

"Oh! What did Skinner think?"

"Nothing."

"Look here, Bunter, did Skinner put you up to getting a sight of Wharton's letter?" asked Peter Todd, frowning.

"Certainly not. I haven't seen it, have I? It wasn't from a bookmaker, either, only from his silly old uncle—"

"So Skinner thought it might be from a bookmaker?" exclaimed Peter, staring.

Bunter grinned.

"Well, what did it look like—breaking bounds, to waylay the postman like that?" he said. "It looked like it all right. I thought there was going to be something jolly shady in it. So did Skinner. He would hardly believe me

when I told him it was from Wharton's uncle."

"How did you know it was from Wharton's uncle?"

"I know his fist, of course—I've seen lots of his letters. I—I mean, I don't know—I haven't seen it, of course. What a fellow you are for asking silly questions, Peter."

"How did you get hold of the letter?" Bunter glared.

"I keep on telling you I didn't! I haven't touched the silly letter," he exclaimed. "I wouldn't, of course. If a fellow leaves a letter on his desk in the Form-room, it's his own look-out. Not that I'd look at it, of course. I'm too honourable for that."

Peter smiled.

"You'd make a nobby witness in a court of law, Bunter," he said. "No end of a prize-packet to the counsel on the other side."

"I fancy I could keep my end up," said Bunter complacently. "I'm rather keen, you know."

"Oh, my hat! Let's see," Peter ruminated. "Wharton's at one end of the form, and you're at the other. Quelch put him down to the bottom of the class last Thursday, and then he was beside you. That was when he must have left the letter on his desk, and you saw it."

"I didn't—"

"I remember now, Wharton collected the Latin papers," said Toddy. "I see it all now. He was a silly ass to leave the letter there, and forget about it."

Bunter grinned.

"You see, he was reading it in class, and Quelch nearly spotted him," he said. "He had just time to slip it under his grammar."

"Oh! It was like that, was it?" "I mean, he wasn't reading it in class—"

"What?"

"And I never saw him slip it under his grammar," said Bunter hastily.

"And I never shifted the grammar with my elbow—I wouldn't, you know. I reached across his desk just to dip my pen in his ink. Just that, and nothing more. See?"

"I see!" assented Peter.

"I'm glad you see, old chap," said Bunter, relieved. "Of course, I wouldn't have looked at his letter. Besides, it was folded, so a chap could only see the top page—not that I saw it, you know, of course."

"Of course."

"And there was nothing about betting, or racing, or anything of the kind, in it," pursued the fatuous Owl of the Remove. "Skinner was a silly ass."

Peter Todd rose to his feet.

"Going to the tuckshop, old chap?" asked Bunter eagerly. "I'll come with you and help you carry the stuff."

"I'm going to see Wharton—and you can come with me," said Peter Todd grimly.

"I don't want to see Wharton! Blow Wharton!"

Peter's grasp closed on Bunter's collar.

"Come on!"

"Look here, Peter—"

"This way!"

"Leggo, you beast!" roared Bunter.

Unheeding, Peter marched the Owl of the Remove out of the study, and along the passage to Study No. 1. Still holding the hapless Owl by the collar with one hand, Peter opened the study door with the other, and hurled it back. There was an angry exclamation within as Harry Wharton just escaped the opening door.

"What the thump—"

"Get in, Bunter!"



Harry Wharton struck out with his open hand, and Skinner reeled across the passage and fell with a crash against the wall. "Why—I—I—you rotten bully!" yelled Skinner, in amazement and rage. The captain of the Remove strode on without a glance at him. (See Chapter 13.)

"Yah! I won't!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Oh! Leave off kicking me, you beast! Oh! Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter rolled into the study, under the propulsion of Peter's boot. He rolled in, roaring; and Peter followed him in.

"What does this silly rot mean?" exclaimed Harry Wharton angrily.

"Yaroooooh!"

Peter Todd glanced round at the clouded faces in the study. It was easy for a less keen eye than Peter's to note that there was trouble in the air.

"You fellows been rowing?"

"Find out!" snapped Wharton.

"That's why I'm asking," said Peter imperturbably.

Wharton knitted his brows, and strode to the door. Peter Todd closed it, and put his back to it.

"Hold on!" he said cheerfully. "Bunter's got something to tell you. I can see you've been ragging, and I fancy I know what you've been ragging about. Go it, Bunter!"

"I've got nothing to tell them," howled Bunter. "I don't know anything about Wharton's letter, and I never saw it on the desk in the Form-room, and he shouldn't have left it there, anyhow."

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. Wharton started violently.

"What—what's that?" he exclaimed. Peter grinned.

"I smelled a mouse, after what you told me this afternoon," he explained. "So I screwed it out of Bunter, in my best cross-examining style. Bunter saw your uncle's letter—"

"I didn't!" yelled Bunter.

"You left it on the desk in the Form-room, and he saw it, last Thursday."

"I wasn't! I didn't! I never!"

"So that's how it got out, is it?" said Johnny Bull, with a grim look at the Owl of the Remove.

"No!" howled Bunter. "I never told anybody, you beast. You can ask Skinner whether I told him, if you like."

"Skinner!" exclaimed Wharton.

"You can jolly well ask him," said Bunter warmly. "Snoop and Stott too. They were both there."

"Both there!" repeated Bob Cherry. "Where?"

"In Skinner's study, you know."

"When you didn't tell him about Wharton's letter?" asked Peter Todd blandly.

"Yes, exactly."

Wharton's face was crimson.

"I-I remember now. I slipped the letter under my Latin grammar when Quelch nearly spotted me reading it in class," he said. "I—I had no idea Bunter had seen it."

"The fat rotter!" growled Johnny Bull. "So he read the letter, and tattled to Skinner. And we needn't inquire who tattled the story up and down the Remove. Skinner, of course! It's in his line."

Harry Wharton made a stride towards Bunter, his face crimson with wrath. Peter Todd threw the door open suddenly.

"Cut, fatty!" he said briefly.

Bunter did not need telling twice. He fairly flew.

Wharton's boot caught him as he fled, however, and there was a heavy bump in the Remove passage, and a terrific yell.

"Yarooooh!"

Peter Todd strolled out of the study, and paused in the passage for a moment to kick Bunter as he passed him, and there was another dismal yell from Bunter.

(Continued on page 26.)

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A BID FOR LIBERTY! Locked doors and barred windows are not sufficient to keep young Peter Voyce a prisoner. He's due to turn out for a footer match and he means to play if it kills him.



The TRIALS of STORRYDENE VILLA

by *Walter Edwards*



No. 7.—THE ELEVENTH MAN!

One Down!

"PLAY up, the ten men!"
The wild shout broke from thousands of throats as Noyle and Battle went away down the left wing, their short-passing tactics bewildering the Storryston Wednesday defence. Battle and his partner formed a perfect wing on their day, and in the game against the Wednesday they were excelling themselves. Their timing was a revelation, their sense of anticipation almost uncanny; and the home "fans" were on the verge of delirium when the bow-legged winger lifted the leather and dropped it into the goalmouth.

"Heads!"

"In with it!"

"Now then, Peter!"

But Peter Voyce was not there, Storryston Villa had taken the field with ten men, and the vast enclosure had rocked with sound when it was seen that it was Peter Voyce, the young centre-forward, who was missing from the side. Hundreds of anxious questions had been hurled at "Hefty" Hebble, the skipper, and the big fellow had grinned and waved a reassuring hand towards the dressing-room.

