

FROM MILLIONAIRE TO PAUPER!

READ THE AMAZING SCHOOL STORY INSIDE!

No. 932. Vol. XXVIII.

Week Ending December 19th, 1925.

The
Magnet 2^d
Library
of
Complete School Stories.

EVERY MONDAY.



VERNON-SMITH SAYS GOOD-BYE TO GREYFRIARS!

(A tense moment in the dramatic long complete school story inside.)



Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums. Write to him when you are in trouble or need advice. A stamped and addressed envelope will ensure a speedy reply.

BOUNCE!

READING through my mail extra carefully this week, I noticed a general complaint against the "bouncer." This type of fellow, unfortunately, can be met with everywhere, as Magnetites, apparently, have discovered for themselves. He possesses little merit, is as thick-skinned as a bippo, and is really objectionable. Now, at least half a dozen of my correspondents this week have come into direct contact with a bouncer. They deplore the circumstance that, with all his cheek, and despite the fact that he is known as a bouncer, this type of fellow seems to get on. But does he? The bouncer can bounce as much as he likes, but everything that bounces comes down to earth again. The same thing happens to the "human bouncer." He prattles merrily about what he knows, what he can do, etcetera, and leaves everyone thoroughly fed-up with him. While he's bouncing he goes up to a great height—in his own estimation—but he comes down to earth with a thud when he's put to the test. He's for ever being knocked down with the coward's blow, and seldom does he impress anyone with his ability for long. When he's "rumbled," the bouncer finds himself looking round for fresh fields and pastures new. He might seem to be getting on in the world; that's his trade—to convince you against your own instincts and judg-

ment. But don't worry, my chums—I'm referring in particular to my correspondents who have met this unwholesome type of humanity—he'll never beat you in the long run. Just you plod on, whatever may be your particular task, and leave the bouncer to get on with it. He'll grow tired of wasting his time on you if he sees that you're not impressed.

MARLBOROUGH COLLEGE!

A reader from the North writes me a very interesting letter about the success of the good old MAGNET in his particular district. He tells me that he's "bagged" fifteen new readers this year. Splendid! If every Magnetite did that—well, I can only stare into the future! Perhaps 1926 will see the MAGNET's circulation trebled. But to return to my correspondent. He wants to know when Marlborough College was founded. This famous public school first saw the light of day in 1842, and was founded by the Rev. Charles Plater. Its first headmaster was the Rev. Matthew Wilkinson, and one of its greatest headmasters was Dr. Bradley. If my chum remembers to buy No. 19 of the "Schoolboys' Own Library," which is billed to be published on the first Friday in January, he will find in its magazine page a fine "nut-shell" history of this famous school.

CHRISTMAS WEEK!

Next week's issue of the MAGNET will be "labelled" a Special Christmas Week Number, and no Christmas will be complete without it. In the natural excitement of quizzing into the shops and buying presents, don't forget to place your order for your favourite paper. Christmas-pudding, etc., cannot better be digested than with a copy of the MAGNET in your hands!

"FROM GREYFRIARS TO BORSTAL!"

By Frank Richards.

This is the sequel to the magnificent story featuring Vernon-Smith that you have either just read or are about to read. I think it will make history in MAGNET circles. The fall of the Bouncer from his pinnacle of wealth to poverty is a long and nasty drop, but Mr. Frank Richards shows us how Vernon-Smith squares his shoulders and battles through, how his generosity places him in a very unenviable situation, and how his pride prevents him from squealing. Don't miss this treat of a story, whatever you do.

WORK!

Harry Wharton & Co. have piled in with a special Supplement dealing with the subject of Work. It has its serious side, but the Greyfriars literary men seem to bring humour into everything—even work! Look out for it!

"THE MYSTERY OF LONE MANOR!"

There will be another exciting instalment of this grand serial. The Green Spider, which holds the secret of the hiding-place of a valuable store of treasure, has an unhappy knack of bringing trouble to all who come into contact with it. But Ferrers Locke and Drake thrive on trouble.

PORTRAITS!

Next week, Wan Lung, the Oriental, will take a place in our Gallery. Look out for his cheeky chivvy, chums! Cheerio till next week!

YOUR EDITOR.

HAVE YOU READ THESE TWO NEW NUMBERS OF— THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY?



No. 17. "SURPRISING THE SCHOOL!"

An amazing story of Harry Wharton & Co.

By Frank Richards.

No. 18. "THE MILLIONAIRE BOOT-BOY!"

A magnificent story of famous Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.

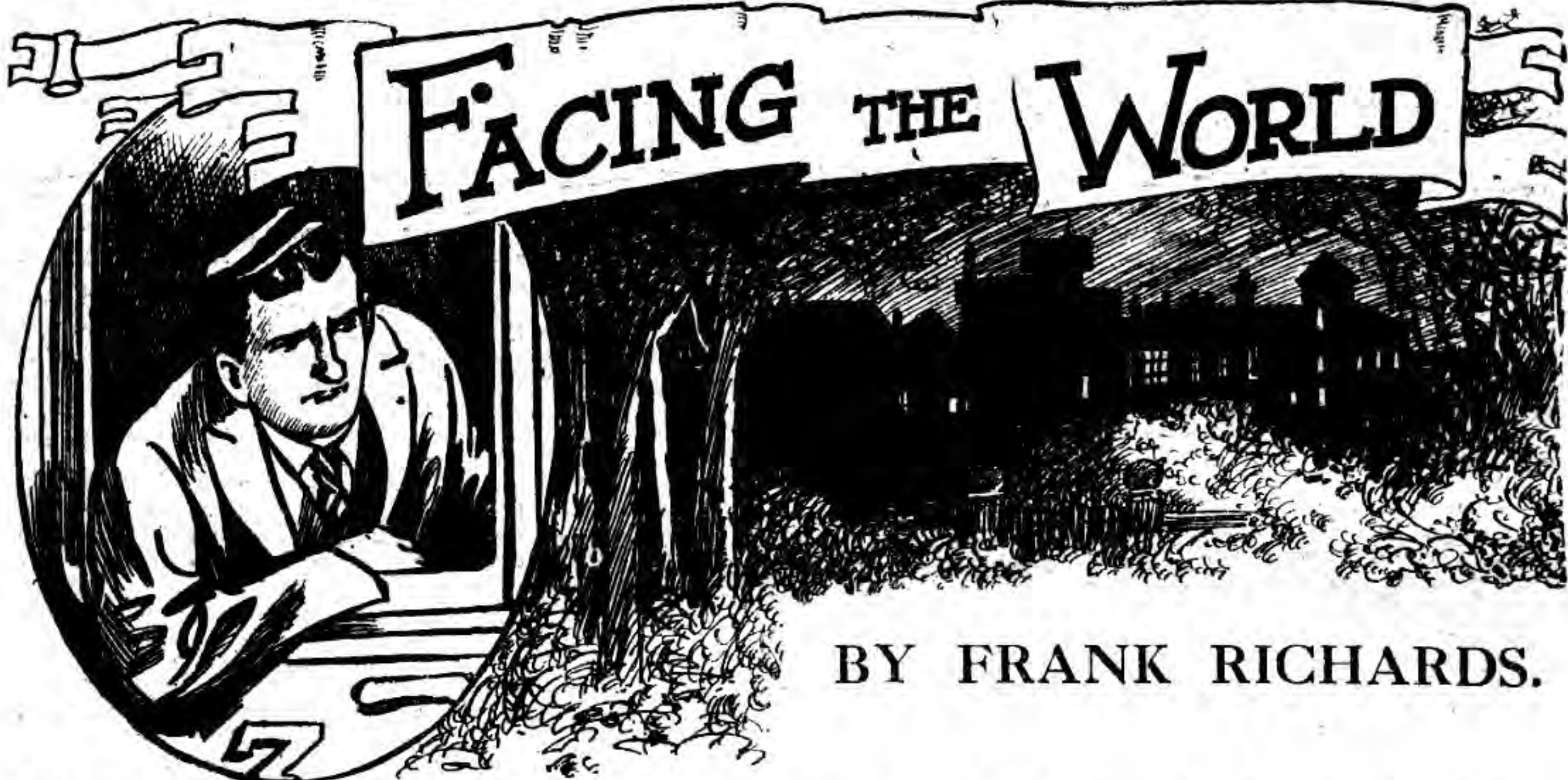
By Martin Clifford.



Price 4d. each.

IF NOT, DO SO NOW!

A COME DOWN! Son of a millionaire one minute and a pauper the next is a big enough blow for the hardest of characters. But Vernon-Smith is no weakling; he's determined to make good away from Greyfriars!



BY FRANK RICHARDS.

A Dramatic New Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, featuring Herbert Vernon-Smith, better known as The Bounder.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Startling News!

"PASS the sardines!" sang out Harry Wharton.

"And the cake," grinned Johnny Bull.

"Another cup of the esteemed teafulness would be of the worthy order, my honourable chums," added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur, passing up his cup.

Harry Wharton and his chums had just started tea, and the table in Study No. 1 groaned beneath a weight of good things.

Bob Cherry obligingly carried out his chums' requests, and helped himself to a cream-bun.

"My hat! These sardines are top-hole!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "If you fellows want any more you'd better buck up before I collar the blessed lot!"

"Wade in!" grinned Frank Nugent. "There's another tin in the cupboard I've been keeping in reserve."

"Oh, good!"

The Famous Five waded in with a vengeance.

They had spent the early part of the evening punting a football about the playing fields. The crisp winter air had given a keen edge to their appetites, and they were doing their best to dispose of that "edge."

"I'd better make some more toast!" grunted Bob Cherry as the pile of crisp, buttered slices rapidly vanished.

"Good wheeze!"

"Hand over the knife, Franky!"

Bob Cherry hacked off several chunks of bread with more force than skill, and glanced around for the toasting-fork.

"Where the thump's the blessed thing gone to?" he began. "I—"

Crash!

The remainder of his sentence was interrupted as the study door was flung open and the lean form of Fisher T. Fish dashed into the apartment.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "What's the blessed game?"

"Holy smoke!" gasped Fish, hardly able to speak for excitement. "I guess—"

"You silly ass!" snorted Wharton.

"You—you burbling jabberwock!" ejaculated Nugent.

"I guess—"

"You nearly knocked the blessed table over!" growled Johnny Bull. "If you don't explain in two ticks I'll—"

"Shut up, Johnny!" cut in Nugent, observing for the first time that the American junior carried an evening paper in his hand. "Let's hear what the silly ass has got to talk about. What's the news, Fishy?"

"News!" shouted the American junior. "I guess it's about poor old Smithy—"

"Smithy?"

"Vernon-Smith?"

"What's happened?"

"I guess it's his pater!" gasped Fish. "He's gone broke! Smash! Ruined!"

The Famous Five started.

For several moments they wondered whether the hustling junior from the U.S.A. was indulging in some elaborate leg-pull. But the excited expression on his face soon banished such an idea from their minds.

"Don't be a silly ass!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "Smithy's pater's a giddy millionaire. He's worth pots of money! You're talking rot!"

"I guess not!" snapped Fish. "It's true. I calculate it's in the paper right now. See here!"

And Fisher T. Fish brandished a copy of the "Evening Echo" in the faces of the astounded Removites.

"There it is!" he exclaimed. "The big story on the front page."

Harry Wharton almost snatched the paper from Fish's hand and stared at it. The rest of his chums jumped up from the tea-table and quickly gathered round him. As they did so, they made

out the following story printed under heading in heavy black type:

"FROM POWER TO POVERTY."

"MR. H. VERNON-SMITH LOSES HIS MILLIONS!"

"One of the biggest sensations the City has ever known was caused to-day when it was known that Mr. H. Vernon-Smith, the well-known Park Lane millionaire, was unable to meet his liabilities."

"The 'Evening Echo' learns that Mr. Vernon-Smith had been speculating heavily recently, and although it was not generally known, his affairs had reached a crisis."

"In an effort to recuperate, Mr. Vernon-Smith planned a spectacular operation, backed with every penny he could obtain."

"By two o'clock, however, the clicking tape-machines showed that he had been attacked from some unknown and unexpected quarter, and that his well-laid plans were being shattered by powerful and unknown enemies."

"The next half-hour saw his long chain of interdependent schemes crash one after another."

"Panic seized the market, and by three o'clock one of the greatest financial figures of the day was brought face to face with complete and utter ruin."

"It is stated from a well-informed source that when all demands are satisfied the one-time millionaire will be homeless and without a penny-piece, so heavily is he involved—"

The story went on to describe the ruined millionaire's early life and climb to power, together with some of the big financial coups he had achieved during the building of his fortune.

Harry Wharton stood gazing at the paper for some moments as though unable to believe his own eyes.

"My giddy aunt!" he gasped at length.

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"Phew!"

"Poor old Smithy!"

"Perhaps—perhaps it's a mistake, you chaps," said Bob Cherry slowly. "It doesn't seem possible."

"Waal, I guess it's there in black-and-white!" exclaimed Fish. "I reckon you can't get away from it."

"No, it doesn't seem like it."

The Famous Five regarded each other helplessly.

They were thinking of the effect his father's ruin would have on their Form-fellow, Vernon-Smith. The Bounder had been brought up to every conceivable luxury. He was the millionaire's only son, and had always received, not an allowance as most fellows understood it, but cash unlimited.

And now his father was ruined!

"Poor old Smithy!" murmured Nugent again.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "It must have been a pretty big smash. But, at the same time, I don't see how everything could have gone. According to what the papers say, Smithy's home will be sold up, too."

"I expect Smithy's governor must have mortgaged everything he had," said Johnny Bull. "Sometimes when a chap goes bust like that, he's left with little more than the clothes he stands up in. They even sell any policies on his life that may exist."

"Great Scott!"

"Does Smithy know what's happened yet?" demanded Johnny Bull, turning to Fisher T. Fish.

The American junior shook his head.

"Can't say," he replied. "I guess I rushed down to the gates to get the paper and see how the footer teams were going, and the first thing I saw was that story on the front page. I reckon I greased right along to you guys to show you, and didn't stop till I got here."

"Well, I think it's up to us to go along and see Smithy, anyhow!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "We can't do very much that I know of, but we can at least tell him we're jolly sorry."

"Yes, that's about all we can do," agreed Bob Cherry.

"Come on, then!"

And, forgetful of their unfinished tea, the Famous Five, with Fisher T. Fish bringing up the rear, left their study and made their way up the passage towards Study No. 4 occupied by Vernon-Smith.

They had not gone far when they encountered Harold Skinner, the cad of the Remove, and his two precious pals, Stott and Snoop.

"Heard about Smithy?" demanded Skinner.

Wharton nodded.

"Yes, jolly rough luck!" he exclaimed. Skinner sneered.

"It might take some of the swank out of him!" he exclaimed.

"Hear, hear!" added Snoop.

"That blessed pauper!" said Stott.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"There was a time in the past when Smith used to be a pal of yours, Skinner," said the captain of the Remove quietly. "But that was when he was called the Bounder—"

"Well, now he's called the pauper," sneered Skinner. "It's all round the blessed school what's happened. I expect his pater's been up to some tricky business, and will probably go to gaol. Greyfriars is no place for paup—"

Smack!

Wharton's fist shot suddenly out and caught the cad of the Remove square on his somewhat prominent nose.

"Ow! Yooooooooop!"

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Skinner gave a yell of pain and collapsed to the ground.

"You worm!" snorted Wharton, in disgust.

"Ow!" gasped Skinner. "Youb hurd by dose! Yooop!"

"And I'll hurt it again!"

"For two pins I'd hand you one, too!" added Johnny Bull, glaring at the junior on the floor.

"Yooooooooop!"

"Keep your caddish remarks to yourself in future!" snorted Wharton.

"Let me hear the word 'pauper' again and I'll—"

"Smash him!" concluded Frank Nugent grimly.

"Hear, hear!"

"Yaaaaaah!" groaned Skinner again.

Wharton dusted his knuckles with his handkerchief; and the crowd of juniors resumed their interrupted journey.

When they arrived at Vernon-Smith's study they found several other juniors already there, including Peter Todd, Mark Linley, and Bulstrode.

But Tom Redwing, the Bounder's chum and study-mate, was absent. He had left Greyfriars only a couple of days before to visit a sick aunt in Yorkshire, and had not yet returned. And in the time of his trouble Vernon-Smith missed the sympathy and advice of his level-headed chum.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry softly. "The giddy news hath spread."

Vernon-Smith was sitting on the edge of the study table, a letter in his hand. He glanced up with an amused smile as Harry Wharton & Co. entered.

"Hallo, Smithy!" began Wharton awkwardly. "We—I—we heard about what's happened, and—and we came to say we're jolly sorry."

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"I don't know if there's anything we can do," said Frank Nugent. "But if there is you can count on us. We saw in the evening paper what has happened. We hope it's not quite as bad as it appears."

"Thanks, you fellows," replied Vernon-Smith quietly. "It seems to be a pretty complete smash, though. I've just had a letter from the pater. I shall be leaving Greyfriars shortly."

The Famous Five stared.

"Leaving?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Great Scott!"

"You—you're joking!"

"Oh, I don't suppose it will be as bad as that!" gasped Bulstrode, trying to assume a cheerful air. "Something's sure to turn up, you know."

Vernon-Smith chuckled grimly.

"Yes, mostly creditors' demands," he said.

"Oh!"

Harry Wharton & Co. shifted uncomfortably.

Vernon-Smith had always appeared to them to be a somewhat cynical youth. And the stunning news he had just received did not seem to have changed him. Most fellows in similar circumstances would have been obviously cut up. But Vernon-Smith's customary coolness and self-assurance did not seem to have deserted him. And the Famous Five, although their sympathy was well meant, could not but help feeling rather uncomfortable.

"Well, I must say you're taking it pretty well!" exclaimed Bob Cherry admiringly.

The son of the ex-millionaire shrugged his shoulders.

"No good crying about it, is it?" he said. "The damage is done, and it's up to me to make the best of it. The

pater's got most of the worry, but I expect he'll survive it."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, thanks for coming, you fellows. I'd like to be alone to think things out if you don't mind," went on Vernon-Smith. "If you spot any other fellows coming along you might tell them I'm busy. I hope they'll understand."

Wharton nodded.

"Certainly! We'll see to it."

The juniors trooped out of the study and made their way in the direction of the Common-room.

When they arrived there they found the old ink-splashed chamber packed with juniors discussing Vernon-Smith's misfortune in excited voices. By now the story of his father's crash had spread all over the school, even to the domestic quarters.

At first many juniors had been hardly able to credit it. The collapse of the Bank of England itself could not have occasioned them more surprise. But every evening paper had the story, and it did not seem that they all could be mistaken.

Mostly the juniors were interested, not so much in Vernon-Smith senior's losses, as to how it would affect his son.

Vernon-Smith—a pauper!

It seemed hardly credible.

Yet it was true enough.

There were a few fellows like Skinner & Co. who secretly gloated over the one-time Bounder's misfortunes. But, unlike Skinner & Co., they had, if not the good taste, at least the discretion to keep their thoughts to themselves.

Vernon-Smith was a curious character. Indeed, his was a character few fellows understood. But, on the whole, he was a popular enough junior, with a long list of decent and unostentatious actions standing to his credit, and most of the juniors were genuinely sorry.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Typical of the Bounder!

ALONE in his study Vernon-Smith read again the letter he had received from his father. It was addressed from his City office in Throgmorton Street, and must have been written almost as soon as the ex-millionaire realised that his fortune was lost.

"My Dear Son," it read,—"*By the time you receive this you doubtless will have learned from the evening papers of the ruin that has overtaken me. I have not much to say, except that it is all in the game, and that we must meet our changed circumstances with fortitude. When everything is settled we shall be without a penny in the world. For myself, I still have my brains and experience, which should earn me sufficient to avoid actual starvation.*"

"It is you, however, about whom I am most concerned, for I fear I have not taught you the value of money."

"It is to the future, therefore, that we must both look. It is almost needless for me to say that you will have to leave Greyfriars. And since the remainder of the term cannot benefit you much one way or the other, I am endeavouring to secure for you at once a position as a clerk in the office of a friend. Your salary will not be much, of course; but with the little aid I shall be able to give you from my own earnings we should manage to get along. I will write you again when things are more settled."

"Your affectionate

"FATHER."

Vernon-Smith read the letter over several times until he almost knew every word by heart. It was typical of the man who had fought his way from the position of an ill-paid stockbroker's clerk to one of the greatest financial figures in the country that even in the hour of his defeat he should talk of looking to the future rather than deploring the past.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth and paced restlessly up and down the expensive carpet on the floor of his well-furnished study.

One paragraph in particular from his father's letter buzzed repeatedly through his mind.

He would have to leave Greyfriars!

There had been days in the past when the thought of leaving the old school would have meant little to the son of the ex-millionaire. But they were the days when he had been known as the Bounder, when he was a social pariah among the rest of the juniors, and an associate of the shady habits of the Cross Keys.

In those days Vernon-Smith had lived a lone hard life, in his cynical way, almost glorying in the fact that the hand of every decent fellow was turned against him. The good name of Greyfriars had meant just nothing to him, and the treatment accorded him by the school authorities and the rest of the fellows, in consequence of his own foolhardiness, had caused him to hate the very name of the old school.

But now things were different.

Vernon-Smith was no longer the Bounder in the true sense of the term.

Under the stimulating influence of fellows like Harry Wharton & Co., Vernon-Smith had changed. He had dropped his old associates and had completely changed his ways. He had earned the respect of his schoolfellows where before he had only earned their scorn. Greyfriars had become to the motherless son of the one-time millionaire the nearest thing he had ever known to a home. He had learned to love the name of the school which once he had hated.

While losing none of the hard-headedness inherited from his father, he had lost a lot of his cynicism. His better points had been developed, and he had learned the meaning of self-respect. His was not a weak nature that had been won over. It was a hard and selfish nature that had been shown a new view of life and had not failed to see its advantages against the folly of the old.

It had been an uphill fight to his present standing at the school, not without occasional backsliding. But against terrific odds Vernon-Smith had won through. And his victory had been greater because of that.

And now he would have to leave!

Greyfriars, the school he had learned to love, would know him no more.

Vernon-Smith smiled grimly.

He glanced at his father's letter again.

The fact that he would have to leave the old school did not appear to mean as much to his father as it did to him. His father was more concerned with the fact that he had not taught him the value of money.

Money!

Vernon-Smith's father had done his duty as he saw it—as he saw it from the point of view of a money king. He had acquired money; he had lived for money; business was his god, and he had always passed on a generous amount of money to his son. Outside that, however, he had believed his duty

done, and had more or less left the junior to fend for himself.

"Your salary will not be much," murmured Vernon-Smith, quoting from the crumpled letter in his hand. "But with the little I shall be able to give you from my own earnings we should manage to get along."

Vernon-Smith read into that sentence just a faint regret that he could not get along on his own, and in the poverty that his father would have to face he would be a drag upon him. It was possible that Vernon-Smith senior had not meant to give that impression. It seemed to the Removite, however, that his father's sub-conscious mind had betrayed him.

The son of the ex-millionaire permitted his mind to dwell upon the idea of the suggested City clerkship and all that it would mean. He was no fool, even in matters of business and finance. But he realised that his youth and lack of experience alone would tell against him. For some months he would be practically useless in any office. His father was endeavouring to obtain a position for him—in the office of a friend.

The position had not been offered, then?

If he secured the engagement at all it would be from motives of charity rather than otherwise. He would be a passenger carried by the other clerks, a useless deadhead engaged out of pity!

The junior paused in his restless pacing, and his jaw squared.

"I can't do it!" he muttered. "The job's off. The pater means well, no doubt, but I can't take it. He fought his own way in the world, and I'll do the same. He probably thinks I can't, but I'll try. What was good enough for the pater is good enough for me."

The junior seemed somewhat cheered by his decision. He had always been accustomed to pulling his own weight. He had never been dependent on others. And now the time for the greatest test of all had arrived he would show the

world that the son of Vernon-Smith, the great City financier, was no deadhead to be carried by the efforts of others. He would fight his own battle, taking only that which he was entitled to by honest labour.

"Yes, that's it," he went on decisively. "I'll write to the pater to-night, and tell him not to worry about me. I'll manage somehow."

Somehow?

The Removite realised he was up against no easy proposition. He decided, however, that no good would be done by meeting troubles half-way. He would stay at Greyfriars for another day or two, while he put his affairs in order. There would be ample time to map out some sort of programme.

Vernon-Smith folded his father's letter and placed it in the breast pocket of his jacket. Now he had come to a decision, things seemed easier and more straightforward.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I haven't had any blessed tea yet. It's no use starving unless I've got to."

The junior commenced to lay the table for a meal, but hardly had he started when there came a tap on the study door.

"Come in, ass!" sang out the junior, with well assumed cheerfulness.

The door opened, and the face of Trotter, the school page, appeared. As



"I want you to accept this from me as a little memento, Trotter," said Vernon-Smith, detaching his gold watch from his chain and pressing it into the hands of the astonished page. Trotter stared at the gift in amazement. "But—but I can't take it, Master Smith!" he gasped, holding the watch as though it burned him. "Thanking you all the same, sir, but I couldn't do it. It's gold!"

(See Chapter 2.)

a rule, Trotter wore a perpetual grin; not that he had anything to grin about, but grinning was a habit with Trotter. Just now, however, he wore an expression that was very mournful indeed.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the Removite, staring. "What's the trouble, Trotter?"

"Which the 'Ead has sent me to ask you if you'll go along to his study at once, Master Smith," replied Trotter.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Removite. "Thanks, Trotter! I'll be along in a moment."

"Yes, Master Smith."

Trotter fumbled awkwardly with the brass buttons on his jacket.

"Anything else, Trotter?" asked Vernon-Smith at length.

"Well, it's like this, Master Smith," burst out the page, after some hesitation, "begging your pardon. We've—we've 'eard in the servant's—all what's in the papers to-night, and—and I'd like to say as how I'm very sorry. It's 'ard luck, sir, that's what it is, and I hopes you won't be leaving Greyfriars like the 'ousekeeper said."

Vernon-Smith smiled grimly.

"Oh, so you've heard, have you?" he said quietly. "Well, thanks for your good wishes, Trotter. But I'm afraid the housekeeper's right. I shall be leaving Greyfriars within the next few days."

The Removite regarded the school page curiously for a moment.

"I suppose you've had to work for your living all your life, haven't you, Trotter?" he asked at length.

The page nodded.

"Which being born lowly, sir, I 'ave, sir," he replied. "But I don't complain. Things ain't turned out so bad, after all. I'm sure all the young gents 'ave always been very kind to me."

The son of the ex-millionaire nodded absently.

"Well, I've never worked for my living yet," he said slowly. "But I've got to within the near future. I may not see you again before I leave, but you're the right sort, Trotter, and I want you to accept this from me as a little memento."

As he spoke, Vernon-Smith detached his gold watch from his chain, and pressed it into the hands of the astonished page.

The page stared at the gift in amazement.

"But—but I can't take it, Master Smith!" he gasped, holding the watch as though it burned him. "Thanking you all the same, sir, but I couldn't do it. It's gold!"

The Bounder laughed.

"Keep it because I gave it you," he said.

The next moment he had gone.

Vernon-Smith made his way up the passage at a rapid pace, a curious expression on his face. He hardly knew what strange impulse had prompted him to give the trinket to the page. He still had some money in his possession remaining from the last generous remittance his father had sent him. The money doubtless would have been of more use to Trotter—if he had accepted it, which was doubtful. But although he was not aware of it, the one-time Bounder had another reason for his action.

Trotter had always worked for his living; he had taken it quite as a matter of course. Vernon-Smith's father had been a multi-millionaire. Riches had meant nothing to him. He had taken them as a matter of course.

But with the news of his father's disaster fresh in his mind, he had felt a strange feeling of kinship with the

school page which no gift of money could have shown.

Vernon-Smith reached the Head's study and tapped on the door.

Dr. Locke's kindly voice bade him enter.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Vernon-Smith Refuses!

DR. LOCKE, the venerable old Head of Greyfriars, rose to his feet as Vernon-Smith entered his study.

"You sent for me, sir?" asked the Removite, in a steady voice.

The Head nodded.

"You can guess the reason, my boy," he said, placing a hand on the junior's shoulder. "I have just had a letter from your father. I—I— My boy, I am more than sorry. It is a terrible misfortune—but, of course, it is just possible that things are not quite so bad as we suppose them to be at the moment."

"Yes, sir, it's possible, but not probable," said the Removite, with a curious smile.

Dr. Locke coughed.

"There are several things I must discuss with you, Vernon-Smith," he said, "and I will try to be as brief as possible."

"Yes, sir."

"In the first place, my boy, I understand that your father intends to take you away from Greyfriars, and that he—er—hem—has in view a clerkship in the City?"

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"While, no doubt, your father believes he is acting in your best interests I feel that with more time for consideration, he might have come to some other arrangement," went on the Head. "An arrangement, in fact, that would enable you to continue your education. Have you considered the possibilities of a post as a pupil teacher, Vernon-Smith?"

The Bounder started.

"A—a pupil teacher?" he gasped.

"Precisely!" nodded Dr. Locke.

"But surely I am too young as yet for such a position?" the junior exclaimed wonderingly. "And in any case—"

"Please permit me to conclude," interrupted the Head, holding up his hand. "As you say, you are a trifle too young for such a position. But in the ordinary course of things it cannot be very long before you pass out of the Lower School, when such a position as I have mentioned would be within your reach."

"I have a great deal of influence, and I think that, on my recommendation, such a post could be found for you in some good but smaller school. Your board would be provided, and in addition you would draw a nominal salary. At the same time, you would have ample leisure and excellent opportunities to consider your studies. It is a prospect well worth considering, Vernon-Smith, and if you are agreeable I will write to your father and make the proposition. What do you think of it?"

The Bounder swallowed a lump in his throat.

"It—it is extremely kind and thoughtful of you, sir," he said slowly, "but it would mean at least another two terms before I could pass out of the Lower School, and according to what the pater tells me, I cannot stay for even one term—"

"I have thought of that also, my boy," murmured the Head, toying with

a pen, "and—er—ahem—your father need let no financial consideration interfere with your staying on at Greyfriars."

"You mean me to stay on as a non-paying pupil, sir?" gasped Vernon-Smith, in astonishment. "To let you or someone else pay for me?"

"Tut, tut! I am asking you to stay as my guest, Smith," said the Head quietly. "Greyfriars College is not run entirely as a commercial proposition, and it would give both Mr. Quelch, your Form master, and myself, the greatest pleasure if you were—ahem—to remain with us. Of course, if your father's affairs should improve later on there would be ample time to talk of adjusting matters then. But in the meantime, you could stay on here as though nothing had happened."

Vernon-Smith's mouth twitched.

He could face misfortune with a bold front and a smile. He could stand all the hammering the world was prepared to give him as he had stood it in the past. But the genuine sympathy and practical kindness of the old Head was something that pierced his armour and gave him a feeling that he would have found it difficult to describe.

"Dr. Locke," he exclaimed, in a voice which sounded strangely unlike his own, "please do not think I am ungrateful, but—but I regret I cannot do as you wish me—"

"Listen to me, my boy," exclaimed the Head, rising to his feet.

Vernon-Smith shook his head and smiled.

"It's no good, sir," he said. "You could never induce me to avail myself of your kind offer. I—I could never stay here on those conditions, sir. It's—it's very good of you, and it's more than I could have any right to expect or deserve; but I couldn't do it!"

"You are a very foolish boy," said the Head, his kindly old face twitching. "If I may say so, Smith, I have a very special interest in you, and—"

"It's no good, sir," repeated the Removite, in a determined voice. "I have thought things over myself and decided I must stand alone. I shall not even accept the berth my father proposes to get me."

"You have decided not to take it?" gasped the Head, in amazement.

"Yes, sir. I should be no good in an office, and to take pay for a job I can't do would be the same as accepting charity—"

"But your father—"

"He means well, sir, but he doesn't understand."

"Then what do you propose to do, my boy?" demanded the Head, gazing helplessly at the grim face of the junior before him.

The Removite shrugged his shoulders. "I shall leave Greyfriars and get a job on my own," he said, in a quiet voice.

"Bless my soul!"

"I suppose you think I sha'n't succeed, sir?" smiled the junior.

The Head did not answer.

"Leave Greyfriars?" he repeated. "Bless my soul! Do you realise that in these days of unemployment trained men cannot obtain work? That men older than yourself can find nothing whatsoever to do?"

"That doesn't follow that I cannot, sir. I can at least try. I certainly shall not sponge on other people for my daily bread. I shall manage somehow."

The Head sank down into his chair and regarded the Removite closely.

"I absolutely forbid you to do any such thing," he said, at length. "Until



your father takes charge of you, I am still responsible for your welfare. You can, therefore, dismiss any such foolish notion from your mind. I hope I make myself perfectly clear, Vernon-Smith?"

"Quite, sir!" replied the junior.

"Very well, then. I do not consider that anything is to be gained by prolonging the interview. Only, understand, my boy, you must do nothing without my permission. I trust that the next time I see you you will be in a more amenable frame of mind. You may go!"

Vernon-Smith left the study.

When he had gone, Dr. Locke sank back into his chair, a troubled frown on his kindly old face.

"Bless my soul!" he murmured. "What an extraordinary boy! Yet it is no more than I might have expected. I must ask Quelch to keep the lad under close surveillance. There is no knowing what the foolish boy might do in his present frame of mind."

The son of the ex-millionaire made his way slowly back to the Remove quarters.

"My giddy aunt!" he murmured. "That was as bad as ten floggings. Still, I've made no promises."

Vernon-Smith had not proceeded far when he encountered William George Bunter, the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter paused and blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"I say, Smithy, old man——"

"Seat!"

"Really, Smithy——"

"Out of the way!" roared Vernon-Smith, who was in no mood just then for the fascinating society of William George Bunter.

"Really, Smithy, you needn't be a beast!" exclaimed Bunter in an injured tone. "I only stopped to ask you a civil question."

"Well, what is it, then?" demanded Vernon-Smith ungraciously.

"It's—it's about the stuff in your study, you know."

Vernon-Smith stared.

"What stuff?" he demanded grimly.

"Well, the old sticks and things you've got in there; the—the furniture and stuff, you know," explained Bunter, blinking. "Now your pater's gone broke and you're leaving the school,

you won't be wanting the blessed stuff, so I want to know if I can have it."

"Is that all?" asked Vernon-Smith, in an ominous tone.

Had Bunter been less obtuse he would have observed the danger signals in the Removite's eyes. But as it was he failed to observe anything of the sort. At all events, he went ahead, his piggy little eyes gleaming greedily.

"Yes, that's all, Smithy. It won't be any good to you now that you're a pauper, and I'm prepared to give you a few bob for it."

"Go hon!"



Vernon-Smith restrained himself with difficulty.

"Yes, really, Smithy. Not that it's worth much, you know, and after all, as I say, you can't take it with you. It's jolly generous of me to offer anything at all. Beggars can't be choosers, you know, and—— Ow!"

Vernon-Smith's hands shot out and dropped on the Owl of the Remove's shoulders. Bunter collapsed on the passage floor with a thud.

Bump!

"Yoooooop!" he roared. "I'm hurt!"

"You fat toad!" snorted Vernon-Smith.

"Ow!"

Vernon-Smith gave the groaning Bunter a kick of disgust and walked on.

"Ow! Beast!" gasped Bunter, rising to his feet and staring after him. "The—the blessed pauper! All because I tried to do him a good turn! His blessed stuff ain't worth tuppence! Yah!"

The Owl of the Remove raised his two fat hands to his mouth and formed them into a megaphone.

"Yah! Pauper!" he yelled at the top of his voice.

He turned to flee, but at that moment he felt one of his fat ears gripped as though in a vice.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared the

stentorian voice of Bob Cherry from behind him. "What's this game, Bunter?"

"Ow! Yooooop!" gasped Bunter in alarm. "Lemme go, Cherry! You're hurting my ear!"

Four other juniors crowded into Bunter's line of vision.

They were the remainder of the Famous Five.

"What were you yelling out after Smithy for?" demanded Wharton, with a grim frown.

"Ow! Really, Wharton!" gasped Bunter. "I—I was saying something to him, you know."

"Do you usually shout 'Pauper' down the passage when you say something to people?"

"Ow! Yes—nunno, I mean. You see, Smithy explained that—that he was a—a pauper now," gasped Bunter, lying rapidly and unskilfully, "and he



"Yah! Pauper!" yelled Billy Bunter after Vernon-Smith's retreating figure. "Yah!" He turned to flee just as the Famous Five came along, and Bob Cherry reached out a hand to grab the fat junior. (See Chapter 3.)

asked me to lend him a bob out of pity. Ow! Groooh!"

"You lying worm!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! And I was just yelling out you—you ahem!—you ain't a pauper, to—to sort of cheer him up, when that rotter Cherry grabbed my ear."

The Famous Five stared at the Greyfriars Ananias in amazement. At any other time his clumsy and absurd explanation would have sent them into roars of laughter. But they did not feel that anything connected with Vernon-Smith's misfortune was a fit subject for jesting.

"You prize liar!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"Bump him!" yelled Nugent.

"Let the esteemed bumping be of the longful and terrific order, my worthy chums."

Yelling and kicking, Bunter was whisked off the ground and bumped well and truly on the floor.

"Yow! Yooooop!" he yelled. "Lemme go!"

The Famous Five did—in fact, they all let him go at once, at a moment when his fat carcass was in the air. He fell with another loud bump and lay groaning.

"Yooooop!"

"That'll teach you not to behave like a cad to a fellow when he's down!" snorted Bob Cherry.

And with a farewell kick at the fat person of the Owl, the chums of the Remove continued on their way.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Toddy's Idea!

"WHARTON, can you spare a minute?"

The captain of the Remove stopped.

It was the day following the news of the ruin that had overtaken Vernon-Smith's father.

Lessons were over, and Harry Wharton was returning along the Remove passage from a trip to the tuckshop to lay in supplies for tea, when the voice of Vernon-Smith hailed him.

"Half a jiffy!" exclaimed Wharton. "I'll drop these parcels in the study first. I'll be back in a moment."

"Right-ho!" replied Vernon-Smith. "You might bring the other fellows along, too."

The captain of the Remove dumped his parcels in Study No. 1, and returned to Vernon-Smith's apartment a few moments later, followed by the rest of the Famous Five.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, pushing open the door. "What the—"

He broke off in amazement and stared.

Carefully arranged on the study table were a number of gold and silver trinkets, including inlaid cuff-links, dress-studs, a diamond pin, and a jewel-studded wristwatch.

"What the giddy thump—" gasped Bob Cherry again.

"Starting up as a blessed jeweller?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Or is my worthy and honourable chum establishfully opening a pawnshop as an esteemed Uncle Sahib?" grinned Inky.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the rest of the Famous Five.

"Shut the door and come inside, you fellows," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "I don't want the whole blessed Form to know what I'm doing—yet."

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Harry Wharton & Co. did as requested.

"What's the wheeze?" burst out the captain of the Remove at length.

"Oh, just sorting things out," said Vernon-Smith briefly.

The Famous Five stared.

"Sorting things out?" repeated Frank Nugent. "What do you mean, Smithy?"

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, the pater's taking me away from Greyfriars, and I'm just sorting out the things I'll need and the things I won't need."

"Oh!"

"My hat!"

The chums of the Remove gazed at each other in consternation.

"You're—you're leaving for good, you mean?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"That's it," said the Bounder. "I told you chaps I should when I received that letter from my pater."

"Yes; but—"

"Well, why the surprise?"