His meaning was clear, yet twenty minutes ticked away and still Peter's place was vacant.

The Villa players were almost as puzzled as the crowd, even though they knew what was keeping the winger.

It had wanted a few minutes to the kick-off when Detective-Inspector Dorland, of the Storryston Police, had stalked into the dressing-room, fixed Peter Voyce with a hard eye, and told the smiling young man that he wished to speak to him in the office. At once Peter, thoroughly bewildered, had followed the burly sleuth out of the room.

He did not return in time to take the field with the other players, however, so Hebble had decided to open the game with ten men.

Peter would turn up all right, growled Hefty.

It was quite on the cards that Dorland, an officious kind of chap, wished to speak to Voyce about some trivial matter—riding a bike without a light, perhaps. Dorland was the kind of fellow who looked for trouble with a microscope.

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But Peter did not turn up, and his berth was still vacant after twenty minutes' gruelling play. It was very annoying, of course, and Hebble and his men wondered what had happened to their pivot but they were given very little time for speculation, for their visitors, a big-limbed, bustling crowd, were making the most of their opportunity.

The fame of Peter Voyce had reached Storryston, of course, so the Wednesday meant to take full advantage of the youngster's temporary absence.

This may not sound very sporting, but a goal's a goal, for all that! Furthermore, the Wednesday were perilously near the bottom of the League table.

The visitors had done most of the pressing in the first ten minutes of the game, and then Thirlboy, taking a pass from Hebble, had sent Battle and Noyle away on their initial expedition into the enemy's territory. It was very pretty to behold, that sudden rush down the field, but it had come to naught when Coyne hallooed the ball over the bar. From that moment Battle and the inside man had put up a perfect partnership.

Four times did they break away, and it was on the fourth occasion that the excited fans had called upon Peter Voyce to get his head to the ball.

But Peter was not there; and it was the gloved fist of Dr. Featherstone, the Storryston custodian, that had flashed out and relieved the pressure.

The home club was playing the following ten men:

Hoppy Hawkins; Grace and Hebble; Denning, Thirlboy, Craye; Sceptre, Coyne, Noyle, and Battle.

The Wednesday put the following stalwarts in the field:

Dr. Featherstone; Toy and Bland; Tegby, McKay, and Trimmell; Burden, Bright, Merrick (K. G.), Goy, and Warren.

Judging Storryston upon the day's form, it was difficult to understand why they were in such a lowly position, for their forwards were clever and speedy, although inclined to be a shade too vigorous in their tackling. They went for the man rather than for the ball.

Certain it is that the big-limbed visitors had the best of the play during the first thirty minutes of the game, and

had it not been for the wonderful keeping of Hoppy Hawkins they would have taken a lead that might easily have gone into double figures.

A sporting scribe with a passion for long words once called Hoppy the "quintessence of ubiquity"; and many a fan shook his head and declared that the scribe was talking through his hat. Old Hoppy was here, there, and everywhere, said the fans.

Hoppy Hawkins had a great heart, birdlike features, and a wooden leg, and the Storryston supporters were apt to declare that he was unbeatable; yet towards the end of the first half of the game against Storryston it became increasingly apparent that no human being could keep the enemy at bay much longer.

Shots rained upon the little goalie from all angles, the home defence being at sixes and sevens, and it was a terrific drive by Merrick, the Wednesday amateur, that opened the scoring for the visitors.

Crashing against an upright with a force which threatened to snap the timber, the leather glanced off obliquely and flashed into the net, and the Storryston supporters consoled themselves with the knowledge that no goalkeeper in the country could have dealt with the shot.

The Wednesday had not scored a goal for four weeks, so the wild yell that broke from their supporters was altogether excusable. The fans from the North did not number more than five hundred, but they managed to make themselves heard.

"Well done, K. G.!"

"Set 'em alight, t' lads!"

It was a somewhat glum-looking ten men who lined up after Merrick had found the net, but the home team's supporters refused to be disheartened.

"Are we downhearted?"

"No!"

"Smile, Hefty!"

"You're not dead yet, lad!"

"Perhaps not!" growled the burly back. "But Mister Detective-Inspector Dorland is going to come to a sticky end when I get at him! If only young Peter were here—"

Phoo-ee-p!

A long blast of the whistle broke into Hefty's meditations, and he looked anything but amiable as he hunched his

great shoulders and strode away towards the dressing-room.

"Now for Dorland!" he muttered, giving a vicious kick at a tuft of grass.

Straight Talking!

THERE was no sign of Detective-inspector Dorland when the ten tired and disgruntled players trooped into the dressing-room. But Sir Aubrey Ailen, the chairman of the club, was there, admiring himself in a cracked mirror. Perfectly at ease, he was twisting the ends of his little moustache into rapier-like points, and he did not turn round until he had done the job to his complete satisfaction.

The portly baronet was over-dressed, as usual, his tight-fitting morning-coat showing every contour of his body, and his light lavender trousers accentuating the dazzling polish of his patent leather shoes. A glossy silk hat was tilted at a rakish angle, and a fat cigar jutted prominently from a corner of the thick-lipped mouth.

Sir Aubrey looked a very unpleasant little man as he greeted the players.

"H'm! Ah!" He gave his pompous nose and felt for his gold-rimmed monocle. "I have some news for you fellows," he said, jamming his eyeglass into position. "You may be interested to know that—"

"Where's Peter Voyce?" demanded Hefty Hebble, going straight to the point. He was in no mood for a long speech.

Sir Aubrey flushed hotly at the lack of respect in the footballer's tone.

"Really, Hebble," he protested, "you surely forget whom you are addressing!"

"Where's Voyce?" repeated the burly back; and his massive jaw jutted forward like the toe of a Wellington boot. He looked ugly and threatening, and Ailen raised a pudgy hand in protest.

"One moment—" began the baronet; and then a muscular hand shot out and caught his shoulder in a paralyzing grip.

"Out with it!" snapped Hebble, knowing that all was not well with Peter. "Speak up, or I'll shake your back teeth out!"

He had conceived a great affection for the brown-haired centre-forward, and something told him that the youngster was in trouble.

"Unhand me, sir!" shouted Ailen, struggling to free himself. "Keep your dirty paws off a gentleman, Hebble! How dare you!"

"I'm just ripe to dare a lot!" growled the burly back. "What's happened to young Peter?"

"Young Peter, as you call him, is in a prison-cell at the present moment," said Sir Aubrey; and a gloating smile flamed across his face as he watched the effect of his statement. "Detective-inspector Dorland took him away in a taxi."

Hebble and the others were standing quite still, their startled eyes fixed upon the smug, self-satisfied countenance of the speaker.

"Peter in prison," breathed Hefty Hebble, the words coming slowly from his lips. "Are you sure?"

The baronet gave a short, unpleasant laugh, and it was obvious that he was feeling very pleased with himself.

"Am I sure?" he asked. "Of course I'm sure! It was largely due to my—evidence that Dorland was able to bring the crime home to Voyce, who is a daring and unscrupulous thief! He was concerned in the robbery at Benning United's club-house. This young

scoundrel, with his quiet manner and gentlemanly appearance, is a rogue at heart, and—"

He was not allowed to say more, for Hefty Hebble caught him by the throat and shook him until he rattled like a bag of nails.