"Well, you see—"

"We didn't think you'd really have to go," said Wharton slowly. "We—we thought something would turn up. Oh, my hat, it's rotten!"

"But what does the Head say about it?" demanded Nugent. "We thought you'd at least stay on until the end of term."

Vernon-Smith described his interview with the Head the previous day.

"I must say it was jolly decent of him," he concluded, having recounted the Head's offer, "but I couldn't do it. You fellows have heard some of the remarks passed by certain people already. You can guess from that what sort of time I'd have if I stayed another term without payment—if I stayed as a pauper," he concluded, with a hard laugh.

"My hat! You needn't take any notice of what worms like Skinner and Bunter say," exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly. "Everyone knows what they are!"

Vernon-Smith shook his head.

"It's no good," he said. "You chaps would have refused, too, if you'd been in my place."

"I—I suppose we would," said Wharton slowly.

"Well, I've got my plans made," said Vernon-Smith. "I can't tell you exactly what they are yet, but that's not what I've asked you fellows to come along for."

The Famous Five waited expectantly.

"I've got a few things here I want you to accept as keepsakes," went on Vernon-Smith, reaching out to the table. "These silver-backed hair-brushes are for you, Nugent, and—"

"Look here, Smithy," began Nugent awkwardly, "we—you—well, why not stick to them, old man? I—I don't like taking them somehow. They might come in useful to you later on."

"Don't be an ass!" grinned Vernon-Smith. "What shall I want with silver-backed brushes?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," exclaimed Frank Nugent, as though struck with a sudden inspiration. "I could do with some brushes like those. I'll buy them off you."

Vernon-Smith frowned.

"I'm not selling them!" he exclaimed. "I want to give them to you fellows as a parting gift."

"But—but—"

"Scat!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith shortly. "If you don't want them say so and done with it!"

"I—it's not that," said Nugent. "But

it seems a—a bit rotten, you know. Like a blessed vulture waiting to swoop down—"

"Like a Bunter, you mean!" exclaimed the one-time Bounder, with a hard laugh. "The fat clam had the nerve to offer me a few bob for all the furniture in the study."

"My hat! So that was the trouble, was it?" whistled Bob Cherry. "We heard him yelling out after you'd gone, so we gave the fat toad a thumping good bumping."

"Well, anyway, the brushes are yours, Nugent. The gold links are for Cherry, the wrist-watch is Wharton's, the diamond tie-pin is for Inky, and the watch-chain is for Johnny Bull."

The Famous Five attempted to protest, but Vernon-Smith cut them short.

"Of course, if you really want us to have them, Smithy," exclaimed Wharton, "we will. But I must say it—it seems a bit thick, as Nugent says."

"Good!" grinned Vernon-Smith. "I don't really want you to have them, but it's just a habit of mine, to ask people to take things when I don't want 'em to."

The Famous Five grinned, but, feeling rather uncomfortable, nevertheless, took up their gifts, and, with a few more words to their Form-fellow, quitted the study.

When they had gone Vernon-Smith sat down and indited a letter to Redwing, his missing chum. When he had finished it he placed it on the mantelpiece, intending to post it when he went out.

A gust of wind, blowing in at the study window, caused the letter to fall and slip behind the clock and out of sight. But Vernon-Smith did not notice—he was thinking of other things at that moment.

Back in Study No. 1, Harry Wharton & Co. surveyed each other with serious faces.

All thoughts of tea had vanished from their minds.

"Look here, you chaps," burst out Wharton at length, voicing the thought that was in each junior's mind, "it's jolly decent of Smithy to want us to have these things, but—well, somehow I don't feel we ought to keep them."

"Just what I was thinking," murmured Johnny Bull in his blunt way. "The money they're worth would do Smithy a thumping sight more good just now."

"Yes, they must be worth a tidy sum," agreed Nugent.

"The foolishness of the esteemed Smith is terrific!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, we'd better think things over a bit," said Harry Wharton. "It's no good offering to buy them off Smithy. We've got to think of some other scheme. In the meantime, what about tea?"

But the juniors shook their heads.

"Don't feel like it just now," said Frank Nugent gloomily. "Let's do a bit of prep."

"Good egg!"

The juniors cleared the study table and drew out paper and pens.

With heavy hearts and minds that were far from their tasks they set to. They found the work far from congenial, but at least it served to keep their minds free from the shadow that had fallen over the future of their Form-fellow, Vernon-Smith.

An hour passed uneventfully.

"On the last lap now, Harry!" exclaimed Frank Nugent at length.

"Oh, good!"

Bob Cherry threw down his pen with a sigh of relief.

"Might manage a cup of tea now," he began. "I— Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

The five juniors leaped to their feet as the study door was opened, and Peter Todd, followed by Mark Linley, came into the room.

"What's up, Toddy?" asked Harry Wharton, noting the grave expression on Peter Todd's face.

"Look here!" exclaimed Peter excitedly. "It's about Vernon-Smith. I happen to know that he's only got a few quid in the whole wide world. From what I can make out, he's not going back to his guv'nor, but is going to try and get a job on his own instead. He'll want every bean he can get hold of to carry him over, and yet the silly ass insisted on giving Marky and me what he called a parting gift!"

As he spoke Peter Todd drew a set of gold studs from his vest pocket, while Mark Linley exhibited a pair of valuable inlaid pearl cuff-links for the junior's inspection.

"These are the things," explained Peter before the Famous Five could say a word. "We refused to take 'em at first, but when Smithy started to cut up a bit rough we took them, for the sake of peace. The silly ass! He'll—"

Wharton pointed to the trinkets he and his chums had received an hour earlier and which were now on the study mantelpiece.

"Those are what he gave us," he said. "We didn't want to take them any more than you did, but Smithy insisted."

"He's giving away quids that he'll need, that's the way I look at it," said Mark Linley in a quiet voice. "I don't think Vernon-Smith realises exactly what he's up against now his guv'nor's gone broke. My idea is that we shouldn't accept these things without seeing that Smithy doesn't lose over it. What do you fellows say?"

"That's it," nodded Peter Todd. "We thought he might have given some stuff to you chaps, too, and that's what we dropped in about."

"We were debating the same point just before prep," exclaimed Frank Nugent. "Smithy needs ready money—but he won't take a gift or a loan, and he wouldn't let us pay him for the things he gave us. We tried to hit on some wheeze to see he wasn't out of pocket over it, but I'm dashed if we could."

Peter Todd grinned. "This is where your uncle comes in," he exclaimed. "If we're all the same way of thinking, I've got a little scheme for keeping the things he's given us and yet being able to see he doesn't lose over the deal."

"My hat! Out with it, then!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Peter Todd seated himself on the corner of the study table, while the rest of the juniors gathered round.

"What about a little auction sale?" he demanded.

"Auction sale?" gasped Nugent.

"Yes, ass! Put the things up for sale, sell 'em, and give Smithy the proceeds. He can't refuse money raised on his own things."

"My hat!"

"That's not a bad wheeze."

"But, look here!" interjected Johnny Bull. "Smithy mightn't like that. He particularly wanted us to keep these things—"

"Half a minute!" exclaimed Peter Todd. "I've only told you half the wheeze. All the fellows to whom he's given things can hand them over to me,

I'll sell them—savvy? Then they can bid for their own things. All they've got to do is to tip me the wink when they've reached their limit, and I knock the article down to them. It's as easy as rolling off a form. Smithy can't refuse to take money raised on his own stuff, and he can't complain that the chaps haven't got the things he wanted them to have."

"Great Scott!"

"What a blessed brain-wave!"

"But what about the cash to bid with?" demanded Bob Cherry, diving his hand into his trousers-pocket. "I'm nearly broke. I couldn't bid more than a bob for anything, and the cuff-links he gave me are worth at least a quid."

"All O.K.," grinned Peter Todd. "I've arranged for that. Mauly says he's prepared to advance cash to any fellow who needs it, so everyone can bid. In fact, he said we can pay back by easy instalments if we like—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Mauly!"

"That's the best of being a blessed lord and millionaire all rolled into one," laughed Bob Cherry.

"Well, what about it?" exclaimed Peter enthusiastically. "How is it for a wheeze?"

GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND."

Now on Sale. Price 2d. As usual.

DON'T MISS IT, CHUMS!

The Famous Five regarded Peter Todd with looks of admiration.

"I reckon it's what old Fish would call the 'real gold-mounted goods,'" grinned Frank Nugent.

"Hear, hear!"

"Right-ho, then!" exclaimed Peter Todd. "We'll have the sale some time to-morrow. I'll tell the wheeze to the other chaps he's given things to, then we'll have the sale on the quiet. We don't want any fellows not in the know hanging around."

And, with a pleased smile on his face, Peter Todd quitted the study.

When he had gone the Famous Five chuckled.

They felt that the auction sale—even if a sort of mock auction—had solved the problem of whether they could keep Vernon-Smith's gifts or not in a very satisfactory manner.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Mauly Springs a Surprise!

AFTER tea in the woodshed, you chaps."

Peter Todd made that remark as the juniors trooped out of the Form-room after afternoon lessons the next day.

Harry Wharton & Co., to whom the remark was addressed, nodded.

"Good man! We'll be there."

Despite the efforts of the Famous Five to keep the forthcoming sale a secret among the few juniors most concerned, when they arrived at the woodshed at six o'clock they found it already packed with juniors.

In some mysterious way the news of what was "on" had spread.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! The tribe's turned up in force," grunted Bob Cherry, surveying the crowd of Removites. "I hope nothing goes wrong with Peter's little scheme."

"The hopefulness is terrific!"

"How can it?" asked Nugent.

"There's nothing to stop any of the other fellows bidding if they want to, is there?" explained Bob. "As auctioneer, Peter's compelled to knock the goods down to the highest bidder, and some other fellow might outbid any of us on the things we want. What's to stop 'em?"

"Only the price!" grinned Nugent. "We're all bidding as high as we can—and even if we're outbid it'll mean all the more for Smithy."

"That's not the point!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "The idea of the sale was that the goods should be knocked down to a chap when he tipped Peter the wink that he'd reached his limit. By that means we should all get the things as Smithy wanted us to."

"H'm! That's so!"

"Anyhow, it'll have to be a pretty wealthy sort of merchant to outbid us!" chuckled Wharton. "And I believe more than half the Form are broke in any case. I don't think there's much to worry about on that score."

"I hope not!" grunted the ever cautious Johnny Bull.

The Famous Five pushed their way into the middle of the woodshed.

At the far end they made out an old wooden washstand which had been brought along by Gosling, the school porter, for repairs. The washstand had now been requisitioned as a rostrum, and the trinkets for sale were neatly laid out in the middle of it.

And standing just behind, with his Sunday topper balanced on the back of his head, and a large coke hammer in his right hand, stood Peter Todd, all ready for business. By his side, seated on the end of an upturned soapbox, sat Mark Linley, who had been pressed into service as auctioneer's clerk.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began Peter Todd, banging the washstand with his coke-hammer for silence—"ladies and gentlemen, I have stood in this market-place for—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let a fellow get a word in! As I was saying, ladies and gents, I have stood in this market-place for five-and-thirty years, selling potions and pills and all things for ills, but never before have I come before you, my lords, ladies, and gentlemen—"

"Get on with the washing!" yelled a voice.

"Don't rot!"

Peter Todd glared.

"Who's the auctioneer?" he demanded. "You silly asses or me?"

"Get on with it!"

Peter Todd frowned.

"Well, to be serious, you chaps," he said in a quieter voice, "we can cut the cackle and get right on with the business. There's no need for me to advertise the reason for this sale. You all know it. All I hope is that you'll bid till your broke—"

"Good old Toddy!"

"Right. Now we'll start the sale."

Peter picked up the silver-backed hair-brushes which had been given to Frank Nugent.

"How much am I bid for these?" he demanded. "Guaranteed real bristle, with hall-marked silver mountings. Come along, gentlemen, how much am I bid?"

"Ten bob!" said Frank Nugent.

"I am bid fifteen shillings," sang out Peter, looking at some imaginary person other than Nugent. "Going for fifteen shillings. Any advance?"

"Make it a quid?" shouted Nugent again.

"Twenty-five bob!" came the nasal voice of Fisher T. Fish.

Nugent started.

He had not been expecting any competition from the quarter of the American junior. And, in any case, twenty-five shillings was the top price he had arranged with Peter Todd to go to. He decided to bid higher and chance it.

"Twenty-seven and a tanner!" he called.

"Thirty bob!" drawled Fisher T. Fish.

Frank Nugent glanced appealingly at Peter Todd. But if that youth saw he heeded not.

"Any advance on thirty bob?" he sang out, raising his hammer. "Going for thirty! Going—going—gone!"

Peter Todd brought the hammer down to emphasise the fact. But unfortunately for him, in his excitement, he failed to notice that his hand was in the way. The hammer caught him dead on the thumb—and he howled.

"Yoooooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience delightedly.

"Do it again, Toddy!"

"Anyhow, it's gone for thirty bob!" grunted Peter Todd, flicking his hand to and fro. "Your bargain, sir!"

And he handed the set of silver-backed hair-brushes to the grinning Transatlantic junior.

"Well, I'm thumped!" gasped Frank Nugent in an undertone to Harry Wharton. "What's Fish's blessed wheeze, I wonder?"

Wharton looked puzzled.

"I can't make it out," he replied. "I thought Fish was broke, too!"

"Come along, gentlemen!" exclaimed Peter Todd briskly. "Let's get on with the washing. The next item on the programme is a pair of best quality binoculars. How much am I bid?"

The binoculars in question had been given by Vernon-Smith to Bulstrode, and Bulstrode promptly commenced the bidding by offering a pound out of thirty shillings he had borrowed specially for the purpose from the wealthy Lord Mauleverer, the generous slacker of the Remove. But hardly had Bulstrode finished making his offer when the nasal voice of Fisher T. Fish was heard in the land again.

"I calculate I'll make it two pounds," he sang out. "I guess I've got no time to waste."

"My giddy aunt!"

Bulstrode stared at the American junior in dismay.

"What the thump—" he began.

"I guess this is an auction sale, ain't it?" demanded Fish briskly.

"Yes, but—"

"Good! Then I offer two quid!"

"The gentleman is well within his rights!" exclaimed Peter Todd, looking puzzled nevertheless. "Any advance on two pounds?"

Apparently there was no advance, and the binoculars were knocked down to the American junior.

By now, however, the rest of the Removites were beginning to regard each other with puzzled and anxious faces. Whether they liked it or not, they

realised that since the goods were being offered Fish was entitled to bid for them if he chose to. And he was certainly bidding good prices.

"There's something jolly fishy about this!" grunted Johnny Bull. "What the dickens does Fish want the blessed things for, anyhow?"

"And where the thump has he got the brass from?" demanded Frank Nugent, with a worried frown. "My giddy aunt! This beats the blessed band!"

The next item put up was the wrist-watch presented to Harry Wharton. The captain of the Remove bid briskly, but once again Fisher T. Fish raised his voice in competition and increased the bid by ten shillings.

Wharton added another five.

"I reckon we won't play at auctions," exclaimed Fish. "If this jay wants a run for his money, I guess he can have it. Every time I nod my head you kin smack another ten bob up until the article's mine. I guess that's how we do things over there."

By "over there" Fish meant the United States, whence he hailed. According to Fish nothing done in this country could compare with the way it was done "over there."

Wharton grinned to himself and decided to accept Fish's offer of a run for his money. He did not understand what curious game the American junior was up to, but he intended to make it as costly as possible. And for the next five minutes, regardless of whether he would be able to pay if by any chance Fish failed to cap his bids, he commenced to run up the price.

"Six pounds is my bid!" shouted Wharton, after a brisk bout of bidding.

He waited expectantly for the voice of the American junior to cap the bid. But Fish did nothing of the sort.

"I calculate he kin have the watch!" he grinned instead.

"Oh!" gasped Wharton, feeling rather foolish. "I—I—"

There came a yell of laughter from the crowd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fish's called his bluff!"

"And if he doesn't want it I'll have it at my previous bid," drawled Fish, peeling himself a piece of chewing-gum and placing the wrapper instead of the sweetmeat in his mouth in his excitement. "I guess— Ouch! Grooo! Yoooooooooop!"

The American junior ejected the paper from his mouth, while the rest of the Removites roared with laughter.

"All right!" exclaimed Peter Todd, regarding the American junior curiously when the excitement had subsided somewhat. "The wrist-watch goes to Uncle Sam."

The sale proceeded briskly.

But as it had started so it finished.

Every bid that was made was capped by the American junior, who seemed to be possessed of an unending supply of cash, with which he paid for his purchases. At length the sale was declared closed, and Peter Todd, now as puzzled as the rest of the juniors, climbed down from his "rostrum," leaving Fisher T. Fish the sole possessor of every article that had been offered.

"Waal, I guess that little lot has cost me fifteen quid!" grinned Fish, as the juniors crowded round him, demanding an explanation. "But I'll tell the world it's worth it, yes, gents!"

"Never mind whether it's worth it or not," grunted Johnny Bull. "I want to know what you've bought the things for, and what your blessed game is?"

You knew when it started, this sale was a—a sort of private one."

"Yes, explain!" shouted several voices.

Fisher T. Fish looked alarmed.

The juniors resented the manner in which he had butted in and outbid them, and they took no trouble to conceal the fact. They knew Fisher T. Fish of old, and, not unreasonably, they suspected that he was up to one of his many slick money-making wheezes again. They determined, however, that he should not make profit out of the presents Vernon-Smith had given them, and which they had only agreed to sell as a means of helping him. But before they showed this determination in an active manner they decided to wait and see what the American junior had to say for himself.

"What's the wheeze, Fishy?" hooted Bulstrode threateningly.

"See hyre, you jays," gasped Fish, in alarm, "I—I guess I'm only acting as agent. I reckon some guy just hired me to buy in for him. I calculate—"

"What's the trouble, begad?" interrupted a languid voice from the woodshed door.

The juniors turned and observed the slim form of Lord Mauleverer supporting himself gracefully against the door-post.

Several excited voices explained to the schoolboy earl what had happened.

"The skinny rotter says someone hired him to buy in!" snorted Ogilvy. "But it's my opinion he's bought 'em to sell. If he has—"

"That's all right, dear boys," murmured Lord Mauleverer languidly. "Fish is telling the truth, begad! I know that, because I'm the fellow whom he's acting for. Beastly fag attending auctions, so I got Fish to do it on a commission basis for me, begad!"

"Oh!"

"But—but what do you want with the blessed things?" demanded Bulstrode.

"Nothin', dear boy," drawled the slacker in a tired voice. "I just bought them to present for sale again. Just to make the business a bit brisk, you know. Now you can buy 'em as arranged, if Toddy doesn't mind selling 'em again."

"My giddy aunt!" gasped Wharton, as the meaning of the slacker's explanation dawned upon him. "He's bought them to give back for sale again!"

"Three cheers for Mauly!" yelled Bulstrode.

But the slacker of the Remove, his business over, had drifted languidly away again.

"Well, come on, chaps," grinned Peter Todd, moving over to his "rostrum," "we've got to start all over again!"

Once again Todd picked up his hammer, and the second time the sale proceeded as at first intended.

"My giddy aunt!" gasped Peter Todd, when it finished. "We haven't done badly out of this deal! There's the cash you chaps paid for purchases, and here's the fifteen quid I took from Fishy when he was bidding for Mauleverer."

"Well, we've got a pretty useful sum to hand over to old Smithy now," grinned Bob Cherry.

"And we've all got the keepsakes as he intended," added Harry Wharton. "I must say old Mauly, one way and another, came up to scratch like a blessed sport!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's get back to the School House," suggested Bob Cherry. "We'll just

finish checking things up and then go along and tell Smithy what we've done."

"Good egg!"

"Come on, then!"

And feeling they had done a very good day's work indeed, the juniors trooped out of the "auction-room" and returned to their own quarters.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Bids Farewell!

"LETTER for you, Smithy!"

Hazeldene uttered that remark as he put his head round the door of Vernon-Smith's study and handed him a letter which had arrived by that evening's post.

"Thanks, Hazel!"

"Not at all. I thought it might be important, so I brought it along at once."

"Good!"

Hazeldene closed the door again, and Vernon-Smith studied the postmark on the envelope. It was addressed in his father's handwriting, and had been posted in the City.

The Removite ripped open the envelope and quickly scanned the contents, which read:

"My Dear Son,—I have just received your letter, in which you tell me that

you do not intend to accept the berth I proposed to get for you. Perhaps you are right in your decision to stand alone. I am glad to hear you have sufficient money to carry you through. If you need more, let me know. I have written to Dr. Locke to tell him you have my permission to act in whatever manner you consider best. After all, your future is your own. Keep in frequent touch, and let me know how you fare.—Your affectionate

"FATHER."

The Bounder smiled grimly.

"Well, that's that," he muttered. "I didn't expect the pater would exactly break his heart if I didn't show up in the City. He'll be able to manage better without me hanging round his neck. There's no need to prolong the agony now."

The Removite replaced the letter in the envelope, and, leaving the apartment, made his way up the passage in the direction of Dr. Locke's study.

The Head was there when he arrived, and he looked up in surprise as the junior tapped and entered.

"I trust you have come to tell me you have reconsidered your decision of the other day, Vernon-Smith?" he said kindly.

"I'm afraid not, sir," replied the Removite, coming to the point at once. "Bless my soul!"

"In fact, I have decided to leave at once, sir. I have written to my father, and he has given me permission to do as I think best."

The Head stared.

"Do I understand your father has given you permission to leave Greyfriars, and—ah—seek employment, as you suggested?" he gasped, in amazement.

"Yes, sir. I believe he wrote you to that effect when he wrote me. You will probably find the letter in your evening mail."

Dr. Locke rose from his chair in an obvious state of agitation.

"But—but—Bless my soul! This is most foolish!" he gasped. "Really, my boy! I hoped that your father, at

least, would see things from my point of view. I—goodness gracious!"

The Head sank down into his chair again.

"I don't think there's very much surprising in it, sir," said the Bounder quietly. "My father worked his way up from the ranks. Why should it be foolish for me to want to earn my own living?"

The Head did not answer immediately.

"Are you determined on this foolish course, my boy?" he asked, at length.

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"I shall go to Courtfield to-night, sir," he said. "I have an idea I may be able to find something to do there. There are several people I know who might help me. In any case, since I must go sooner or later, I may as well go at once and start looking for a job in the morning."

The worried lines beneath the old Head's eyes seemed to deepen.

"Very well, Vernon-Smith," he said, at length, "if you are determined, I do not see how I can prevent you. Nevertheless, I think you are a very foolish lad. However, if your mind is made up, I can but wish you from the bottom of my heart the very best of luck!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"You must promise to let me know how you get on, and whether there is anything I can do for you at any time."

"I will, sir!"

Dr. Locke held out his hand. As the Removite gripped it, and looked into the kindly eyes of the man who had almost been a father to him during his somewhat chequered life at Greyfriars, his good resolve to go out and fend for himself all but broke down. He pulled himself together with an effort, however, and smiled.

"I—I'm sorry I can't stay as you wish me to, sir," he said quietly. "But—but I don't think you can understand how it would be. There is more than one reason, and—"

"Perhaps I understand more than you think, my boy," returned the Head



"Any advance on thirty bob?" sang out Peter Todd, raising his hammer. "Going for thirty—going—going—gone!" Peter brought the hammer down to emphasise the fact. But, unfortunately for him in his excitement, he failed to notice that his hand was in the way. The hammer caught him dead on the thumb—and he howled. "Yoooooop!" "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the audience delightedly. (See Chapter 5.)

gravely. "You will not forget to see Mr. Quelch before you go?"

"No, sir!"

"A curious and complex character," he murmured to himself, as he resumed his seat. "I—I sincerely trust the lad will come to no harm!"

Vernon-Smith did not spend a great deal of time taking his farewell of Mr. Quelch. And when it was over he hurried to the dormitory to pack a few essential things into a suit-case.

Most of his property he had disposed of to various fellows in the school, and the study furniture had been taken off his hands by Mr. Lazarus in Friardale village, who had allowed the junior as much as he could for it without injuring too severely his business instincts.

The rest of his things, such as they were, the Removite intended to leave at the school until he had arranged something definite and was able to send for them.

In the privacy of the empty dormitory he examined his money.

From that which remained of the last remittance his father had sent him before the crash, together with what he had obtained from various other sources by the sale of his property, he had accumulated a total of close upon twenty pounds.

It was not much as Vernon-Smith had been accustomed to regard money, but he calculated that by care and thrift it would more than see him through until he could land some sort of employment.

He recommenced his packing with a lighter heart.

He had not been at work long, however, when the dormitory door suddenly opened and Peter Todd appeared.

"Hallo!" gasped Peter. "We've been looking all over the blessed place for you!"

He broke off short, and stared at the open suit-case.

"What's the wheeze?" he demanded quickly.

"Packing up," returned Vernon-Smith.

There came a sound of many footfalls in the passage without, and a crowd of juniors, headed by the Famous Five, entered the dorm.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, staring. "What's the giddy idea, Smithy?"

"Packing up!" repeated Vernon-Smith briefly. "I'm leaving to-night."

"To-night?" echoed several voices.

"My aunt!"

"But—"

"I say, this is a bit sudden, isn't it, old man?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We didn't think you'd be going yet. You didn't say the other day it would be as soon as this—"

"Well, I am," laughed Vernon-Smith. "I've seen the Head and told him. The village hack will be at the gates, so I can catch the last train to Courtfield in about ten minutes. I phoned from the prefects-room on my way from Quelch's."

The juniors stared.

True, the Removites knew that the Bounder would be leaving; but now, with the open suitcase before him, it brought the fact home to them with sudden realisation.

"What's the idea of going to Courtfield, anyway?" asked Bulstrode.

"Might as well go there as anywhere else," replied Vernon-Smith. "But the main idea is to land a job. If I don't buck up I sha'n't be packed in time. I'll see you fellows before I go."

"Hold on a minute!" snorted Peter Todd. "We've been hunting all over the blessed place for you as it is. It's a jolly good job I thought of looking in here, it seems."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Peter!"

Todd handed Vernon-Smith an envelope.

"What's this?" demanded the Removite, with a puzzled expression.

"Why not look and see?" grinned Peter.

Vernon-Smith opened the envelope, and gazed at its contents.

"My giddy aunt!" he gasped. "It's full of quid notes. You've made a mistake, Toddy."

"No mistake about that," said Peter. "Twenty-five there should be."

"But what's the idea?" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "What have you given them to me for?"

"Why, they're yours," explained Bob Cherry. "You see, with those keepsakes you gave us we—we did a bit of business—"

"Sort of used them as capital," put in Wharton. "After we'd done the business we all got our keepsakes back—"

"And that's the profit!" concluded Peter Todd triumphantly.

Vernon-Smith coloured.

"It's jolly good of you fellows," he said. "But I'm not taking this money, if that's what you want me to do—"

"Don't be a silly ass!" snorted Bob Cherry. "The money's yours—not ours!"

"It's not mine," protested Vernon-Smith. "And I'm not taking it."

"Look here—"

"I mean it, so why argue the point?"

"Don't be an ass, Smithy—"

"Well, I don't need it, anyway," continued the Removite, closing the suitcase he had been packing with a snap. "It's very decent of you fellows, but I've got as much as I need."

Harry Wharton & Co. attempted to argue, ably supported by Mark Linley and several other juniors. But, despite all their protestations and entreaties, nothing could shake Vernon-Smith's resolution.

"It's no good!" groaned Peter Todd in despair. "He's as obstinate as a blessed mule!"

The juniors gazed at each other with disappointed faces.

Their scheme had been conceived and carried out with the very best of intentions. But Vernon-Smith, apparently, had experienced no difficulty in seeing through it. It was obvious to the hard-headed and practical junior that it was nothing more nor less than a wheeze to provide an excuse for offering him money.

"Sorry to hurt your feelings, you fellows," he said. "But, honestly, if I thought I'd need it, I might think differently about it."

"Oh, you're a silly ass!" snorted Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!" shouted several voices. Vernon-Smith grinned.

"You're all silly asses, too!" he exclaimed. "But you are not bad sorts of silly asses all the same."

"Rats!"

Vernon-Smith picked up his suitcase and moved to the door. The rest of the juniors followed him, and together they made their way out to the school gates where the village hack was already waiting.

"Well, so-long, you chaps!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "I—I'm sorry I'm going in a way. But I sha'n't forget you—"

"Good-bye, old chap! Write to us—"

Many hands were thrust out for the Removite to shake.

As the Bounder looked at the grave faces of his school-fellows, and thence to the ivy-covered buildings of Greyfriars behind them, a lump came into his throat. But he summoned up a cheerful grin and climbed into the waiting hack.

His one regret was that his chum, Tom Redwing, was not there to bid him good-bye with the rest of the fellows. Vernon-Smith wondered how long it would be before he received a reply to his letter.

But in the excitement and worry of packing and leaving he had forgotten to post that letter.

Tom Redwing did not know.

"Good-bye, Smithy!"

"Good luck, old man!"

The driver cracked his whip, and the ancient horse started up.

"Give him a cheer," yelled Wharton suddenly.

"Hip-pip—"

"Hurrah!"

The cheer was a rather feeble effort. The juniors did not feel much like cheering at that moment.

Vernon-Smith leaned out of the hack window, and waved as the driver turned the bend in the road. The next moment he was lost to view. The juniors round the gates stood listening to the clatter of the horse's hoofs until they faded away.

"Well, he's gone," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"And he wouldn't take our money."

"He's got some pluck, though."

"Yes. Oh, this is rotten! Let's get back!"

And almost in silence the Removites made their way back to the School-House for call-over which Vernon-Smith had answered for the last time.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Figure at the Window!

THE next few days at Greyfriars passed very uneventfully.

Somehow or another the old school did not seem quite the same place to the Removites without the familiar face of Vernon-Smith.

His old place in the Form-room was still vacant, a fact which constantly brought him to the juniors' minds during lessons. True, he had not played a very prominent part in the domestic life of the Remove like certain other fellows did.

This week's

BOYS' REALM

(On Sale Wednesday, December 16th.)

Contains the opening chapters of a sensational new League Football Serial by Robert Murray, entitled

THE TEAM THEY COULDN'T CRUSH!

This wonderful yarn will hold you spell-bound from first word to last. It is one of the finest "Soccer" stories that have ever been written. Besides this you will find another grand long complete footer tale by A. S. Hardy, three other stories, two football competitions, and a special article by Harry Chambers (Liverpool F.C.) on "When I was a Boy!"

Make sure of this week's BOYS' REALM.

Wednesday's Wonderful Twopennyworth.

like Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry—or even Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, in another sense. But Vernon-Smith was one of those fellows whose absence was noticed more than his presence.

A week passed by without any news of him being received.

"I'd like to know what's happening to him!" exclaimed Mark Linley to a group of juniors in the Common-room on the seventh day.

"I don't think it's anything very bright, whatever it is," said Johnny Bull. "If things had turned out as Smithy was hoping he'd have been sure to let us know by now. You can take it from me, we sha'n't hear a word until he's fixed up."

"Nunno. I suppose not."

Wednesday arrived, but still no news came of the absent junior.

"I think I'll slip over to Courtfield on the jigger this afternoon and see if I can hear anything," Wharton told the rest of the Famous Five during dinner.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "We'll all go!"

"Someone's sure to be able to tell us something. There are quite a few people who knew Smithy—or used to know him," added Frank Nugent.

"I could make a pretty good guess at what's he's doing!" sneered Harold Skinner, the cad of the Remove from the other side of the table. "If you ask me, he's up to his old tricks! I reckon—"

"Oh, shut up, Skinner!" snorted Wharton in disgust. "Any worm can run a fellow down when his back's turned."

"Well, that's my opinion," went on the cad of the Remove, secure from the wrath of Harry Wharton & Co. by the fact that Mr. Quelch, although out of hearing, was presiding at the head of the table. "You can take it or leave it. He's probably found he can't get a job and gone back to his old gambling tricks for a living."

"Rats!"

"Bejabers, an' 'tis meself as will give ye a punch on the skinny nose of yez, ye spalpeen!" hooted Micky Desmond, the lad from the Sorrowful Isle. "Say another word, an' I'll do it now, begorra!"

Skinner shrugged his shoulders and subsided.

The cad of the Remove was not a particular favourite with the rest of the Form, and he had an idea that unless he held his tongue the hot-headed Irish junior would be as good as his word, whether Mr. Quelch was present or not.

When dinner was over the juniors trooped out of the dining-hall.

Harry Wharton & Co. made their way to the cycle-shed, and, mounting their machines, set off for Courtfield as arranged.

Skinner's remarks had made them feel rather uneasy. They remembered the days when Vernon-Smith had lived up to his name as the Bounder. In those days Vernon-Smith had been known not only as a gambler, but one who was well able to hold his own in any shady company.

Indeed, for that matter, Vernon-Smith's dexterity with cards had been almost uncanny. He had been able to "flap a deck" in a manner that might have turned any professional sharp green with envy. It was unlikely that he had lost that skill even as the result of long disuse.

Certainly Vernon-Smith had reformed. He had long since given up his vicious habits, and had dropped in a very definite manner all his old associates.

"MAGNET" PORTRAIT GALLERY.

No. 16—Peter Hazeldene (of the Remove).



A wayward, passionate youth who finds the "wrong turnings" of life more to his liking than the straight and narrow path—but only up to a point. That point reached, Peter Hazeldene indulges in self pity and remorse and is usually hauled out of a scrape in the nick of time by Harry Wharton & Co., who interfere rather than Hazel should disgrace his sister Marjorie, of Cliff House. It is a remarkable fact that Hazeldene's lapses into blackguardism are coincident with the times he has money in his pocket. As the money goes, so Hazel repents and "reforms." He is likeable enough, however, when he is running straight, exhibiting some of the charm of his fascinating sister. A clever goalkeeper, and quite a useful cricketer, Hazeldene could be a regular member of the junior eleven if he chose to keep fit. Shares Study No. 2 with Tom Brown and George Bulstrode.

But Harry Wharton & Co., knowing his curious mental make-up as they did, could not help wondering what would happen if the son of the ex-millionaire found himself unable to obtain honest employment, and with his funds running out.

"Suppose—"

Harry Wharton & Co. dismissed the thoughts Harold Skinner had put into their minds as unworthy. True, such a lapse in certain circumstances might be possible, but it was hardly probable.

Whatever might happen to Vernon-Smith, they told themselves, he would not go back to his old ways.

As for Harold Skinner & Co., back in the safety of their own study, they grinned.

"Got Mr. Magnificent Wharton's rag out when I said that about Smithy, didn't it?" asked Skinner of his two precious pals.

"He, he, he!" sniggered Snoop. "There's many a true word said in jest."

Skinner shook his head.

"I don't think Smithy'll get back on the old game," he said. "I believe that since he's been playing the good Georgie stunt with Wharton and his crowd he's lost his nerve."

"Well, what about a run down to the village," suggested Stott. "I want to get some fags."

"Good wheeze! Let's go now. We're not so likely to get spotted if we buzz down before the crowd get there."

The three cads picked up their caps, left the School House, and a few minutes later they were on their way to Friar-dale. Although it was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, when they reached the village they found that, as yet, few of the fellows from the school had arrived there.

Skinner & Co. walked through to the far end, and, after twisting about various small back streets, made their purchase of cheap cigarettes at a small general shop that also possessed a licence to sell tobacco.

"What about wandering round to that barn past the Cross Keys for a quiet whiff?" suggested Stott.

"I'm on!" exclaimed Skinner. "Come on!"

The three cads made their way back to the little village High Street, and out by way of the towing-path to the Cross Keys public-house, the haunt of Mr. Banks, the local bookmaker, and his rascally associates.

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 932.



THE GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 253.

HARRY WHARTON, EDITOR

Week Ending Dec. 19th.



EDITORIAL!

HARRY WHARTON.



I FIND myself in a pretty pickle this week—a sorry plight, forsooth! The members of my editorial staff have organised a lightning strike, and they have struck!

Here am I, left to grapple single-handed with the production of this issue. Offers of help come pouring in, but the would-be helpers will, I believe, prove more of a hindrance than a help. You see, they haven't the journalistic talents of such fellows as Frank Nugent, Mark Linley, Dick Penfold, and Smith. They are not masters of craft. They know more about plum-puddings than poetry, and they are happier frying sausages than writing stories. Nevertheless, I appreciate the generous spirit which prompted them to come to the rescue when they saw that my staff had deserted me.

"What's it all about?" "Who started the strike?" "Have the Bolshies come to Greyfriars?" These and many other questions will be on the tips of your tongues.

The responsibility for the strike rests upon the shoulders of my chum—for we are still chums, despite the upheaval—Bob Cherry.

Bob has filled the post of Fighting Editor ever since the "Greyfriars Herald" was launched. He has performed his pugilistic duties faithfully and well. Whenever unwelcome and unwanted guests have strayed into my editorial sanctum, Bob has ejectfully removed them on the neckful portion of their anatomies, as Inky would say.

Now, the Fighting Editor's salary is half-a-crown a week. I dare say a Fighting Editor in Fleet Street would get slightly more than this, because he would probably have a wife and family to keep. But Greyfriars isn't Fleet Street, and I consider half-a-crown a week to be jolly good pay.

During the past week Bob Cherry has been extra busy. The unwelcome visitors have been more numerous than usual, and they have lingered longer. Some of them have been difficult customers to eject. Coker of the Fifth, for instance. It took Bob nearly half an hour to eject Coker, and Bob himself was ejected twice in the process!

At the end of a most strenuous week Bob put in a request for overtime pay. He wanted an extra "tanner" for his services. I put my foot down very firmly, and said "No!"

Before you run away with the idea that I am a mean, stingy fellow, let me explain why I turned down Bob's request. If I were to be so foolish as to give him an extra sixpence, I should be making a rod for my own back. Instantly all the rest of my staff and contributors would be up in arms. The story-writers would be clamouring for more

pay; the poets would refuse to versify unless a farthing per line was tacked on to their remuneration. The artists, like Oliver Twist, would also cry out for more. And what would be the end of it all? Why, the jolly old "Herald" would go bankrupt!

On my refusing to meet his wishes, Bob Cherry promptly organised a lightning strike, and the staff has rallied around him. I have tried to get the silly duffers to listen to reason, but all in vain. However, strike or no strike, the work of the world must go on. You will see strange names in this issue, and still stranger contributions; but I hope that by next week the strikers will have come to their senses. Anyway, whether the strike lasts a week or a month or a year, I am determined to hold on and hold out, and to keep the flag gaily flying!

HARRY WHARTON.

TO THE STRIKERS!

By ALONZO TODD.

STRIKERS, proud and haughty,

Get you back to work!

Really, it's most naughty

Thus to slack and shirk.

Back, boys, to your labours,

To your inky toil;

Burning, with your neighbours,

Pints of midnight oil!

You have ceased from scribbling,

Pens no more you wield;

You're engaged in dribbling

On the football-field.

You have left poor Harry

Minus yarns and verse;

Pause! Reflect! Pray tarry!

Ere the strike gets worse.

When a ship is sinking,

Rats all scuttle clear;

And to-day, I'm thinking,

A parallel is here.

You have left your duties,

Cast your pens aside;

Very wrong of you 'tis—

Pocket, now, your pride!

Cherry, you're the leader,

Bid this conflict cease!

So that every reader

Has his mind at peace.

Stop this senseless striking,

Stop it straight away!

It's to no one's liking—

You will rue the day!

Cherry, Nugent, Smithy,

Penfold, Bull, and Brown,

Hear my words, I prithee,

Tremble at my frown!