"Say another word against the kid and I'll leave you through the window, you little toad!" shouted the burly footballer, thoroughly roused. "Young Voyce is as honest as they make 'em, and if he's really in the 'jug' it means that some dirty hound has gone and done it on him! I can't use your fine and fancy talk, but you know what I mean all right! I'll bet it's a put-up job, and I'll get to the bottom of it before I'm through! D'you hear that?"

He gave the baronet another rough shake before he sent him staggering across the dressing-room. "Some scoundrel has done it on him!" Hefty Hebble looked a terrible figure in his wrath. Muddy and dishevelled, with a bloodstained knee and a gaping rent in his jersey, he was primitive, a savage. Sir Aubrey cringed as the giant raised his great fists above his head.

"Some scoundrel's done it on the kid!" repeated Hebble. "But I'll find him! I'll find him! And when I do—"

His husky voice trailed away, and a crooked smile twisted his lips. Sir Aubrey Ailen shuddered.

"Really, Hebble," protested the baronet, a quiver in his voice, "you must try to control yourself. Dorland has the case in hand, and the evidence against Voyce is overwhelming. Like yourself, I deeply deplore that this thing should have happened. We have the good name of the club to think about!"

It was an unfortunate remark, and an angry growl broke from the players.

"I wasn't thinking about the club," said Hebble. "I was thinking about the kid! And now tell us what happened; and we don't want a long speech! Time's short, you know!"

The pompous baronet disliked being talked to in this disrespectful manner, but he thought it would be as well to humour the burly footballer.

"I—er—know very little about it, as a matter of fact," said Ailen. "It seems that a school badge was found on the scene of the—er—crime, and that the badge is the property of this young scound—er—of Voyce. You get my meaning, Hebble?"

"Go on!" growled Hefty, a scowl upon his heavy features.

"That—er—clue is not the only thing that points to Voyce's guilt, for he had the audacity to tell Dorland that he dined with me on Thursday evening! The mere suggestion is absurd, of course, for it is not my habit to entertain professional footballers—H'm!"

Ah! As a man of the world, Hebble, you understand!"

Hefty nodded his massive head.

"I understand all right," he growled.

The referee appeared at this moment.

"Come along, you fellows!" he said, somewhat testily. "Didn't you hear the whistle? I'll send you a postcard in future!"

"Thanks!" grinned Sceptre. "I'm collecting 'em!"

There was a general move towards the door, but Hefty Hebble remained statueque, his thick eyebrows drawn together, his lips tightly closed.

"So the kid says he had dinner at your house on Thursday?" asked Hefty, looking down into the baronet's shifty eyes.

Ailen nodded.

"That's so," he said, with a nervous laugh. "The mere suggestion is unequalled for brass-faced audacity, and the—"

"And you say that he didn't have dinner with you on Thursday?" pressed Hebble.

"Of course I do!" snapped Ailen, a tinge of colour in his cheeks. "Haven't I already said so?"

"Oh, yes, you've said so right enough," growled Hefty, "but that doesn't mean that I believe you! It strikes me, Mister Sir Aubrey Ailen, that you're the biggest liar I've ever met, 'cause if the kid said he had dinner with you I'll bet he did! I don't know what your game is, old man, but you can bet your boots that I'm going to find out!"

Turning on his heel, the big fellow strode out of the dressing-room; and it was a very agitated baronet who fumbled for his gold-rimmed monocle.

The Getaway!

"COME on! Out of it!"

It was Detective-inspector Dorland who grunted the amiable command, and Peter Voyce flushed hotly as he stepped out of the taxicab and allowed himself to be escorted up the steps of Storrydene Police Station.

It was less than three miles from the Bedwell Park ground to the station, and no word had been exchanged during the journey, the detective being taciturn by nature and Peter having a great deal to think about.

The youngster objected to the tight grip on his arm, however; and the light of suspicion leapt into Dorland's eyes as he felt the magnificent young muscles ripple beneath the sleeve of the tweed overcoat.

"Now then, none o' that!" he growled. "You haven't got an earthly chance of getting away!"

The notion of trying to escape had not even occurred to Peter, but the detective's words started a certain train of thought.

"Is it likely that I'd deprive myself of your pleasant company?" asked the youngster; and the burly police-officer shoved him roughly into the charge-room.

A beetle-browed sergeant was waiting for Dorland and his prisoner, and his beady black eyes lit up as the handsome youngster was placed before the desk. It seemed incredible that this tanned, healthy-looking youth could be one of the notorious Starlight Boys, yet he had Dorland's word for it. The detective had enough evidence to convict the prisoner a dozen times over.

Peter's name and address, as well as other particulars, were jotted down in

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Don't Miss It, Chums!

a ledger, and then the youngster was told that he was charged with being concerned in the robbery that had taken place at the Benstone United Football Club, when the sum of one thousand two hundred pounds had been stolen.

That was all.

The evidence would come out at the trial.

"What happens now?" asked Peter, after he had signed for the articles that had been taken out of his pockets. "Can I go back to Bedwell Park?"

Detective-Inspector Dorland removed his bowler hat and ran his fingers through his stubbly grey hair.

"You're a cool customer!" he growled. "It's likely that I'd let you go, isn't it? There's a comfortable little cell waiting for you, my bright boy! Come on!"

Gripping the youngster by the arm, he led him down a narrow passage, the beady-eyed sergeant bringing up the rear; and the latter officer, with much clanking of keys, unlocked a door and threw it open.

"Inside!" growled Dorland, giving Peter a gentle push; and the youngster had his first glimpse of a prison cell.

The narrow apartment was cold and cheerless, the grey, unfriendly light of a raw December afternoon stealing through the barred window, and the only furniture was a chair and a bed.

The detective chuckled as he saw the look of distaste that crept into his prisoner's brown eyes.

"You'll be pretty cosy here, my bright boy," said Dorland. "There's every modern convenience, of course, and the cooking is excellent! But I'm afraid we shan't be able to get you any skilly—it's out of season! There isn't a 'Q' in the month! Just ring if you fancy anything. You won't get it, but there's no harm in your ringing!"

Dorland had taken a bitter and unaccountable dislike to the footballer, but his brutal sarcasm made no impression upon his victim.

"And how long do I stay here?" asked Peter.

"You'll stay in this hotel until Monday morning," answered the detective; "and then you'll be brought up before the magistrates and remanded. You see, we're after the other bright lads who were with you when you did the job!"

"But I didn't do it!" protested the youngster. "I know nothing about it: there's some hideous mistake!"

Dorland nodded.

"That's right," he grinned. "There always is a mistake! We never catch the right party! Strange, isn't it?"

"But you are making a mistake!" repeated the youngster. "Sir Aubrey must remember that I had dinner with him on Thursday evening."

"Of course he must," said Dorland. "That's why he denied the whole thing."

"But—"

"Quit the bluffing!" growled the detective. "Now then! Do you feel like squealing?"

Peter looked puzzled.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," he said. "Squealing?"

"Come off it!" said Dorland. "You can't put that Baby Innocent stuff over on me! As I've said before, I'm a bit too old in the tooth! Are you going to 'split' on the rest of the gang? It'll be worth your while!"

"How can I 'split,' you idiot?" demanded the youngster, his cheeks flushed. "I know nothing about the affair. Do I look like a 'crook'? Ask yourself the question!"