Should this strike continue,

Heedless of my call,

Angry youths will skin you—

Traitors, one and all!

LOOK OUT FOR A
SPECIAL "WORK"
SUPPLEMENT
NEXT WEEK.



"Strike" Snapshots.
By A Looker-On.

AS soon as the strike of the "Herald" staff was officially declared by Bob Cherry there was quite a sensation in the Remove. Lots of fellows expressed strong sympathy with the strikers. Others thought it would be rather rough on the Editor, and they flocked to his assistance. Among the would-be helpers was Billy Bunter, who undertook, for "a consideration," to fill every issue of the "Herald" while the strike lasted. The "consideration" Bunter asked for was five pounds, but Harry Wharton showed the fat junior no consideration whatever!

LAST night the strikers formed a procession in the Close. It was a torchlight procession, which rather reminded one of Bonfire Night. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull marched in front bearing a banner, with the inscription:

"WE WANT FAIR PLAY
For Our Fighting Editor!"

RALLY ROUND, STRIKERS!
No more work until justice is done!"

The supporters of Harry Wharton attempted to get possession of the banner, and there was an unseemly scuffle close to the Head's window. The strikers looked like getting the worst of it, but the Head intervened at the crucial moment, and the rival factions broke up.

DICK PENFOLD, one of the strikers, was jolly near caught napping. In his red-hot zeal and enthusiasm, he wrote a rousing strike poem for the "Herald," quite forgetting that he had pledged himself to send in no more contributions! Fortunately, Bob Cherry got hold of the verses in the nick of time and tore them up, and scattered them to the winds. We understand that the poem commenced:

"Rise, like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number!"

I have a faint suspicion that I have seen something remarkably similar to the above in the works of Shelley!

THE coolest bit of "nerve" I have ever come across was the colossal cheek of the strikers in demanding "strike pay" from the very Editor they were on strike against! They actually wanted Wharton to pay them for striking! Wharton made no reply to their impudent demand. Probably he was speechless!

HOW long will the strike last? That is the burning question of the moment. I have interviewed Harry Wharton on the matter, and he said, "My flag will never strike!" I have also interviewed Bob Cherry, the leader of the strikers, and he said, "My strike will never flag!" So that's that! It really seems that the jolly old strike will emulate Tennyson's brook, and go on for ever!

FOR latest strike news, see the "STOP PRESS" corner.



"The Coker Chronicle!"

Taking advantage of the strike of the Greyfriars Herald staff, the great Coker attempts to launch a paper of his own—with surprising results!

By SAMPSON QUINCY IFFLEY FIELD:

"TEA-TIME!" announced Coker of the Fifth. "Would you kids care to join me? There's a top-hole spread in my study."

A group of juniors, chatting together on the School House steps, suddenly left off talking and stared at Coker. Six separate and distinct stares, in fact, were bestowed upon the great man of the Fifth.

"It's all ready," said Coker genially. "Will you step along?"

The juniors continued to stare blankly at Coker. They were surprised. They were astonished. Dumbfounded, in fact, would not have been too strong a word to describe their emotions.

Here was Horace Coker, the lordly man of the Fifth, who bestrode the narrow world of Greyfriars like a Colossus, and who usually ignored the very existence of the junior fry, actually inviting a number of Removites to tea!

Coker beamed at the juniors.

"I'm not pulling your legs if that's what you think," he said. "There's a really handsome spread in my study, and I want somebody to help me shift the grub."

"Well, we're always willing to do a chap a good turn!" said Vernon-Smith, with a grin. "We'll come!"

Horace Coker led the way to his study in the Fifth Form passage. The six juniors trooped gaily at his heels. They were all members of the staff of the "Greyfriars Herald," and they happened to be out on strike at the moment. Bob Cherry, the Fighting Editor, had put in a claim for an increase of salary. Harry Wharton, the Editor, had not seen his way clear to grant the increase. A strike had therefore been declared, and the rebels had been discussing the position when Coker had turned up with his amazing invitation.

Magnificent, indeed, was the spread which had been prepared in Coker's study. The table groaned, so to speak, beneath the weight of the goodly viands, and the eyes of the juniors glistened as they gazed at the array of good things.

"Sit down, and pile in!" said Coker graciously. "This is Liberty Hall, remember."

For the next twenty minutes the merry clatter of knife and fork echoed through Coker's study.

Bob Cherry looked up from his plate at last.

"Where's Potter and Greene?" he inquired.

Coker frowned.

"I've had to kick them out," he explained. "They refused to help me with a little scheme of mine, so I showed them the door."

"Oh!"

"The fact is," said Coker, glancing eagerly at his guests, "I'm wanting a little help. You kids are on strike, I understand?"

"That's so," said Vernon-Smith.

"You've packed up writing for Wharton's rag?"

"Yes."

"Well, p'raps you'd like to give me a hand with mine?" said Coker. "The 'Greyfriars Herald' will have to put up the shutters now that the staff is on strike. Wharton will never be able to run it on his own. So I consider the time is ripe to bring out a new paper—a paper with plenty of punch and pep in it that will take Greyfriars by storm, and make everybody sit up and take notice!"

Coker paused. His guests exchanged winks across the table. They could understand now why Coker had invited them to tea. He had an axe to grind. He proposed to launch a paper of his own, and he wanted to commandeer the staff of the "Greyfriars Herald" for his purpose.

"I'm calling my paper the 'Coker

Chronicle," Coker went on, "and I want to get the first issue out this evening."

"Great pip!" ejaculated Frank Nugent. "You'll have to hustle, Coker!"

"The first number won't be printed," said Coker. "It will be written out by hand, and copies run off on a duplicator. If each fellow does his fair whack, we ought to get the paper out by bedtime, and distribute copies in the dormitories—see? Now, are you kids game to help me?"

"Certainly!" said Bob Cherry, with a covert wink at his chums. "Rely on us, Coker. When do we start?"

"Now!" was the brisk reply. "Give me a hand with clearing the table, and then we'll get down to business!"

The table was cleared with drastic swiftness—so drastic, indeed, that a number of cups and saucers were swept on to the floor and shattered to fragments. But Coker didn't seem to mind. He was too full of his new scheme to worry about such trifles.

"Now, you kids must clearly understand," said Coker, with a note of sternness in his voice, "that I'm the editor, proprietor, and publisher of my paper. You are merely subs, and will take your orders from me!"

"To hear is to obey!" murmured Bob Cherry meekly.

"Here's some paper and some special duplicating ink," said the editor-cum-proprietor-cum-publisher. "Now, I'll give you your various jobs. I shall write the Editorial, of course. You, Cherry, will write an article, entitled 'Why Coker Should Be Captain of Greyfriars.'"

"But—but why should you be?" asked Bob innocently. "To tell you the truth, Coker, I can't think of a single reason why you should be captain of Greyfriars!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker frowned.

"No cheek!" he said sternly. "Just you go ahead with that article. You, Bull, will write an essay explaining 'Why Coker is Popular.'"

"Are you popular, Coker?" asked Johnny, in surprise. "First I've heard about it. Still, we live and learn."

Coker glared at Johnny Bull, and turned to Penfold.

"You're a bit of a poet, I believe?" he said. "Well, I want you to do me a poem cracking me up."

"Wouldn't a coke-hammer be more suitable for that purpose?" asked Penfold.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The editor of the "Coker Chronicle" was finding it increasingly difficult to keep his temper. He turned to Frank Nugent.

"I understand you're a pretty good artist," he said. "I shall want a full-page drawing of myself for the cover. Can you manage that?"

"Yes—if you'll lend me a picture of a gorilla to copy from!" said Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—" spluttered Coker.

And he came within an ace of boxing Frank Nugent's ears. But he restrained himself in the nick of time, and turned to Vernon-Smith, the erstwhile Sports Editor of the "Greyfriars Herald."

"You, Smith, will do an article describing my athletic abilities."

"That's soon done!" said Smithy, with a grin. "You haven't any!"

"What!"

During the next hour no sound broke the silence of Coker's study save the steady scratching of pens. The juniors applied themselves to their allotted tasks with a will. It really seemed as if they were bubbling over with eagerness to help Coker.

The great Horace gave a grunt of satisfaction when he had finished his Editorial. Then he rose to his feet.

"I've got an appointment, you kids," he

explained. "I've promised to take Miss Howell, of Cliff House, to the pictures, but I shall be back within a couple of hours. I shall expect you to have made plenty of headway by then. You'll take charge, Cherry, while I'm away. Do you know how the duplicator works?"

"Yes, rather!"

Coker nodded to his busy sub-editors and quitted the study. As soon as his footsteps had died away the juniors peeped over each other's shoulders to see what had been written, and peal upon peal of laughter rang out.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"The 'Coker Chronicle' will be the biggest scream of the term!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I don't think old Horace will ask us to help him again in a hurry!"

"No jolly fear!" chuckled Vernon-Smith. "Off with your coats, you chaps, and let's get all the copies rolled off and distributed before Coker comes back!"

The juniors peeled off their coats and got busy. Many hands made light work. They took turns at the duplicator and as the sheets were thrown off they were carefully clipped together.

At the end of an hour and a half a hundred copies of the "Coker Chronicle" were complete and ready for distribution.

Coker did not wish them to be distributed until bed-time. He naturally wanted to go through a copy first to see that everything was in order. But the juniors took time by the forelock, as it were, and, without waiting for Coker to return from Courtfield, they started to circulate the copies.

Greyfriars rocked and roared when the "Coker Chronicle" dawned upon them.

The cover drawing by Frank Nugent was a far from flattering likeness of Horace Coker. Coker's features were exaggerated to absurd proportions, but everyone could see whom the caricature was supposed to represent. Underneath the cartoon appeared the libretto: "Coker—the Greyfriars Gorilla!"

The inside contents of the paper were no less amusing. Bob Cherry's article was not quite what Coker had intended it to be. It was entitled, "Why Coker Should NOT Be Captain of Greyfriars," and it gave a score of thoroughly sound reasons. Johnny Bull's article was entitled, "Why Coker is NOT Popular," and Johnny, like Bob Cherry, advanced a host of reasons. Dick Penfold's poem, instead of being an eulogy of Coker, covered that great man with ridicule. And Vernon-Smith's article, describing Coker's comic feats on the football field and elsewhere, was perhaps the pick of the bunch.

When Coker came in from Courtfield it was to find Greyfriars bordering on hysterics. Copies of the "Coker Chronicle" had been circulated everywhere. Even Gosling, the porter, had one, and Gosling's usually sour visage was wreathed in smiles.

When Coker was shown a copy of his production, he came very near to having an apoplectic fit. He raved, and he roared, and he raged. He vowed dire vengeance upon the juniors who had dared to cover him with ridicule, and he strode off in search of them like a lion seeking whom he may devour.

But the cheery sub-editors of the "Coker Chronicle" were wise in their generation. They had vanished to a safe retreat, and the vengeance of Horace Coker had to be deferred till some future occasion!

THE END.

STOP PRESS NEWS STRIKE OVER!

"At a late hour last night, a satisfactory settlement was arrived at. There was a midnight conference in the Remove dormitory, and Harry Wharton agreed to meet the strikers half-way, by granting the Fighting Editor the sum of threepence for overtime pay. Sixpence was the sum demanded by the strikers in the first place.

"When Harry Wharton sat up in bed and signed the agreement, there were scenes of tremendous enthusiasm."

"Business as usual" is now the order of the day, and all your favourite contributors will reappear in next week's issue!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 952.



(Continued from page 13.)

Skinner glanced at the windows of the inn and grinned.

"What about a little game of billiards or snooker first?" he demanded.

His two precious pals glanced apprehensively around.

"It's a bit risky this time of the afternoon, isn't it?" exclaimed Snoop.

"There's no one about. We can use the back room, and leave by cutting across the fields by the river," urged Skinner. "Let's have a look through the windows and see who's there first, though."

Led by Skinner, the three black sheep of the Remove approached the public-house. As they did so Stott stopped suddenly short and stared.

"My giddy aunt!" he exclaimed excitedly. "See who's there, you chaps?"

He pointed to the front parlour, his hand trembling with excitement. Following the direction of his outstretched forefinger his two pals made out a figure they knew as well as they did each other.

"Smithy!"

The figure half turned. There was no doubt about it. It was that of Herbert Vernon-Smith, late of the Remove Form at Greyfriars!

"Well, if this doesn't beat the giddy band!" gasped Skinner. "And everyone thinks he's in Courtfield! I wonder what the thump he's doing in there—and with his blessed coat off, too!"

"And a billiards-rest in his hand," said Stott. "It's obvious!" he added. "He's hard-up, and he's come back here to have a little flutter!"

"That's about it!" breathed Snoop. "The deep boulder!"

Vernon-Smith turned to glance out of the window, and his eyes fell on the three Greyfriars fellows. He started visibly, and the next moment he vanished from sight.

"Wind up!" grinned Skinner. "Come on, chaps! In we go!"

The Removites reached the door of the public-house and made to step inside. At the same moment Vernon-Smith appeared, his jaw set and an angry expression on his face.

"Hallo, Smithy!" sneered Skinner. "Didn't expect to see little us, did you?"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Snoop. "Quite a pleasant surprise all round, eh?"

"What do you chaps want, anyway?" snapped Vernon-Smith quickly. "You know this place is out of bounds to Greyfriars fellows."

"Of course, good little Georgie never broke bounds when he was at school," said Skinner. "He always did what his kind teacher told him."

"Cut that out!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith, with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. "What is it you want?"

"Oh, you needn't be funny!" retorted Skinner, glaring. "We've come for the same reason that you have—a bit of fun."

"I'm not gambling, if that's what you mean," rejoined Vernon-Smith quietly.

"And, if you fellows take my advice,

you'll clear off before someone from the school spots you."

"Hark at him!" jeered the cad of the Remove. "He's not gambling, if that's what we mean—oh, no! He's just called in to dust the coals!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Snoop and Stott dutifully.

Vernon-Smith bit his lip.

"Believe me or not, just as you like," he said.

"Well, come out of the way and let us get in. It doesn't matter tuppence to us what you're doing. We're not spoil-sports."

"Yes, out of the way!" added Stott.

"Rats!"

"We're coming in!"

"You're not!"

"Who'll prevent us?"

"I will!" grated the ex-Removite.

"Look here, Smithy——"

"Get out!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Skinner, attempting to push by.

"Get out!" roared Vernon-Smith again.

As he spoke he thrust Skinner off the wooden step back on to the gravel.

"We know your rotten games, and we're coming in if we want to."

"Back at the old trade!" shouted Stott, feeling there was safety in numbers.

Vernon-Smith clenched his fists.

Skinner & Co. were evidently looking for trouble. If they were, the ex-Removite was prepared to give them all they wanted of that commodity, and a little overweight as well.

"Are you going to let us in or not?" demanded Skinner again.

"I'm not—and that's flat! Now clear off!"

Skinner & Co. exchanged glances.

"At him!" yelled the cad of the Remove suddenly.

The three juniors hurled themselves at their late Form-fellow.

Vernon-Smith suddenly stiffened, and his fists shot out in rapid succession.

Biff, thud!

"Yoooooop!"

Stott and Snoop were sent flying out on to the gravel.

Vernon-Smith hit out at Skinner and missed. The next moment the cad of the Remove ducked, and butted his opponent in the stomach with his head. The two crashed to the ground, panting and struggling.

Biff, thud, biff!

In a flash Stott and Snoop were on their feet. They jumped into the passage-way of the inn and threw themselves bodily on to Vernon-Smith, who had just wriggled on top of his opponent.

In three seconds the four juniors were fighting hammer and tongs. The three cads were convinced by now that Vernon-Smith was at the Cross Keys for the purpose of gambling, and they were determined to get inside, more especially because Vernon-Smith was trying to keep them out.

Over and over on the floor they rolled, hitting out right and left.

Biff!

"Hold that, you rotter!"

Thud!

"Ow! Yoooooop!"

Skinner stopped a smashing blow to the nose, accidentally kicking Snoop in the eye as he rolled over.

The next moment Vernon-Smith staggered to his feet and got going with a vengeance. Waiting till Skinner gained his feet he let fly.

Biff, crash!

His left took Skinner on the point, sending that youth flying outside, to

land with a heavy thud on the hard and unsympathetic gravel.

"Yooooop!" roared Skinner.

Bump!

Stott followed, his head singing from a swing to the head.

"Yaroooo!"

As for Snoop, never a fighting man, seeing how things were going with his pals, he emitted a yell of alarm and turned and bolted.

Skinner and Stott picked themselves up and gazed dazedly about.

"Ow! Yooooop! I'm hurt!"

"You'll get hurt some more if you don't clear off," panted Vernon-Smith, returning from his chase of Snoop.

Skinner and Stott backed hurriedly away.

"Yah! Pauper!" yelled Skinner suddenly, and he turned and bolted up the road for all he was worth.

Vernon-Smith stared after the retreating forms of his late schoolfellows with a curious expression on his face. When he returned to the bar-parlour he found Mr. Banks, the bookmaker, regarding him with a grin.

"Allo, cully!" he said. "I see there ain't no love lost atween you an' them young shavers up at the school, then? Wot they bin after?"

"Mind your own business!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

And he left Mr. Banks, a worried expression on his face.

The Bounder felt that the unfortunate visit of Skinner & Co. was the forerunner of trouble.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Shock for Mr. Quelch!

"**B**LESS my soul!" Mr. Quelch started as he uttered that ejaculation.

Dusk had fallen, and the Remove master had been on his way back to Greyfriars. But the sound of excited voices issuing from the open window of the Cross Keys had attracted his attention and caused him to halt. Not that there was anything unusual in the frequenters of the village inn speaking in excited voices. Indeed, they were more often excited than calm. But one of the voices sounded very familiar to the Form master.

"Bless my soul!" murmured Mr. Quelch. "Surely I am mistaken!"

There came the coarse voice of Mr. Banks raised in protest.

"I tell yer it makes forty-five! Five added to forty is forty-five, ain't it? Don't try and cheat me, young shaver! It won't come off!"

There came the sound of other voices over which one rose predominant.

"Why should I cheat you, you fool? I've got nothing to gain."

The voice was that of Vernon-Smith!

Mr. Quelch's brows contracted, and his face took on a grim expression. He had not understood Vernon-Smith's reason for insisting on leaving Greyfriars in the manner he had, and he had not approved of the junior's decision to obtain employment on his own. Not knowing Vernon-Smith's curious pride as well as Harry Wharton & Co. did, he had been rather puzzled at his attitude, and from the wisdom of his superior years had been inclined to regard the junior as something of a fool.

But now, he thought, he was beginning to understand things better.

Vernon-Smith was supposed to be in Courtfield looking for a job. No one had heard a word from him since he had left the school, and yet here he was in the Cross Keys having an argument, the

nature of which there was no doubt, with a person no less than the notorious gambler, Mr. Banks.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch again. "This—this is preposterous!"

The Remove master strode rapidly up the little gravel path to the door of the public-house.

An odour of stale tobacco and strong spirits was wafted to him, causing him to catch his breath and cough.

"Allo, who's there?" demanded a voice from the bar-parlour.

A moment later Mr. Banks, accompanied by Cobb and several other men, appeared. Behind them, his jacket off and his sleeves rolled up, appeared Vernon-Smith.

"It's the bloke from the school," grinned Cobb. "Here, youngster—a gent to see you."

Vernon-Smith pushed his way to the front and faced the Form master.

"You—you want to see me, sir?" he asked.

"Do I want to see you?" snapped Mr. Quelch, gazing at the grinning faces around him. "Why else should I contaminate myself by coming to a—a haunt of this description?"

Vernon-Smith signalled to Messrs. Banks, Cobb & Co. to leave him.

"Now, sir," he said when, after several protests, they did so. "What is it you want? I did not know you knew I was here. I did not want anyone to know—"

"I can quite believe you!" snapped Mr. Quelch tartly. "I should imagine this is the last place anyone would have expected to find you, Smith. I understood you were going to Courtfield to seek employment. And then I—"

Mr. Quelch broke off short.