"Of course you don't!" grinned the detective. "The clever ones never do. Are you going to split?"

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Dorland snapped the question, taking the prisoner by surprise.

"No," answered Peter at once, and then he coloured. "What I mean is that—"

"You heard that, Wilkinson?" said Dorland, turning to the beady-eyed sergeant. "Come on! We'll get away."

Peter Joyce stood quite still as the door closed, making him a captive.

Never before had he felt so helpless and hopeless as he did at that moment, and he swallowed hard as he turned slowly and walked across to the bed, a shaft of cold light dazzling his eyes.

The business had happened with such amazing suddenness; he had had no time in which to think, to make plans, to seek advice. He could not believe that he was a prisoner even now; the whole thing was like a nightmare.

It seemed but a few minutes ago that he had been changing in the dressing-room up at Bedwell Park, and now—

He looked round at the drab walls of his cell, and a little shudder ran through his sturdy frame.

"And I've got to stay here until Monday," he muttered, sinking on to the bed.

Cupping his chin in his hands, he leaned forward and stared fixedly at the stone floor; and so he remained for some minutes—motionless, deep in thought, cold and wretched, a prey to depression. But it is not like youth to be depressed for long, and it was the booming of the town-hall clock that made Peter lift his head and look towards the barred window.

One—two—three—four!

Four o'clock!

That meant that the game against Storcastle Wednesday had been in progress for half an hour. The youngster wondered how the boys were getting on. He also wondered who was filling his place at centre-forward; and, having wondered about that, another thought came to him.

Perhaps the Villa were playing ten men. Perhaps old Hefty was wondering what had become of him. The possibility gave Peter Joyce much food for thought.

Rising from the bed, the youngster commenced to pace up and down the cell; and little by little a daring scheme took form in his mind.

"Why shouldn't I?" he asked himself, halting abruptly and gazing up at the window. "I'm innocent! Besides," he added reflectively, "it will be a bit of a 'rag'!"

Lifting the chair, he placed it beneath the window; and by standing on tiptoe he was able to peer through the bars into the station courtyard. It was not the outlook that interested the youngster, however; he had eyes only for the three rusty bars that stood between himself and freedom.

A Late Arrival!

ALBERT HENRY HEBBLE looked anything but companionable as he strode on to the field for the second half against Storcastle Wednesday. He was not altogether happy about Peter Joyce—the "kid," as he always called the youngster—for something told him there was more behind the Benstone theft affair than met the eye.

The burly back had always had an honest man's dislike and distrust of Sir Aubrey Ailen, and he felt sure that the wealthy baronet was at the bottom of Peter's troubles.

Having no use for subtlety, he had not

hesitated to make his suspicions known to Sir Aubrey, and for this tactical blunder he gave himself a mental kicking. He had been too headstrong; he should not have blurted out that tacit accusation of treachery. He had used a bludgeon instead of a rapier, and now Ailen would be on his guard.

"I ought to be put away in a nice quiet home!" muttered Hefty, breaking into a trot.

The Villa were a goal down, but the Storrydene crowd remained optimistic and jubilant.

"Buck up, the ten men!"

"Are we downhearted?"

"NO!"

"What are you laughing at, Hefty?"

The scowling full-back was given little time for morbid meditation once the ball was set in motion, for Bright broke away, pushed a pretty pass out to Burden, and started a movement that carried the Wednesday deep into Storrydene territory.

Denning made a valiant effort to smash the dangerous movement, but he found himself out-manœuvred by the Storcastle left wing; and it was left to the elephantine Grace to rush in like an infuriated bull and sky the ball clean over the grand-stand.

It was a drastic clearance, and it brought a hoarse shout from all parts of the enclosure.

"Oh, pretty, sir!" yelled the home "fans."

"Windy!" roared the "fans" from the North.

The shouts were conflicting; a lot depends upon one's point of view—especially at a football match.

Tegby took the throw-in, and the ball went to McKay, the broad-shouldered centre-half flicking the leather over his head and feeding Merrick, the amateur. Eluding Noyle, K. G. Merrick pushed a ground pass out to Warren, on the right, and all went well until the winger came up against Hefty Hebble.

Hefty, a large-hearted fellow in the ordinary way, was feeling at war with the world at that moment, and the charge with which he sent Warren reeling would have rocked a brick wall. It was clean enough, however, although it did not err upon the side of gentleness, and the referee waved aside the wild shout that broke from the indignant fans from Storcastle.

Even some of the Wednesday players eased up and looked inquiringly towards the official, and this brought another roar from the visitors in the crowd.

"Get on with it!"

"Play on!"

"Into him!"

Lifting the ball, Hefty dropped it out to Battle; and the bow-legged winger lost no time in getting into his stride. Trimming Goy, he made rings round Trimmell, and shot off down the wing; and the Storrydene fans began to shout lustily when it seemed likely that their pets would equalise. But it was not to be, for Dr. Featherstone brought off a brilliant save when Coyne, dashing forward, took a first-time shot from a centre. Collecting the ball in his safe hands, the goalie threw it out to McKay, and the half-back swung round and sent Merrick away with a perfect pass.

The amateur was playing magnificent football, even though he had but recently recovered from a fractured ankle, and the cool manner in which he carved his way through the home defence brought a roar of applause from the crowd. Noyle, Thirlboy, and Denning were made to look like a trio of novices, and disaster faced the Villa when Grace, attempting another drastic clearance,

knocked badly, and sent the ball out to Burden.

A hollow groan escaped the Storydene supporters, for it quickly became obvious that the home side might have to pay dearly for that blunder.

Surging forward, Burden placed the ball at Merrick's toe, and the amateur, making Hefty's homicidal rush, took a resounding shot at goal.

There appeared to be very little force behind the shot, yet Hoppy Hawkins, making it in his arms, was knocked clean off his balance and sent flying into the air!

Nobody—least of all Hoppy—knew exactly how it happened, but the fact remained that the whistle shrilled and the referee pointed towards the centre.

The Villa were two goals down, but still their supporters kept a stout heart.

the amateur slid by Thirlboy, and set off towards his objective; and the fact that he, the fox, was being worried by the Storydene hounds did not seem to disturb him in the least. Taking scarcely a charge—though how he managed to avoid physical contact was something of a mystery—he carved his way into the goal area; and it was the elephantine Grace who was largely to blame for the goal that followed.

Losing his head, the big fellow rushed madly at the amateur, meaning to stop him at all costs, and so vigorous was his method that the referee blew his whistle and pointed a rigid forefinger at the tragic blob of whitewash within the penalty-area.

"Penalty!"

"Play the game, Grace!"

"Take the kick, Merrick!"

It was a very dazed amateur whom

swung his foot, and the ball, crashing against an upright, shot into the net with a vicious rush of air, giving Heppy Hawkins no chance.

"Good old K. G.!"

"Let's have another, boys!"

"One—two—three!"

There was much jubilation in the Storydene camp, the "fans" from the North doing a certain amount of crowing over their victims; but still, the Storydene supporters refused to be downhearted.

"Buck up, Hefty!"

"Come on, the ten men!"

The din died away as the teams lined up for the fifth time that afternoon, and then all eyes turned upon a brown-haired, brown-eyed youngster who came springing across the turf from the direction of the club-house.

The youngster was Peter Voyce.

The eleventh man had arrived!



"Come on, the ten men!" The din died away as the teams lined up for the fifth time that afternoon, and then all eyes were turned upon a brown-haired youngster who came sprinting across the turf from the direction of the club-house. The newcomer was Peter Voyce. The eleventh man had arrived! (See this page.)

"Come on, the ten men!"

"Don't let 'em get your tail down, Hefty!"

The home side looked a very grim lot as they lined up for the resumption of play, but it was soon proved that a rot had set in. Hefty and his warriors could do nothing right, whilst the visitors, striking a winning vein, took all kinds of risks, and reaped a rich reward. Time and again they swept down the field and scored the Villa goal, and Hoppy, a wizard between the sticks, was called upon to play the game of his life.

The newspaper scribes searched in vain for new superlatives with which to adorn the name of Hoppy Hawkins, but they had to be content with "masterly," "brilliant," "magnificent," and the rest of the much abused adjectives.

But even Hoppy Hawkins was but human, and the time was to arrive when Merrick should score his third goal and accomplish the hat-trick.

Taking a tricky pass from Trimmell,

Grace assisted to his feet, an amateur who wondered vaguely whether a factory chimney had fallen over and dropped on top of him; and the burly back's moist, spacious face was a study in contrition.

"Sorry, old man!" growled Grace. And Merrick winced—and smiled.

"Accidents will happen in the best-regulated menageries!" observed the amateur.

Merrick was limping as he prepared to take the penalty-kick, and Hoppy, his gentle smile very much in evidence, gave his green Homburg hat an extra tilt. Hoppy looked a grotesque little figure as he crouched beneath the cross-bar, and it was difficult to believe that he was one of the finest "keepers" in the country.

A tense hush settled upon the vast concourse as the referee placed the whistle to his lips. Then:

Phoop!

Taking three limping steps, Merrick

The Draw!

THE name of Peter Voyce broke from thousands of lips as the youngster raced across the turf and took up his usual position between Coyne and Noyle. Flushed, breathless and bright-eyed, he shot a furtive glance towards the club-house, and his manner made it obvious that he did not wish to waste any time.

And the crowd, of course, was roaring, bugles and bells and rattles adding to the din.

"It's Voyce!"

"Good lad, Peter!"

"Better late than never, son!"

"Set 'em alight, Peter!"

The Villa players closed in upon the newcomer and shot a score of eager questions at him, and then the stentorian voice of Hefty Hebble boomed down from the far end of the pitch.

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"Put a sock in it!" roared the Storrydene skipper. "Get on with the game! We're three goals down!"

"That's the talk, Hefty!" yelled the delighted crowd. And Peter, having waited for the whistle, touched the ball to Noyle, on his left.

Goy was soon in the picture, but he was not quick enough to intercept a pass that sent the bow-legged Battle away down the wing, and neither was Trimmell able to rob the outside man as he sped along the line.

The sudden invasion did not seem to worry the bovine-faced Bland, for he ambled across in a leisurely fashion that spoke of abundant self-confidence. He was in for a surprise, however, for Battle leapt over the outstretched leg and reached the corner flag.

Boomph!

Describing a graceful arc, the ball dropped into the goal-mouth, and it was Peter Voyce who managed to get his head to the sphere and deflect it past the outstretched hand of Dr. Featherstone.

"Goal!"

Seldom had such a volume of sound floated across the town from the direction of Bedwell Park, but that outburst was merely a drip in the ocean compared with the vocal explosion that greeted Peter's second goal, a low drive from the edge of the goal area. This goal, which put the finishing touch to a brilliant run through, was netted exactly four minutes from Time, so the Storrydene "fans" had every reason for throwing sanity to the winds and allowing their excitement full rein.

"Good lad, Peter!"

"Just one more, son!"

"Only one more!"

The somewhat superior smile had faded out of the faces of the visiting eleven, for it was now painfully obvious that the Villa might equalise; and the word went round that Peter Voyce was to be "bottled up" for the rest of the game.

The idea was excellent in every way, of course, and it might have succeeded had the young man to be "bottled up" been anybody other than Peter Voyce. It may have been sheer prejudice, of course, but Peter did not take kindly to the "bottling" process; but he showed

no sign of his antipathy until a minute from Long Whistle.

Standing somewhat apart from the mass of players that surged round Hoppy's goal, he appeared to be studying the banks of dark cloud that were drifting across the grey heavens; and then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Hefty clear with a mighty kick.

Darting forward, he outdistanced the Storrydene players in the race for the ball, and, with the leather at his toe, he covered the distance from the centre line to the goal area in something very like record time. His speed was almost uncanny, for he appeared to glide over the turf; and the combined effort of Messrs. Toy and Bland, the Wednesday backs, was almost pitiable, inept. How the brown-haired youngster managed to slip between them remains a mystery to this day, although one scribe went so far as to write a paragraph about Peter's hypnotic eye.

Crouching very low, Dr. Featherstone knew that the great moment had arrived, and even he, old campaigner that he was, hesitated for a moment, wondering whether he should rush out of his goal and throw himself bodily at the ball.

It has been said that he who hesitates is lost, and certain it is that Featherstone paid dearly for his hesitation on this occasion, for Peter Voyce slammed in a shot even as the goalkeeper was trying to make up his mind about his course of action.

The sound of boot meeting ball echoed dully upon the air, and the next moment Dr. Featherstone was seen to fly across the goal-mouth, his arms outstretched. But the ball was already in the net, twirling and wriggling in evil glee.

"Goal!"

"Well done, Voyce!"

"Just one more!"

The Villa players were every bit as excited as the home "fans," and even Hefty Hebble pounded down the field and hugged the youngster in his mighty arms. Flushed and bright-eyed, the burly fellow appeared to be upon the verge of tears, and the heart of Peter Voyce thumped in strange fashion as he realised how much he meant to Hefty.

Pandemonium held the vast enclosure in its grip, and the chilly air was still

drenched with raucous sound as the players lined up once more.

His eyes upon his watch, the referee set the game in motion, and scarcely did Merrick touch the ball than a long blast of the whistle brought the match to a close.

Honours were even, the score being three—three.

The Surprise!

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR JOHN DORLAND, of the Storrydene Police, was annoyed. Striding into the charge-room of the station, he banged his bowler hat down on the top of the desk with a vicious force that jerked a quantity of blue-black ink over the station-sergeant's tidy ledger; then, adding insult to injury, he glared malevolently at his subordinate.

"Any luck, sir?" asked the beady-eyed officer brightly; and the simple question, which was well-meant, brought a dull flush to the hard-bitten face of his superior.

Glowing, Dorland swallowed hard.

"Have I had any luck?" he snapped, showing his teeth. "Do I look as though I've had any luck, you idiot? Ask yourself the question! Of course I've had no luck! That brass-faced kid's been one too many for me again! I went through his rooms with a small toothcomb, but there wasn't a scrap of evidence anywhere! Not a word! Not a pinprick! And his father told me that the dear boy couldn't possibly be mixed up with the wicked Starlight gang! Oh, no! Of course he couldn't!" Dorland snorted, and ran on: "There's a clear case against him, yet he still sticks to that Little Innocent stuff! It annoys me, Wilkinson! Why doesn't he come across with the whole story? No, he's just blamed stubborn! He's keeping mum to spite me, the hound! But I'll get him, Wilkinson! No crook has ever had the laugh of me for long! You know that!"