Hanging over a picture almost on a level with his eyes was a torn glove with a large splash of red ink on the back. The glove had evidently been picked up and placed there to be found by its owner if he returned to look for it. And on the inside of the wrist, plainly visible in marking-ink, appeared the words:

"H. Skinner, Greyfriars Remove."

Mr. Quelch stared, and his face assumed a deep purple hue.

"How dare you, boy!" he thundered, snatching at the tell-tale glove and flourishing it before Vernon-Smith's amazed face. "How dare you, I say! Not content with disgracing the name of the school you once belonged to, you have the—amazing audacity to—encourage your former schoolfellows to sink to your own depraved level—"

"I—I—"

"Enough, sir!" shouted the infuriated gentleman. "Has Skinner been here, or has he not? Answer me that! Yes, or no?"

"Yes, sir; but—"

"That will do, Vernon-Smith. That is all I wanted to know. I heard with my own ears the disgraceful argument you were having about a gambling game with your scoundrelly associates. And then—then I find this!"

Vernon-Smith bit his lip and controlled himself with an effort.

"You are mistaken, sir!" he snapped. "Skinner did not come here at my invitation. In fact, Skinner did not enter the place. Seeing me here he stopped to speak, but he was gone again within five minutes—"

"Silence, miserable boy!"

There was no doubt about it. Mr. Quelch firmly believed he had caught the junior out, and that he was trying to cover himself by a tissue of falsehoods.

He recollected the reputation Vernon-Smith had once borne while he had been at Greyfriars, and his temper, not very sweet at the best of times, was rapidly getting the better of him.

"I can explain, sir—" began Vernon-Smith.

"Explain, fiddlesticks!" snapped the Form master. "I have found you out, Smith. You are a scoundrel, sir! A young blackguard! You—you—"

Words almost failed the angry gentleman.

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose if I told you I am doing honest work here you would not believe me?" he said quietly.

"No!" grated Mr. Quelch, trembling with anger. "I would not believe a word you say! What honest work is there for a lad like you in a place of this description? Answer me that, sir?"

"Is it any good my telling you anything, sir?" asked the junior, in a weary voice.

"It would be no use whatever. I know what I think, and I am right. My ears and eyes have not deceived me. You may as well save your breath—"

The noise of the altercation had attracted the attention of Messrs. Banks, Cobb & Co. in the bar-parlour, and they crowded out into the passage again with grinning faces.

"My 'at! The gent's got 'is rag out, ain't he?" demanded Mr. Cobb of the assembly at large. "Ark at him a-rotting!"

Mr. Quelch glared.

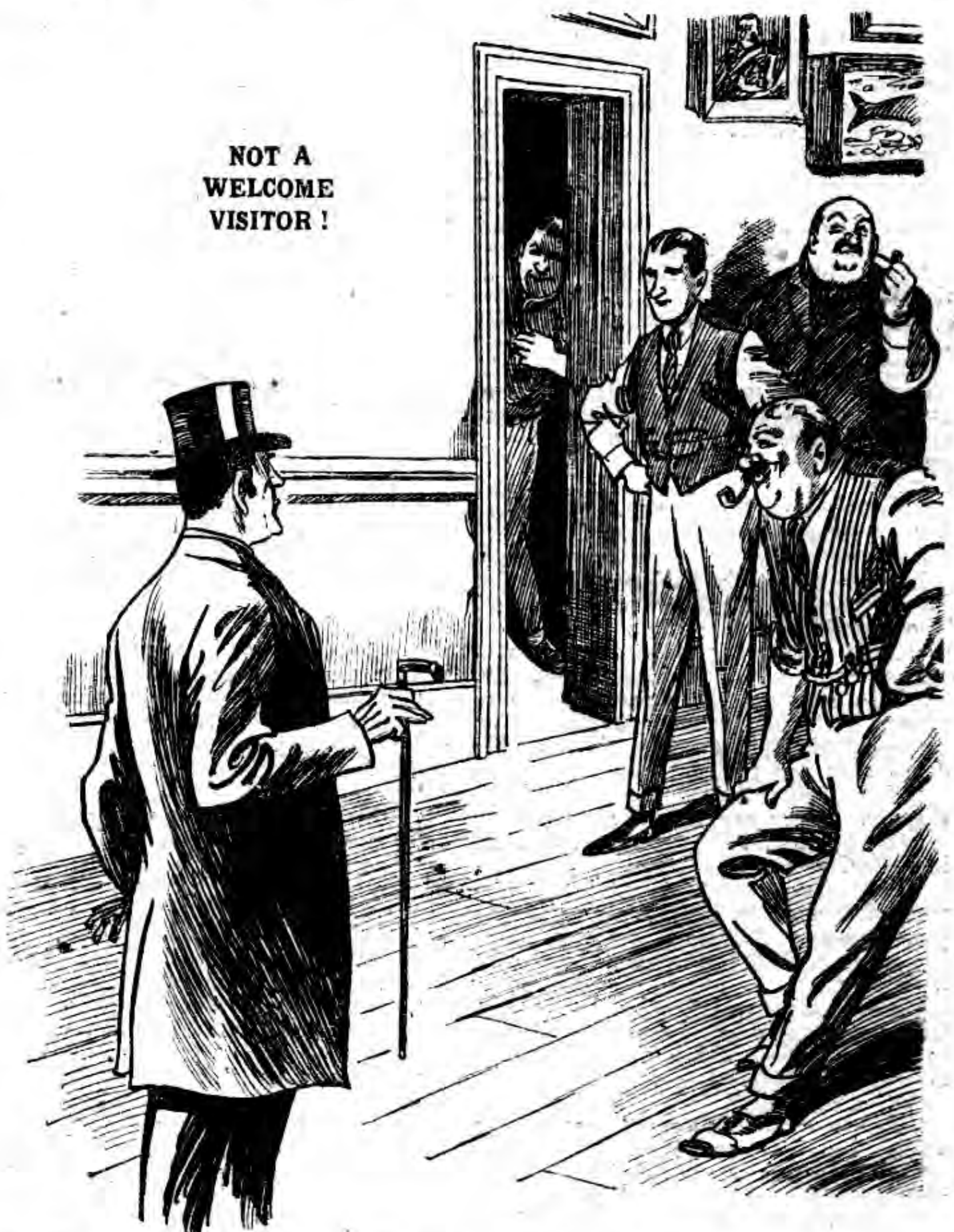
"I find your company is as disgusting as your conduct, Vernon-Smith!" exclaimed the Form master, burying his nose in his handkerchief. "You have disgraced the good name of Greyfriars School. I repeat, you are a young blackguard!"

Vernon-Smith smiled bitterly.

"If you are not willing to listen to my explanation, it might be better to reserve your remarks until you have learned it from another source," he said.

"No explanation is necessary. I am not a fool, boy! The circumstances in which I have discovered you and the ruffians you are associating with explain all that I need to know—"

"'Ere, hold 'ard, guv'nor!" snorted



"I do not believe a word you say, Vernon-Smith!" grated Mr. Quelch, trembling with anger. "What honest work is there for a lad like you in a place of this description? Answer me that!" "Is it any good my telling you anything, sir?" asked Vernon-Smith in a weary voice. Messrs. Banks, Cobb & Co., attracted by the altercation, crowded out into the passage with grinning faces. (See Chapter 8.)

Mr. Banks. "Not so much of the ruffians. Honest, hard-working men, that's what we are."

Had Mr. Quelch been less excited it is probable he would have been a little less candid in his opinion of the frequenters of the Cross Keys. But as it was, believing he had bowled the junior out, and that Vernon-Smith had been encouraging Skinner & Co. to frequent the inn, he had all but lost control of himself.

"Hard-working blackguards!" he stormed. "Men of your age should know better—should possess more decency than to drag boys down to your own level—"

"Chuck 'im out!" came a thick voice from near the bar.

"Who's he a-insulting of?"

"Lay so much as a finger on me, my men, and you will regret it!" went on Mr. Quelch. "I will have every one of you arrested, and do my best to have this place closed up for good and all!"

"Ho! You will, will ver?" exclaimed a burly labourer, who had imbibed not wisely but too well. "Thish ish a respectable place, an' if you don't like it you can clear out!"

Vernon-Smith pushed the man back and placed himself between the now angry patrons of the Cross Keys and the irate master.

"All right, Joe!" he exclaimed. "We don't want any of that here. You keep out of it!"

"Whaffor?" demanded the half-intoxicated man thickly. "Ain't I a gentleman? Ain't the cove inshulted me? Hic! If he don't—"

"Last horders, gentlemen, please!" shouted the potman.

Joe turned and hurried to the little bar.

"They're closing now, sir," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "If I were you I'd go before the rest of them get out. You haven't put them in a very good humour—"

"I will go when I think fit and proper!" roared Mr. Quelch. "Not that I want to stay among such people—"

"Out with him!"

It seemed that the patience of Messrs. Banks, Cobb, & Co. was exhausted. They made a rush at Mr. Quelch and sent him staggering down the passage. For a moment it looked as though Mr. Quelch's visit to the Cross Keys was going to end with trouble. But Vernon-Smith flung himself at the angry men and pulled them away.

"None of that!" he exclaimed sharply. "You can stop it at once!"

"Good gracious!" gasped Mr. Quelch, in alarm.

"Why don't you get out, sir?" demanded Vernon-Smith sharply. "If you don't go soon I sha'n't be responsible for what will happen. It's your own fault, sir."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch for the sake of something better to say. "I—I think perhaps I had better."

"You had, sir."

"Time, gents, please!" came the voice of the potman again.

The Remove master picked up his hat, which had been knocked off in the rush, and retreated towards the doorway.

At the same moment the man Joe returned from the bar.

"Wot, ain't he gone yet?" he demanded, pressing forward. "Out of the way! I'll show 'im!"

But Mr. Quelch did not wait to be shown.

He had seen as much as he wanted to see—and a lot more besides. He hur-

ried out to the gravel path, Vernon-Smith bringing up his rear. His head was in a whirl, and the fumes from the intoxicated Joe, still reeked in his nostrils.

"Bless my soul!" he gasped. "This is terrible!"

"I'm sorry you've had this experience, Mr. Quelch!" said Vernon-Smith in a low tone. "But, as I said before, you have made a mistake."

Mr. Quelch did not answer. He snorted instead, and without so much as a second glance at the ex-Greyfriars boy strode off rapidly up the darkened road in the direction of the college.

Vernon-Smith watched his retreating figure with a twisted smile, and walked slowly back to the inn doorway. Most of the patrons of the Cross Keys had left by now, and only the landlord and Mr. Banks, the bookmaker, remained.

"Give a dog a bad name!" murmured Vernon-Smith bitterly. "Oh, well, what the thump does it matter, anyway?"

Mr. Banks greeted the junior with a smile.

"Made your bloke from the college get 'is rag out, didn't they?" he grinned. Vernon-Smith scowled.

"Rats!" he retorted. "I'm going to bed!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Condemned Unheard!

"WHAT luck, Wharton?"

"Seen anything of Smithy?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

The Famous Five had returned from their ride to Courtfield an hour ago.

They had just finished prep, and had entered the junior Common-room to watch a game of chess that had been arranged between Peter Todd and Wun Lung, the little Chinese junior.

But hardly had they been there a couple of minutes before they were surrounded by a crowd of Removites all anxious to hear the news, if any, of their late Form-fellow.

"Didn't see a sign of him," said Harry Wharton. "No one in the town seems to have seen him, either—at least, not anyone who knows him."

"Perhaps he hasn't been able to get a job, as he expected, and is keeping out of the way until he can," suggested Ogilvy.

"Very likely."

"Still, he might have written some of us!" exclaimed Penfold.

"The writefulness would have been of the acceptful order," agreed Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed knowledge of what is happening to the honourable Smith would have preventfully avoided us worrying."

"Well, we may hear any day now," said Bulstrode. "It's no good worrying about it."

"I suppose not."

Several juniors wandered over to watch the game between Peter Todd and Wun Lung. But even as they did so the door of the Common-room was flung violently open, and Skinner, followed by his two precious pals, Stott and Snoop, appeared.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, staring. "Been in the blessed wars, haven't you, Skinny?"

"Looks as though he's been in a series of wars—and lost the blessed lot!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner certainly could not be described as looking spick and span. His

left eye was fast assuming a purple hue, while his collar was torn, and the rest of his person was dusty, as though he had been amusing himself by rolling in the road. As for his two pals, they were in a condition little better.

"That's trying to do a good turn to your rotten pal Vernon-Smith!" exclaimed Skinner, with a malicious laugh, addressing Harry Wharton.

"Vernon-Smith!" echoed several voices.

"What do you mean, Skinner?"

"Where is he?"

"Where I said he'd probably be at lunch-time," returned Skinner. "Hang-ing out with a lot of low blackguards and getting his living by card-sharping and—"

Harry Wharton rose to his feet suddenly. His fists were clenched, and there was a hard gleam in his eyes. He grabbed the cad of the Remove by the collar of his coat and swung him round.

"Just repeat that again, Skinner," he said, "and I'll make you eat your words!"

"Well, it's true!" retorted Skinner defiantly.

Smack!

Skinner staggered backwards as Wharton's free hand took him across the side of the face.

"Yoooooop! You rotter!" he yelled. "I'm telling the truth! Ask Stott or Snoop. We saw Smithy down at the Cross Keys this afternoon, gambling in the front parlour. Ow!"

"What!"

"You saw Smithy at the Cross Keys?" demanded Nugent incredulously.

Skinner nodded.

"We tried to persuade him to come away," he went on quickly, "and he cut up rough."

The juniors stared at the cad of the Remove in amazement. Whether they liked it or not, they were compelled to admit there was the unmistakable ring of truth in what he was saying.

"If you don't believe me, you can go down and find out for yourselves," he went on. "It was Vernon-Smith all right, and he didn't seem to like us spotting him, either. I consider he's a disgrace to the school, and—"

"Say, cut it right out!" snapped Fisher T. Fish. "You may have seen Smithy at the Cross Keys, but I don't believe you saw him gambling—no, sir!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, what else would he be doing at the Cross Keys?" demanded Skinner savagely.

"Well, for that matter, what were you doing there to see him?" snorted Bob Cherry. "You seem to think every fellow is like yourself!"

"I—I—as a matter of fact, we happened to be passing by," gasped Skinner, in some confusion.

"I see!" exclaimed Nugent sarcastically. "You happened to be passing by, and Smithy came to the door and yelled out: 'Hallo, Skinny! Look! I've just dropped in for a little flutter.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

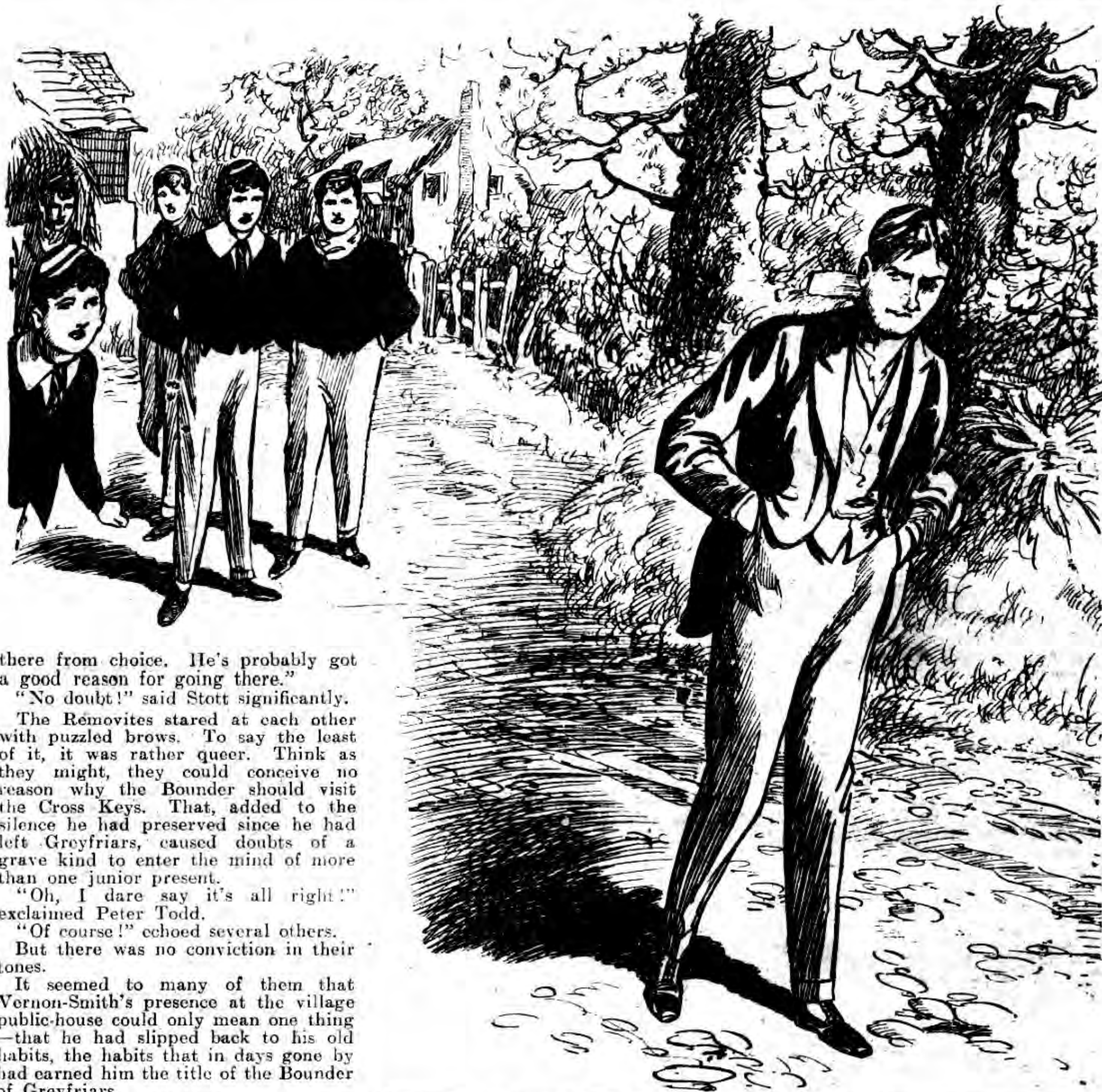
"Well, you can believe it or not, but that's where Vernon-Smith is, and it's no more than could have been expected of him!" sneered Skinner.

"Rats!" snorted Bulstrode.

"I half believe it's a tissue of rotten lies now!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Same here!"

"And, in any case, I dare say if Smithy was at the Cross Keys he wasn't



there from choice. He's probably got a good reason for going there."

"No doubt!" said Stott significantly.

The Removites stared at each other with puzzled brows. To say the least of it, it was rather queer. Think as they might, they could conceive no reason why the Bounder should visit the Cross Keys. That, added to the silence he had preserved since he had left Greyfriars, caused doubts of a grave kind to enter the mind of more than one junior present.

"Oh, I dare say it's all right!" exclaimed Peter Todd.

"Of course!" echoed several others.

But there was no conviction in their tones.

It seemed to many of them that Vernon-Smith's presence at the village public-house could only mean one thing—that he had slipped back to his old habits, the habits that in days gone by had earned him the title of the Bounder of Greyfriars.

The Famous Five, however, were staunch in their faith to their chum. They felt that however bad appearances might be, that Vernon-Smith probably had a very simple explanation for his presence at the village inn.

"It's Skinner's usual lies, of course!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"That's about it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Let's get out!"

"Boys, kindly stay where you are!" came a deep voice from the doorway.

The Removites started.

"Quelch!" gasped Frank Nugent.

"My hat!"

The Remove master stood framed in the doorway, an angry frown on his face. That he must have overheard some of the conversation was obvious enough.