The sergeant nodded.

"Why not have another talk with him, sir?" he suggested. "He's had time to think matters over!"

Dorland granted.

"That's so," he growled. "But another hour or so won't do him any harm. Has he asked for anything?"

"No, sir," answered Wilkinson.

"That's a pity," grunted Dorland, "cause he wouldn't have got it! He's slick, is this youngster, Wilkinson, but he's up against the wrong man this time!"

"I suppose you'll send up to Bedwell Park for his ordinary clothes, sir?" asked the sergeant.

"Yes," grunted Dorland; "but there's no hurry."

A tall young man, obviously a constable in mufti, entered the charge-room at that moment, and his face was beaming as he touched his hat to Dorland and looked across at Wilkinson.

"How did they get on, Henty?" asked the latter.

"They drew," answered the tall young man, his cheeks slightly flushed. "But what a game! We were three goals down until a quarter of an hour from the end, and then—"

"We played ten men, didn't we?" put in Dorland, a grim smile flitting across his hard face.

"Yes, sir," answered the constable—"at least, for the greater part of the time. And didn't things move when our eleventh man turned up! He got two goals in less than ten minutes, and it was almost on the stroke of time

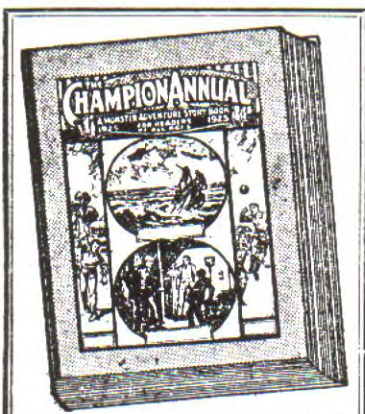
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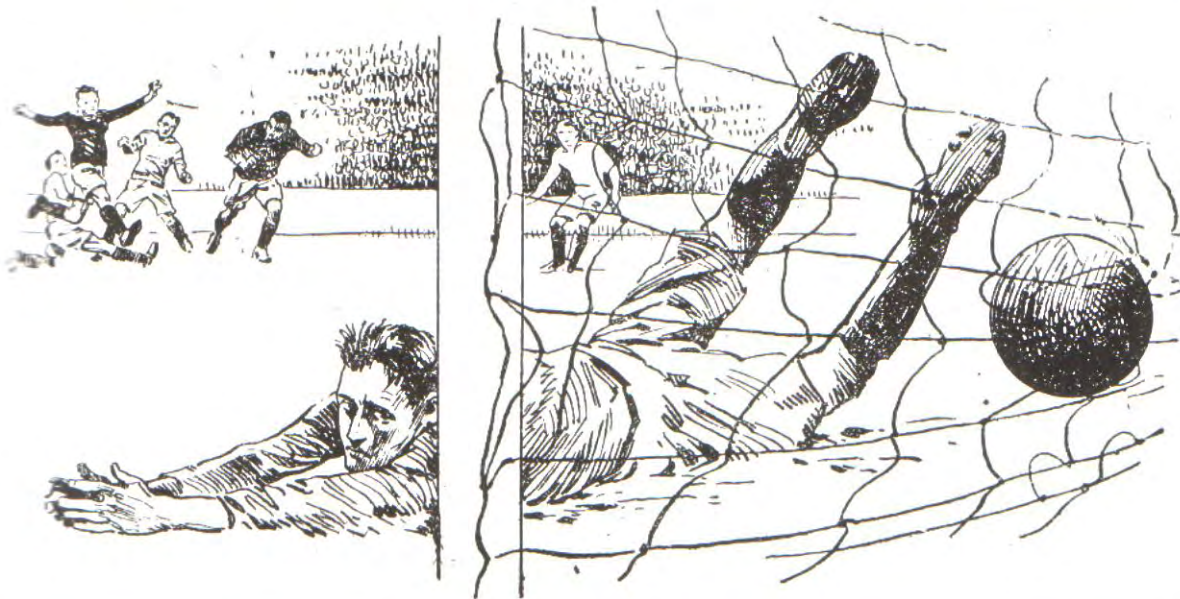
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The sound of boot meeting ball echoed dully upon the air, and the next moment Dr. Featherstone was seen to fly across the goal-mouth, his arms outstretched. But the ball was already in the net, twirling and wriggling in evil glee. "Goal!" The roar that went up was deafening. (See page 24.)

when he beat Featherstone again! Young Voyce will go a long way, sir!" Dorland and Wilkinson started violently, as though each had received a powerful electric shock.

Young Voyce would go a long way! "Say that again, Henty!" breathed the detective-inspector; and so threatening was his aspect that the young constable shot a nervous glance at the station-sergeant.

"Are you deaf as well as silly?" snapped Wilkinson.

"I—I said that young Voyce will go a long way, sir," said Henty, thoroughly bewildered.

The sergeant and Dorland exchanged puzzled glances.

"I never gave you credit for having intelligence of a high order, Henty," said the detective-inspector acidly; "but now I'm convinced that you're a mental midget! Would it surprise you to know that young Voyce is in the cells at this very moment?"

"It would, sir," answered Henty, convulsed in his tone. "I shook hands with him less than half an hour ago, and—"

"Come on, Wilkinson, we'll see into this," snapped Dorland. "We must prove to this fool that he's talking through his hat!"

Followed by his superior officer and Constable Henty, the sergeant set off down the echoing stone corridor and lifted the shutter of Peter's cell; and the next moment he was opening the door with feverish haste.

"What is it, you idiot?" snapped Dorland testily.

"He's gone, sir!" gasped Wilkinson, stumbling with his bunch of keys.

"Rot!" snapped Dorland.

Wilkinson flung wide the door at this moment, and the grim-faced detective-inspector was the first person to cross the threshold. Coming to a sudden halt, Dorland fixed his eyes upon the narrow window set high in the wall; and the absence of iron bars told its own story. It was quiet obvious that the captive had removed the bars, squeezed through the aperture, and

dropped into the station-yard. That was elementary deduction.

"But how—" began Dorland, swinging round; and he muttered savagely when he found himself alone.

The bars had been placed in a neat row upon the low bed, and Dorland was busy inspecting them when the wild-eyed sergeant burst into the cell. He was a phlegmatic individual in the ordinary way, but now he could scarcely articulate.

"I—I've found out how he got away, sir," he announced. "He borrowed a bike, and—"

"Bike—bike! Be more explicit!" snapped Dorland. "What kind of bike? Motor-bike? Push-bike? One of the old-fashioned penny-farthing bikes?"

"Motor-bike, sir!" stammered Wilkinson.

"That's not good enough!" snapped Dorland. "What make was it?"

"Cowley-Harverson, sir," returned the sergeant. "Latest model, sir!"

"Rot!" snapped the detective-inspector. "There's only one in the town—and that belongs to me!"

"I know, sir," said Wilkinson, looking very scared. "You see, sir, it was your bike that Voyce borrowed!"

The Big Bluff!

HAVING had their cold shower, the Storydene Villa fellows were changing into their outdoor clothes; and their toilet was almost over when the door was jerked open, and Detective-Inspector Dorland and Sir Aubrey Ailen walked into the dressing-room.

The police-officer grinned unpleasantly as he fixed his hard eyes upon Peter Voyce.