"It is in reference to your late Form fellow, Vernon-Smith, that I wish to speak," he said, in a hard voice. "I want you all to listen to what I have to say. Skinner, stand forward!"

The cad of the Remove turned a shade paler.

"Yes, sir," he stammered.

The rest of the juniors waited expectantly, wondering what was coming

Vernon-Smith tore himself away from Bob Cherry's grip and increased his speed. "I say, Smithy!" called out the juniors. But the Bounder made no reply. The Famous Five stood and gazed after the retreating form of their late schoolfellow. But he did not so much as give one glance backwards. "This is rotten!" exclaimed Wharton gloomily. (See Chapter 10.)

next. But they were not kept waiting long.

Mr. Quelch suddenly produced a grey glove, the back of which was covered with a large splash of red ink, and held it out towards the junior before him.

"This is your property, Skinner?" he said.

"N-nunno—I—I mean, I t-think it is, sir!" stuttered Skinner.

"Then, pray, explain how it comes about that it was found in the Cross Keys public-house this evening."

There came an astonished murmur from the Removites.

Skinner's usually pasty face turned a shade paler.

"You—you see, sir," he gasped, wondering exactly how much Mr. Quelch knew, "I was passing by the

Cross Keys with Stott and Snoop when we saw someone through the window we thought we knew. Knowing the Cross Keys was out of bounds, we were naturally surprised, sir, so—so we went to the door to see if we could get the chap to come away. We pointed out to him that he was getting the school a bad name and tried to prevail on his better nature."

"The thumping liar!" breathed Bob Cherry, in an undertone.

"Hear, hear!" added Johnny Bull.

"I see," said Mr. Quelch. "Pray, proceed, Skinner."

"Yes, sir. Well, the fact is, the chap refused to come. We tried to drag him away, but I'm afraid he cut up a bit rough, sir! There was a bit of a scramble, and I must have dropped my glove in the scramble. Curiously

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enough, I—I was just telling the fellows about it when you arrived, sir!"

"Exactly," exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "And now kindly tell me the name of the person you tried to get away."

Skinner made a pretence of hesitating.

But he succeeded in deceiving no one save the Form master.

"I—I'd rather you didn't ask me that, sir!" he exclaimed, hoping nevertheless that Mr. Quelch would not take him at his word.

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch irritably. "What was the boy's name, Skinner?"

"Well, sir, it—it was Vernon-Smith, sir."

"The cad!" hissed Harry Wharton.

"But, sir—" began Johnny Bull indignantly.

"Silence, boy!" thundered the Form master. "In the ordinary way I should regard Skinner's statement with some doubt. But on this occasion I believe him to be telling the truth."

"Great Scott!"

There came subdued exclamations of astonishment from the rest of the Removites.

"Unfortunately," went on Mr. Quelch, "I happened to be passing the Cross Keys on my way back to the school this evening when I heard your former school-fellow's voice raised in altercation with some—some person. It appears that Smith was being accused of cheating."

"My giddy aunt!"

A deadly silence fell on the Removites.

Then it was true!

Skinner had not lied, after all!

"Vernon-Smith is beyond the jurisdiction of the school authorities now, of course," went on Mr. Quelch; "but I sincerely trust none of you boys will have anything to do with him should you meet him in the future."

"Oh!"

"I may say that when I remonstrated with the miserable boy, I was treated in a most reprehensible, yes, disgraceful manner by his tap-room associates! Indeed, I narrowly escaped physical injury. I shall, of course, communicate with Dr. Locke on the subject. But, in the meantime, remember what I have said. Since Vernon-Smith has chosen to so far forget himself as to gamble in a low public-house with the notorious characters of Friardale, he is not fit to be spoken to by any boy from this college!"

Mr. Quelch turned again to the cad of the Remove.

"As for you, Skinner," he said, "I would advise you to leave the rescue of Vernon-Smith to older and more experienced hands. That is all."

And, with an angry swish of his gown, the Form master turned and strode away.

Harold Skinner & Co. breathed a sigh of relief. They felt they had come out of a very tight corner in a very fortunate manner.

"Look here, you chaps!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, some moments after the Form master's departure. "There's—there's some horrible mistake about all this—"

"I don't know about that," sneered Bolsover. "There doesn't seem to be much mistake about it, if Quelch heard him arguing the point about a game with Banks or one of that crowd!"

"That's what I think!" exclaimed several other juniors.

"We know Skinner's a liar," went on Bolsover. "But I suppose we can believe Quelch. Anyway, he's confirmed what Skinner was telling us."

"Rats!" exclaimed Harry Wharton sharply. "It's a mistake, I tell you!"

But as the captain of the Remove looked round at the doubtful faces of the Removites, he realised that whatever he and his chums might think, the rest of the Removites were convinced beyond doubt of Vernon-Smith's guilt.

"I'm standing by Smithy until I've heard what he's got to say!" exclaimed Johnny Bull stoutly.

"The stand-by-fulness is terrific!"

"It's no good chewing the rag about it," said Wharton quietly. "I'm going to reserve my opinion—and if you chaps take my advice, you'll do the same."

And with that the Famous Five turned and left the Common-room, and made their way slowly and thoughtfully back to their own quarters.

"This is rotten!" groaned Frank Nugent. "You can see what the fellows think."

"Let 'em think what they like!" granted Bob Cherry. "They'll sing another tune when they find they're wrong."

But even Bob Cherry's tone was not altogether as convincing as it might have been.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

No Explanation!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. came out of the Form-room when classes were dismissed the next day still thinking of Vernon-Smith. The junior had not written to them yet. After the reports they had heard of him, they could not help being concerned.

What his motive might be in visiting the Cross Keys they could not guess. His conduct as reported by Mr. Quelch, to say the least of it, was very queer. But in the minds of most of the Remove, his motive was clear enough. Now he was up against it, he had taken the easiest course, and dropped back into his old ways!

Although he was no longer a member of Greyfriars, many of the juniors had already commenced to refer to him by his old nickname—the Bounder!

As time went on and still no letter arrived from Vernon-Smith, even the Famous Five felt their faith beginning to waver. They would not so much as admit it to themselves—yet, unmistakably, it was so.

Was it possible that they had been mistaken in their estimate of Vernon-Smith's character, that he was at the bottom the same kind of fellow as Carne or Loder of the Sixth?

Harry Wharton & Co. were very reluctant to think anything of the sort. Yet his silence and his presence at the Cross Keys certainly needed explaining.

The chums of the Remove were very anxious to see him again. It was possible, as they had hoped all along, that he had a very good explanation for his conduct.

As the dusk of evening fell upon the old Close of Greyfriars, Wharton and his chums strolled down to the village, feeling puzzled and uneasy. They had a faint hope that Vernon-Smith might

still be in Friardale, and that they might meet him.

But although they strolled about in likely places, a couple of hours went by with no sign of him.

"Better be getting back for call-over, you chaps," said Wharton, at length. "Smithy's probably gone back to Court-field again."

"Yes, I suppose so, unless—"

The juniors regarded each other with thoughtful expressions. The same thought was in all their minds, and there was no need to voice it.

"Well, we can't hang about until the—the place closes!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "I'm not certain what time they do close; but I believe it's about ten o'clock."

The Famous Five turned and made their way up the lane towards the school again. They had not gone far, however, when a familiar figure loomed up out of the dark before them.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly. "What the—"

The juniors gave a shout:

"Smithy!"

"Hallo!" exclaimed a well-known voice.

Johnny Bull grinned quietly.

"We've been looking for you, Smithy."

Harry Wharton & Co. quickly surrounded the junior.

"Now then," exclaimed Wharton, "where the dickens—My hat! What's up, Smithy?"

The Famous Five gazed at their late Form-fellow in amazement.

His collar was torn from his neck, his jacket was split, his lip was in a similar state, and his left eye was rapidly closing. It was obvious, too, that he was in a temper that was far from sweet.

"Great Scott! Been in the giddy wars, old man?" said Johnny Bull.

"What do you fellows want with me?" demanded Vernon-Smith, ignoring their remarks. "I've nothing to do with Greyfriars now!"

"Oh!"

"My hat!"

The five juniors gasped.

This was not quite the greeting they had expected.

"If you've come to point out to me the error of my wicked ways, you can save your breath—or put up with what I've just given some of the other fellows," went on Vernon-Smith, in a hard voice.

"Look here, Smithy," gasped Frank Nugent, "I think you've got things mixed up a bit!"

"The mixfulness is terrific!"

"Suppose you tell us what happened?" said the captain of the Remove quietly.

"Oh, I was just informed a little while ago what the fellows at Greyfriars think of me," returned Smith, with a hard laugh. "It appears Quelch has told the Form to have nothing to do with me—that I'm a disgrace to Greyfriars. In fact, some of the fellows on their own account put it a bit stronger than that, and I didn't stand for it!"

"So—so there was a fight?" exclaimed Nugent.

"That's it," nodded Vernon-Smith, mopping at his split lip. "And there's plenty more fight left in me, for anyone who wants it!"

There was a moment's silence.

"Of course, the fellows were wrong!" exclaimed Wharton, at length.

"Of course," echoed Johnny Bull.

"And so was Quelch," added Bob Cherry.

"Very charitable of you fellows to think so!" sneered the one-time Bounder of Greyfriars. "But you probably

ANSWERS

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wonder yourselves what I was doing in the Cross Keys."

"Well, you see—"

"We know there's some explanation," said Nugent.

"Yes; I suppose you'd like to hear my explanation?"

"Well, you see, we could shut the fellows up if you told us," explained Wharton, beginning to feel rather uncomfortable.

"I thought so!" laughed Vernon-Smith, still in the same curious voice. "You can shut them up when you've had me on trial, and judged me guilty or not; but you can't without. You don't know me well enough, of course. It might be true, what Quelch said, and you want me to confirm or deny it—I see!"

"You don't understand, Smithy—"

"I understand enough to know that even you fellows can't trust me," rejoined the ex-Removite. "If someone accused Wharton of being a thief, you naturally wouldn't believe it. You wouldn't find it necessary first to ask him to deny it. But with me—"

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't be a silly ass, Smithy!" growled Johnny Bull bluntly. "We're not responsible for what the other fellows think. Anyway, we don't think the same way—"

"Hear, hear!" shouted Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith seemed to brighten for a moment.

"Good! Then it won't be necessary to explain anything," he said.

"Well, we thought you'd want to on your own account," exclaimed Wharton. "But, of course, if you don't want to—"

"What then?"

"Oh, we sha'n't press you, you know—"

"And you'll believe that I'm going quite straight? You'll believe that Quelch is mistaken and that Skinner is a liar?"

"Yes, if you say so, Smithy."

"Only if I say so?" sneered Vernon-Smith. "We get back to the same point every time, it seems. You won't believe from what you know of me that I'm going straight—only if I say so."

The Famous Five surveyed each other with troubled faces. They were beginning to find Vernon-Smith somewhat difficult to handle. It was not that they did not trust him exactly. But, after what Mr. Quelch had heard—

Harry Wharton & Co. felt the least the junior could do would be to volunteer some sort of explanation, if only to enable them to clear his name at Greyfriars. To say the least of it, things did look pretty black against him. It was not, therefore, to be wondered at that certain fellows in the Remove thought and believed about him what they did. And, in any case, if Vernon-Smith had an explanation, why should he refuse to give it?

"Do you believe that I was gambling at the Cross Keys?" demanded Vernon-Smith at length.

"No, but—"

"Then why have you come out to look for me?"

"We—we wanted to know how things were going, since you didn't write as you promised," said Wharton.

"And to ask me about this business at the Cross Keys?"

"Look here, Smithy," exclaimed the captain of the Remove desperately, "you can see the position as well as we can. You must admit that things look jolly black against you. We don't believe them, of course, but—"

"But!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith scornfully. "But! There's always a 'but' in it! You believe me, but— In other words, you're not guilty, but— Oh, think what you dashed well like! You fellows are no different to the rest! You come out professing to believe in me, but—"

"Listen, Smithy—"

"Get out! I don't want to listen! I've listened to enough to-night without you fellows starting—"

"My hat!"

"Don't be an ass, Smithy!"

"The assfulness of the esteemed Smith is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, I'm through!" snapped the ex-Removite impatiently. "If you fellows can't believe in me without an explanation, or any 'buts,' you can go to thump!"

Vernon-Smith turned abruptly away and commenced to stride towards the village.

"Just a minute, old man!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, running after him and gripping his sleeve. "Don't be a fool—"

"Let go of my arm," growled Vernon-Smith, shaking himself. "And in future if you see me you can keep out of my way."

"My hat! Why don't you listen—"

"Oh, rats! Leave me alone!"

Vernon-Smith tore himself away from Bob's grip and increased his speed.

"I say, Smithy!" called out the juniors.

Vernon-Smith made no reply.

"It's no good," groaned Wharton. "The silly ass has lost his temper, and won't hear a word."

"My giddy aunt!"

"It's no good trying to talk to him in his present frame of mind," grunted Johnny Bull. "Some of the other fellows have got his rag out, and we're getting the benefit of it."

"I suppose so."

The Famous Five stood and gazed after the retreating form of their late schoolfellow. But he did not so much as give one glance backwards. The gloom of the lane swallowed him up, and only his footfalls on the hard road echoed back to them.

"This is rotten!" exclaimed Wharton gloomily.

"The rottenfulness is terrific!"

"Well, it's no good hanging about any longer."

"Let's get back! We shall miss call-over if we don't buck up!"

And with heavy hearts and puzzled minds the five juniors continued their trudge up the dark lane until the gates of Greyfriars loomed into view.

They had gone out to meet Vernon-Smith and to tell him that they believed in him, and to hear his explanation in order that they could use it to clear his name with the rest of the Removites. But from the first their overtures had been received with suspicion.

Vernon-Smith had lost his temper and gone off in a huff. He thought that they believed him guilty of the charges made against him by Mr. Quelch and Skinner—at all events, if he did not think exactly that, he thought that their trust in him had gone.

The hard and cynical nature of the one-time Bounder of Greyfriars had come to the surface as a sort of armour—and it had proved to be armour that turned away friendship as well as shafts of enemies.

"Oh, this is rotten!" repeated Wharton, as the juniors turned into the school gates.

And the same thought was in the minds of the rest of his chums.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Kicked Out!

"HALLO, youngster! Bin 'aving a battle?"

Mr. Banks uttered that remark as Vernon-Smith entered the front door of the Cross Keys after leaving Harry Wharton & Co.

"Mind your own business!" snapped Vernon-Smith irritably.

Mr. Banks grinned.

"No offence meant, Master Smith," he said soothingly. "Only I don't like to see a pal come in all a-battered and cut up in the state you are. Them young gents at the college again?"

"Yes, hang them!" snarled the ex-Greyfriars junior.

"Well, never mind about them now. Come in the back parlour and 'ave a little chat. I got a fire in there, all nice and cosy, and a little supper laid out."

Vernon-Smith hesitated.

The night was certainly chilly, and the junior was hungry. In his present mood Vernon-Smith found the friendly overtures of the Friardale bookmaker not altogether unacceptable.

"All right," he exclaimed shortly.

"Only I'm not stopping long. I want to get to bed."

Mr. Banks nodded, and led the way to the little private parlour at the back of the house.

A cheerful fire was blazing in the grate, the room was warm with the soft glow from the single shaded oil-lamp, and an appetising if plain meal was laid ready on the table.

"Sit down, youngster," invited Mr. Banks, indicating a chair. "I've got a drop of something special for to-night. What about a little drop of pre-War, eh?"

The village bookmaker produced a bottle of whisky from a cupboard and placed it on the table with two glasses.

"I don't want any," exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "You know what I told you—"

"That's all right," said Mr. Banks genially. "A little drop won't hurt to-night to keep the cold out. I'll just give you a small tot."

"I tell you I don't want it!" snapped Vernon-Smith decisively. "Don't ask me again!"

"Of course, if you'd rather not, I won't try an' persuade you," said Mr. Banks, with a look of annoyance the junior did not see. "Every man to 'is taste, I say. This is a free country, and it would be 'ard luck if a young gent couldn't please 'imself."

"That's all right, then," said Vernon-Smith. "Let's get on with the grub."

The bookmaker and the junior sat down, and the meal commenced. And by the time it was half-way through Vernon-Smith was beginning to feel in a more cheerful frame of mind. By a series of sympathetic and judicious questions, Mr. Banks eventually persuaded the ex-Removite to recount the happenings of the evening. Vernon-Smith concluded with his meeting with Harry Wharton & Co.

"I don't think much of 'em as pals," said Mr. Banks at length. "And the 'ard rub of it you wasn't gambling when the master 'appened to pass by. Didn't you tell 'em that?"

"What was the good?" demanded Vernon-Smith bitterly. "No one would have believed me. The fact that I'm living here would condemn me even more in their eyes. As it is, they think I'm only calling here occasionally."

Mr. Banks nodded. "And in any case, went on the junior, 'why the thump should I be called upon to explain? I told them if they couldn't believe in me whatever the appearances might be they could go to thump.'"

"Seems to me you might as well 'ave a bit of fun as to get the credit of it," said Mr. Banks, watching the junior closely.

Vernon-Smith shook his head. "Anyway, you ain't got no pals up at the college now," resumed the bookmaker. "Even if you did 'ave a flutter to earn a bit now and agin they couldn't treat you no worse. Why not take my tip and enjoy yourself?"

"No, I sha'n't do that," replied the junior, shaking his head. "They can think what they like, but I'm leaving the cards alone. I gave that kind of thing up years ago."

Mr. Banks leaned forward and clutched the junior by the sleeve.

"Look here, youngster," he said, "don't you be a fool! They're no pals of yours—"

"I know, but—" "They've treated you real dirty. But you needn't let that worry you. I called you in 'ere to-night to 'ave a little friendly chat, like. Ain't I bin a friend to you? 'Ave I tried to make you drink and smoke after you said plain you didn't want to?"

"I know," nodded Vernon-Smith. "But that was the arrangement before I came. I told you plainly how it would be."

"Just so, just so," agreed Mr. Banks. "An' I've kept to the arrangement. But it ain't done you no good. All your pals up at the college, the blooming master as well, wot 'ave they done? I'll tell you. They've treated you just like they would a blessed thief. Ain't they?"

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth. "Yes, hang them, they have!" he grated savagely.

"Well, now," went on the bookmaker with more confidence, "I've got a little scheme for you to git a bit o' your own back, and to make a bit of money besides. You've got to look out for yourself. Never mind about them—"

"What's the scheme, anyway?" demanded Vernon-Smith curiously.

The bookmaker lowered his voice. "You know all about some of the young gents up at the college," he said. "Lots of them are werry sportive and might be inclined to 'ave a flutter sometimes. The only thing is they're a bit nervous like, and don't know the way to go about it—"

The ex-Removite sat upright, his real feelings masked by a look of interest.

"Go on!" he exclaimed in a non-committal voice.

"Well, this is where we comes to it!" chuckled Mr. Banks, misunderstanding the expression on Vernon-Smith's face. "Suppose you was to put them wise how to git a bit on now and again? There's a lot of new clients we might pick up from the school. You could take the money and the slips. They wouldn't mind dealing with you, but they get a bit nervous of having to come here or meet me or Cobb."

Mr. Banks paused and filled his glass. Vernon-Smith's expression remained the same.

"That's the idea," went on Mr. Banks. "You see what you can do in working up a little business, and I'll pay you a good commission on it. It's

as safe as 'ouses, and, in any case, you don't belong to the school now, no more than me and Cobb. After the way they've treated you up at the school nobody could blame you for trying to make a honest penny."

"I see," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "The idea is that I should tout on commission for you among the Greyfriars fellows?"

"You uses 'ard words, Master Smith," chuckled the bookmaker. "Suppose we say you become a sort of agent for me—kind of assistant-turf commissioner, like? They're no pals of yours, like I've said. You could get a bit of your own back on 'em and turn a honest penny, too. What do you think of it?"