"I didn't expect to find you here, even though I received a phone message from Sir Aubrey," he said.

"Oh, yes, I'm here all right!" smiled the youngster. "I thought you'd turn up, and I've been longing for a glimpse of your sweet face. That's not a bad bus-

ness of yours, by the way! What is it—Bryant & May, or a Matchless?"

A chuckle broke from the players, but the detective's face became hard and ugly.

"I don't know that you've got much to feel funny about, my friend!" grunted Dorland, feeling for his handcuffs. "You got away once, but you're not likely to do it again!"

"What's the trouble, old man?" asked Hefty Hebble, walking across the dressing-room and placing a muscular arm round Peter's shoulders.

"That's my business!" snapped Dorland. "Voyce comes to the station with me: there's a taxi at the door!"

"And the charge?" asked Hefty.

"You know what the charge is—and so does Sir Aubrey!" growled the detective. "Voyce is mixed up with the Starlight Boys, who pulled that job off on Wednesday! Still, it's no business of yours, and I warn you not to interfere with an officer in the execution of his duty!" The words came hurriedly, for Dorland did not like the expression upon Hefty's broad features. "Come on, Voyce! We'll get away! And no tricks, mind!"

"Just a moment, old man," smiled Hebble. "I've one or two things to say to Sir Aubrey!"

The portly baronet started as his name was mentioned, and he looked very uncomfortable as he glanced across at the speaker: deep down in his heart he feared Hefty Hebble.

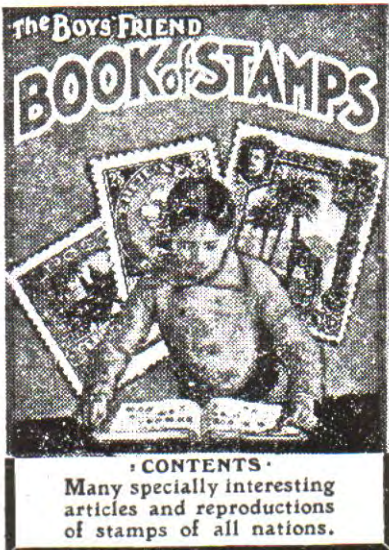
"We must not delay the officer, Hebble," said Ailen, feeling for his monocle.

"I expect he can spare a minute," growled Hefty, "and he's likely to be interested in what I've got to say!"

Strolling across the room, the burly back came to a standstill in front of the baronet; and Sir Aubrey winced as a muscular hand closed upon his shoulder.

"Look here, Hebble, you forget yourself—" blustered the baronet, trying to wriggle out of that terrible grip; and then, realising that he was making an

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exhibition of himself, he tried to assume an air of frigid dignity. "I must ask you—" he began.

"This is where you answer—not ask!" growled Hefty; and he did not remove that grip from the other man's shoulder. "Listen very carefully, Mr. Sir Aubrey Ailen! Is it true that you told this detective that Peter Voyce did not have dinner at your place on Wednesday evening?"

The baronet, whose face had gone strangely pale, nodded his sleek head.

"Of course it's true!" he blustered. "Do you think I invite common—er—invite my players?"

"That's all right!" growled Hefty. "Now have another think! Are you absolutely positive that Peter Voyce wasn't at your house from seven o'clock until ten on the night of the Benstone robbery?"

Hefty asked the question slowly and

deliberately, and a light of uncertainty, of suspicion, of vague fear, dawned in the baronet's dark eyes.

"Of course I'm sure," he said, at length; but his tone was anything but emphatic.

"And what if I can prove that Peter Voyce did dine with you?" pressed Hebble.

"But—but—"

"And what," broke in Hefty, "if I can bring Mrs. Potts, your housekeeper, and Maud Baker, your maid, to swear that Peter Voyce was with you on the night of the Benstone robbery?"

"But they weren't at home!" cried Sir Aubrey, a sickly smile flitting across his pallid features. "I sent them—"

"Exactly!" snapped the footballer. "You sent them out! And what for? It wasn't their evening off! You might make a note of that point, Mr. Dorland!" Hefty turned once more to the

quivering baronet. "And what if I tell you that both Mrs. Potts and Maud Baker were at home?" he demanded, his strong fingers crushing Ailen's shoulder. "But—but I would have known—" began Sir Aubrey weakly.

"No, you wouldn't!" snapped Hebble. "They were only too glad to keep out of your way! But they heard Voyce arrive, and they heard him go at ten o'clock; also they heard you say—"

"Perhaps—er—there—er—is a slight mistake, my dear Hebble!" broke in Sir Aubrey. "My—er—memory is very bad nowadays, you know, and— Strange—very strange, that our little dinner should have slipped my memory, Voyce!"

"Very strange, sir!" was Peter's dry comment.

"And you're willing to sign an affidavit?" growled Dorland.

"Yes, officer," said Ailen, almost eagerly. "I'll come up to the station at once, if you like!"

"You'd better!" rasped the disgruntled sleuth; and Sir Aubrey followed him out of the dressing-room.

Scarcely had the door closed than the players crowded round Hefty Hebble.

"But how did you know that Mrs. Potts and the maid were at home?" asked Peter, his brown eyes glowing. "I didn't see anything of them!"

"Of course you didn't," grinned Hefty. "For the simple reason that they weren't at home!"

"But—"

"It's like this," explained the burly back, "I had my suspicions about Sir Strawberry, for it struck me that he was trying to put you in the cart, so the only thing possible was to try a big bluff. I happened to know that Mrs. Potts and Maud Baker were employed by him, and I staked everything on that!"

"But why should he wish to harm me?" asked Peter. "Why did he deny that I had dinner with him?"

"I know not, my son," returned Hefty, his voice low and grave; "but I mean to find out! Sir Aubrey Ailen is booked for a very rough passage!"

THE END.

(Don't miss next Monday's grand Boxing Day story of the Storrdenes foster club, boys! Make a note of the title: "The Team From Chicago!")

"TROUBLE IN THE CO.!"

(Continued from page 19.)

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

HARRY WHARTON stood silent in Study No. 1.

The Co. did not speak.

Peter Todd had "buted in" just in time—but had he been in time? It was clear now to Wharton, angry as he was, that his chums had not failed him; that no member of the Co. had spoken a word of what was in the colonel's letter. It was Bunter's prying, and Skinner's malice, that he had to blame for the latest topic in the Remove.

"I'm sorry!" blurted out Wharton at last. "I—I was wrong, I suppose."

"No supposing about it," said Johnny Bull tersely. "You were wrong."

Wharton seemed to gulp down something.

"I was wrong," he said. "But what was I to think? I never dreamed that Bunter, or anybody, had seen the letter. What was a fellow to think?"

"Anything but what you did think," said Johnny Bull grimly.

"That's all right," said Bob Cherry hastily. "Let it drop, for goodness' sake."

Wharton breathed hard.

"I own up I was wrong, and I'm sorry," he said in a low voice. "A fellow can't say more than that. If you want more than that from me you'll be disappointed, that's all."

And with that the captain of the Remove strode out of the study, his face pale and set.

"Harry!" called out Nugent anxiously. There was no answer from Wharton.

In the Remove passage he came on Skinner and Snoop, and Skinner looked at him with a malicious grin. Skinner knew nothing of the discovery that had been made of Bunter's prying, and his own part in the affair. Had he known he would probably not have given the captain of the Remove that impudent grin just then. But he did, and repeated it. Without a word, but with a black look of anger and disdain, Whar-

ton struck out with his open hand, and Skinner reeled across the passage and fell with a crash against the wall.

Wharton strode on to the stairs.

"Why, I—I—you rotten bully!" yelled Skinner in amazement and rage.

The captain of the Remove strode on without a glance at him.

The Famous Five of the Remove stood together, as usual, to answer to their names at calling-over in Big Hall. But when the roll was taken, and the school dismissed, and the juniors marched out, the Famous Five did not come out together. As the Co. moved off towards the Rag, Harry Wharton walked away to the stairs, without a word or a look to his comrades, and they let him go. And then all the Remove knew that there was Trouble in the Co.

THE END.

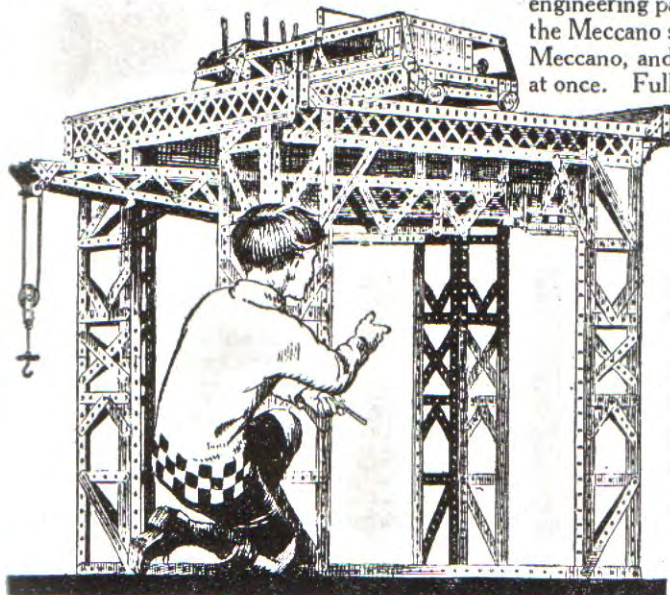
(There is another ripping Greyfriars story in next week's Grand Christmas Number of the MAGNET LIBRARY, entitled: "Harry Wharton's Christmas!" Be sure and read it!)

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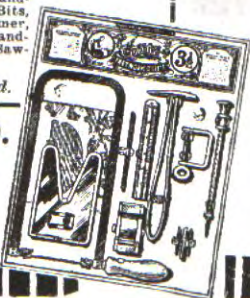
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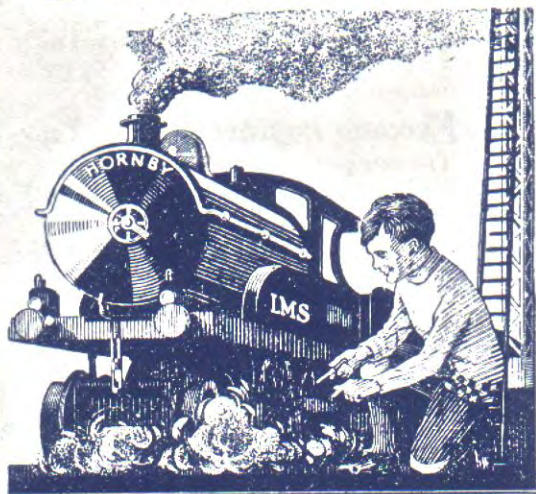
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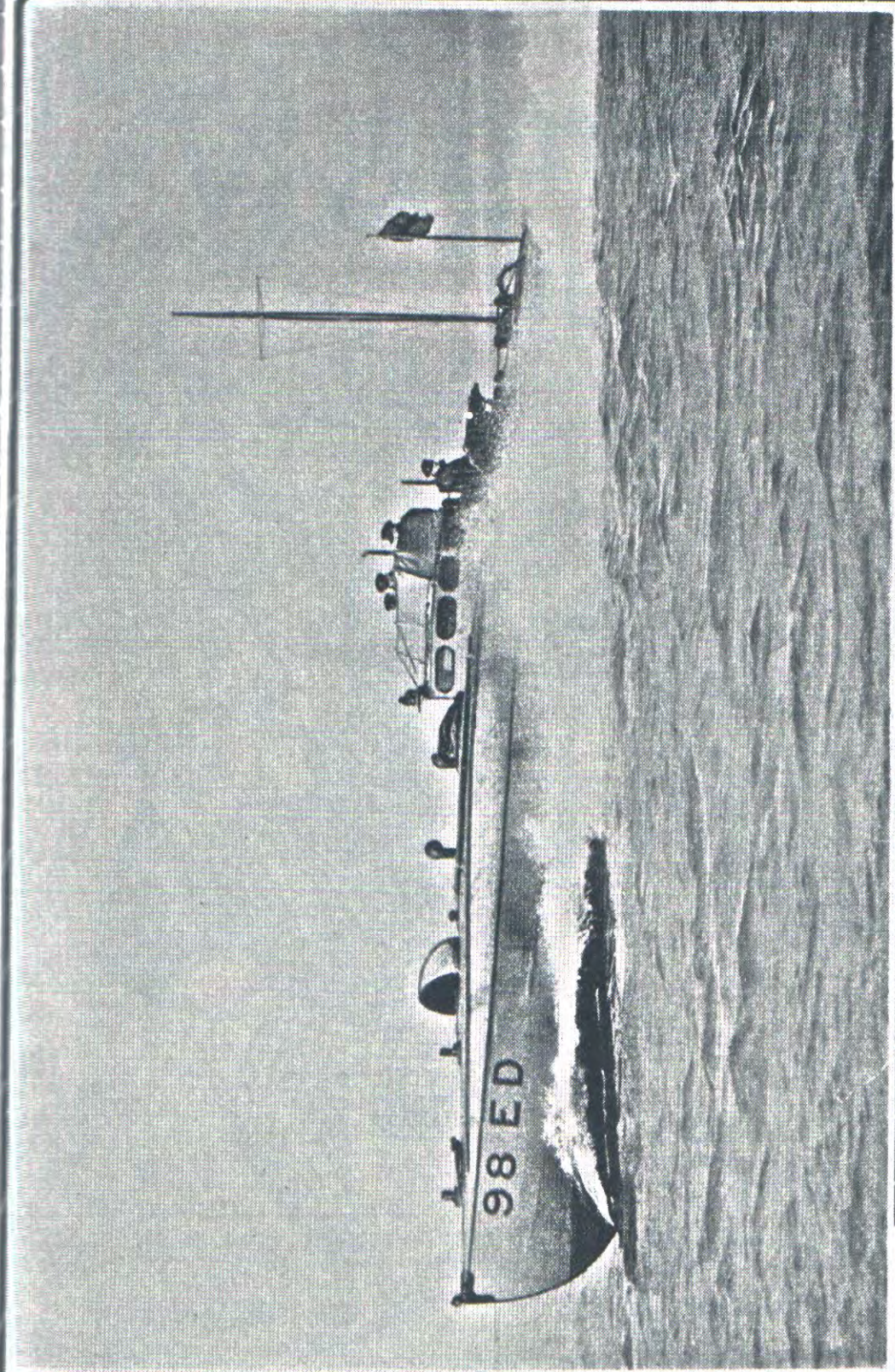
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