Vernon-Smith rose to his feet. "I understand!" he snapped, his eyes blazing. "In other words, you are asking me to help fellows to get into your clutches—to try and persuade them to gamble, to act like a Judas! You—you rotter! You—you—"

Mr. Banks jumped to his feet with a look of amazement. All the coolness had gone from Vernon-Smith now; the mask had fallen from his face, and he stood trembling with anger and indignation.

"You rotten scheming cad!" roared Vernon-Smith, shaking his fist under the astounded bookmaker's nose. "For two pins I'd smash you! What the thump do you take me for?"

"Old 'ard!" gasped Mr. Banks in alarm. "That ain't the way to speak to me. I'm your boss, I am. Don't forget you ain't at Greyfriars now, you're working 'ere as a billiards-marker. Particular all of a sudden, ain't you?" he concluded, with a sneer. "Forget when you used to be a young 'ound worse than any of 'em in the old days—"

Smack! Vernon-Smith's fist shot out and took the rascally bookmaker under the chin.

Crash! The bookmaker toppled back over a chair and struck the floor with a heavy thud.

"That'll teach you to keep your tongue between your teeth and to take your rascally schemes elsewhere!" panted Vernon-Smith.

But the next moment Mr. Banks was up again, his thick lips twisted in a snarl.

"All right, me young shaver!" he roared. "It me, would you! I'll show you!"

The next moment the man made a wild rush across the room, his podgy fists flying. Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth and hit out.

Smack, thud, biff! Round and round the room the two circled. Ornaments were sent flying from the parlour mantelpiece, chairs were overturned, and pictures came crashing from the wall.

Vernon-Smith, his eyes blazing, fought with every ounce of strength he possessed. The bookmaker was twice his size, but what he lacked in weight he made up for with speed and science.

Crash! Thud! "Yoooooop!" howled Mr. Banks as the junior's bunched fist caught him twice in rapid succession in the left eye. "Elp, 'elp!"

Crash! The parlour door flew suddenly open, and Mr. Cobb, accompanied by two other men, appeared.

"My 'at!" "Elp, 'elp!" yelled Mr. Banks again, his nose streaming, and his eye fast closing. "Dragimoff!"

Mr. Cobb gave a yell, and hurled himself across at the junior. Vernon-Smith, who had all his work cut out to deal with Mr. Banks, felt a thick arm flung round his neck from the rear. At the same moment he received a heavy kick on the shin as the two other men with Mr. Cobb took a hand in the proceedings.

"Let me go, you rotters!" roared the angry junior. "Fight fair— Yooop!" "Let 'im 'ave it!" hooted Mr. Banks, feeling sore and bruised all over. "Ow! The young shaver's 'arf killed me!"

The ex-Removite fought and struggled; but he was no match for the four men. Two of them grabbed him by the legs, Mr. Banks gripped his shoulder, and he felt himself borne out of the little parlour to the front door.

"Hout with 'im!" roared Mr. Banks savagely. Crash! Vernon-Smith felt himself hurtling through the air, and the next moment he hit the ground on all-fours.

There came a yell of coarse laughter from the doorway. "Now his bloomie's suitcase!"

The Bouncer's suitcase followed its owner into the road. "You ain't coming back 'ere no more!" snorted Mr. Banks. "Now you're out, you can stay out! That's wot I get for giving you a job to 'elp you, is it, you—you young 'ound! You're fired! Go an' ask them to let you in the workhouse, if you ain't got nowhere to go!"

Vernon-Smith staggered to his feet, picked up his suitcase, and gazed dazedly at the four men before him.

"I know what your pretended sympathy and job's worth now!" he laughed bitterly. "You've shown your hand to-night, but you mistook your man! I wouldn't stay here if you paid me a thousand a year, you dirty set of cads!"

"What do you think we wanted you for, now you ain't got no money?" jeered Mr. Cobb. "You forgot you ain't no one now. You're no good to us. We only took you in and give you the job because we thought you might be useful. But now you can git!"

And Mr. Cobb closed the door of the Cross Keys with a slam.

Vernon-Smith stood still for some moments. Eleven o'clock chimed from the church in Friardale village.

The Cross Keys, which had been his home for a week, was closed to him. The job Mr. Banks had given him as billiards-marker had gone. Not that the junior had ever relished it. But it had provided him with a bed and meals. He had been glad to accept it at the time, hoping to be able to stay there until he got something better.

Courtfield, as he knew from bitter experience, was a town that had no room for him. All his efforts to obtain employment there had failed dismally. He had wondered at Mr. Banks' generosity when he had accidentally met him in Courtfield. But now he knew the reason that had prompted it.

For a fraction of a second, he thought of Mr. Quelch and the Removites. Mr. Quelch did not believe he had been doing honest work at the Cross Keys, and had given him no opportunity to explain. Indeed, for that matter, the Form master had definitely stated that he would not believe any explanation.

He had judged him as the rest of the Removites had judged him—without a hearing. And Harry Wharton & Co., fellows who should have known him better, they had failed to stand by him, too. Their faith in him had not been proof against circumstances. They had not possessed sufficient trust in him to

(Continued on page 26)

KIDNAPPED! For a well-known footballer to be kidnapped in the middle of a match, in full view of the public, seems incredible. But that's a mere bagatelle when the "Wolves" are on the job!



A Baffling Mystery Story, featuring Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, and Jack Drake, his boy assistant.

Larkham City v. The 'Spurs.

THE long, lean, white motor-car came speeding down the road from Lone Manor, with Locke and Jack in the front seat. The White Hawk, as the detective had nicknamed the handsome machine, was bound for London.

It was on the following Saturday, and the detective and Jack were bound for the famous football ground at White Hart Lane, to see the match between the Larks and the 'Spurs.

They had left Lone Manor in the charge of the Scotland Yard men who had been sent down at Locke's request. Locke had thought it wise for the old moated house to be looked after by plain-clothes men during his absence.

For the last few days, Ferrers Locke had been scouring the countryside for a sign of the Wolves. But the mysterious gang of scoundrels had vanished as though into thin air. The house from which Locke had rescued Adam Guelph had been deserted; yet Locke believed that Silva and the other leaders, with their underlings, were still not so far away.

A recent message from Dr. Grieve, in Birmingham, had told them that Adam Guelph was no better. From him they could learn nothing yet. With the green spider safe in Travers' possession, its secret still an utter mystery, it seemed as though the Wolves had been checkmated. But when Jack Drake voiced that opinion to Locke, the detective shook his head.

"Don't you believe it, Jack! The Wolves aren't to be beaten so easily. They know now that Adam Guelph fooled them when he told them there was a secret place under the moat where the green spider was hidden. They'll be hot after it again now—they won't rest till they've got it, or find that they can't get it."

His foot pressed down on the accelerator, and the speed of the powerful car increased as they turned into the main London Road.

"They'll strike again, Jack, you can rely on that. Oh, but they're cunning

and clever! When they do strike again, it'll be suddenly, swiftly, in some utterly unexpected fashion! I'm certain of that!"

It did not take long to reach London. With the car parked, Jack and Locke passed in through the turnstiles of White Hart Lane.

INTRODUCTION.

TOM TRAVERS, a clever goalkeeper playing for Larkham City.

ADAM GUELPH, his miserly uncle, owner of Lone Manor.

ARMITAGE, Guelph's butler.

FERRERS LOCKE, the celebrated detective of Baker Street.

JACK DRAKE, his boy assistant.

SILVA, **SCARAMANGA**, and **DROOD**, a blind man, members of the Wolves, a powerful secret society.

Adam Guelph mysteriously disappears, and Tom Travers enlists the aid of Locke and Drake to find him. This they eventually do, for the old man has been kidnapped by the Wolves. But Guelph's rescuers are unable to discover the motive of the Wolves in capturing him, for the old miser is suffering from brain fever. Locke and his companions therefore set themselves the task of unravelling the mystery. After a series of thrilling hand-to-hand encounters with the Wolves, who have besieged Guelph's old manor house, Locke and his two companions explore an underground vault. Here they come across Armitage. The butler, apparently, had gone down to the vaults for his master to take from its hiding-place the Green Spider—a weirdly constructed ring, set with a flashing emerald, resembling in shape a spider—when the entrance to the vault had been sealed up, leaving him a prisoner. From the butler's lips Locke & Co. learn that the Green Spider holds the secret of the whereabouts of a vast hoard of treasure, and that it is this ring, and the treasure it will lead to, that the Wolves are seeking. Armitage gives the ring into Travers' keeping. After another desperate encounter with Silva and his gang, Locke, Travers, Drake, and Armitage manage to escape from Lone Manor.

Travers is down to play against the Spurs on the following Saturday, and, after cautioning the young goalie to take care of the mysterious ring, Locke and Drake part from their friend, with the remark that they will be at White Hart Lane to see the match.

(Now read on.)

There was a huge crowd to watch the match, confident in their expectation of seeing real tiptop football. The Midland team had always been popular in London, and enthusiasts of the Soccer code had turned up in their thousands to see how the Larks framed against the 'Spurs that season.

Jack and Locke had splendid seats opposite the half-way line.

"Not long before they start now," said Locke, glancing at his watch. "I hope Tom is in form."

"He ought to be!" grinned Jack. "Ever since Monday the trainer has been putting him through it!" He lowered his voice. "I say, guv'nor, I wonder—What's he doing about the green spider?"

Locke frowned.

"I've been wondering," he answered. "We ought to have come up yesterday and taken it, to look after it for him."

"It ought to go into a bank," said Jack.

Locke laughed.

"Tom Travers won't trust banks," he said, "and I don't know that I altogether blame him! Banks have been broken into before to-day, and thieves have been successful in getting away with the most precious guarded valuables, despite the watching eyes of the London police. Travers thinks that if he has the thing with him always, it's safer than in any bank!"

"Dare say he's right," Jack Drake said thoughtfully. "If the Wolves got wind of it that the green spider was in a bank, I fancy there'd be another bank robbery sensation for the papers! They're as clever as they make 'em, are Silva, Drood, & Co."

"But I confess I'm rather worried about to-day," admitted Locke, and there was a shadow in his keen eyes. "Travers will be a fool to leave it in the dressing-rooms. Anyone might be about."

"Don't see how he can carry it with him, though, in his footer togs!" grinned Jack.

Five minutes later the game began, and the youngster's eagerness over the

football drove all thoughts of the green spider from his mind.

It was clear from the start that Travers was in good form.

The 'Spurs set a hot pace from the first, and at the opening of the game all the play was in the Larks' half. Travers, lithe and swift between the posts, had several fierce shots that would have beaten any but a first-class goalkeeper. His name was on the lips of the crowd continually, and Jack felt a thrill of pride to know that the famous young goalkeeper was a friend.

"Play up, the Larks!"

"Go it, 'Spurs!"

The crowd was soon in a fever of excitement. A dull roar rose as Crisp, the Larkham City centre-forward, was seen to cross the half-way line with a rush, the ball dancing at his toes.

He was tackled, but skilful footwork left his opponent standing. The ball went flashing out to the outside-left, and in a perfect line the five Larkham forwards swept down on the home goal.

A breathless hush fell over the ground.

Crisp had the ball again now. The opposing centre-half was on him, but the Larkham City man was already rid of the ball to his outside-right. The wing man came curving in towards the goal.

The left-back tackled, but a flashing pass returned the ball to Crisp. By the old rule, it would have been off-side; but there were still two defenders between Crisp and the goal-line.

The centre-forward steadied himself for the fraction of a second, then came the sound of leather on leather, and the ball went flashing from his foot.

It was a long shot—to some it seemed a mistaken one. But Crisp had seen that there was more than a sporting chance, if he put the ball just where he wanted it:

Swift and straight, rising as it went, the ball flew for the top right-hand corner of the net. The goalkeeper flung himself at it, but it was impossible to save. The cheers of the Larkham supporters crashed out as the net shook to the impact.

"Oh, fine!" gasped Jack. "Jove, guv'nor, but that's what I call football!"

The whistle piped, and the 'Spurs kicked off.

The home team were out to equalise without delay! They swept down the field, the ball flashing from toe to toe, with the wonderful technique for which their team is famed. The visiting halves seemed to crumple up.

The skill of the attack was almost irresistible. The Larkham City backs fell back, but they were swamped. From the foot of the inside-right, the ball went singing towards the goal.

Travers leapt for it, fisting it out with a magnificent punch. The 'Spurs inside-left got possession, and sent in a deadly shot. But Travers was there.

The young goalkeeper sprang up, and his fingers tipped the ball over the bar.

The corner kick was taken, and Jack's eyes were alight with the thrill as the bunched players struggled before the goal-mouth. There was a surge over the goal-line, and suddenly the referee's whistle shrilled.

The ball was in the net—the 'Spurs had already equalised. And then Jack Drake gave a gasp to see a still form lying on the goal-line.

It was Travers.

Just what had happened it was impossible to know then. Two of the players were bending over him. And then three running figures appeared, with a rolled-up stretcher. The players fell back as the uniformed ambulance men swiftly opened the stretcher and lifted the injured goalkeeper upon it.

"Oh, my hat!" said Jack glumly.

Locke's face was set and anxious. A great silence had fallen on the watching crowds. The men with the stretcher were retreating towards the entrance to the dressing-rooms. Ferrers Locke rose quickly to his feet.

"Come on, Jack! We've got to look into this!"

On producing his card to the attendants, and explaining that he was a personal friend of the injured man, Locke did not have much difficulty in gaining access to the dressing-rooms, with Jack Drake. It was there that they found Hutchins, the Larkham City trainer, with a queer look in his face.

"Where is he?" echoed Hutchins, his round, ruddy face exasperated. "Ask me something I can answer!"

"What do you mean?" cried Locke.

"Why, simply this!" gasped the trainer. "Those ambulance chaps who nipped off with Travers weren't the regular bunch at all! No one seems to know anything about 'em, and they gave us all the slip! They're not here at all—neither's Travers! What it all means, goodness knows, and there's going to be trouble when I find out! But someone says he saw an ambulance car drive away down the road just now—"

From Jack Drake broke a startled cry.

"Kidnapped!" gasped the youngster. He gripped Locke's arm. "Don't you see, guv'nor? Oh, but the Wolves are fiendishly clever! Tom must have had the green spider on him—they arranged for Travers to be fouled, injured—and now they've got away with him, and the green spider, too!"

On the Trail!

"KIDNAPPED!" breathed Ferrers Locke.

The detective's eyes were gleaming.

This last amazing exploit of the Wolves revealed to the full the sheer daring audacity of the brains of the gang. Jack Drake read that gleam in Locke's eyes—knew that it was a sign that the detective was on his mettle at finding his foemen so worthy of his steel!

What had happened was all clear enough.

Tom Travers, fearful of leaving the precious ring of the green spider out of his keeping for one moment, had even taken the precaution of taking that mysterious object on to the football-field. Somehow the Wolves had discovered this, or had guessed it beforehand, and had doubtless arranged with some unscrupulous member of the Larkham City team that Travers should get hurt during the match. Promptly, too, swiftly for any questions to be asked, or even for any suspicions to be aroused, the fake ambulance men had carried Travers from the field.

The cool cunning of it all left Jack Drake's brain in a whirl.

Kidnapped, before the eyes of watching thousands; verily a plan worthy of the Wolves!

Ferrers Locke swung on his heel.

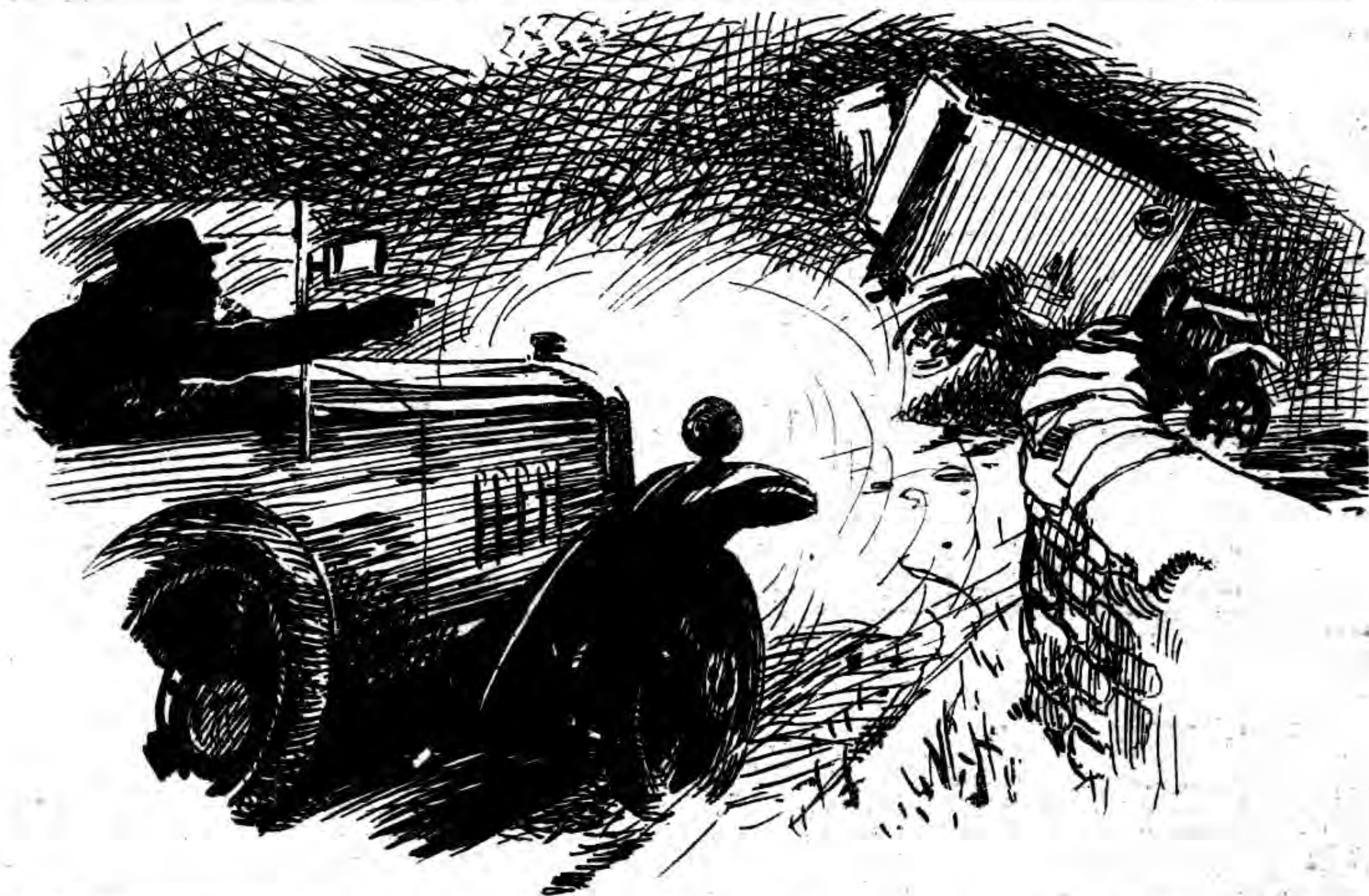
"Quick, Jack—not a moment to lose if—"

They left the Larkham City trainer staring after them blankly. Two minutes later they were outside the main entrance of the football ground. Locke called to one of the policemen, and hurriedly showed his card. The man saluted.

"What can I do, sir?"



With the agility of a tiger Travers sprang up and his fingers tipped the ball over the bar. (See this page.)



A low stone wall ran between the road and the stretch of water on their right. And hanging over the wall was a black motor van—the van in which Travers had been so audaciously kidnapped from the football ground. (See page 26.)

"You saw an ambulance car drive away a few moments ago?"

"No; not an ambulance car, exactly," answered the constable. "I supposed the case was too urgent to wait for one, for the ambulance chaps ran their stretcher, with the fellow on it, into a small black van, and drove off like one o'clock—"

"Which way?"

The constable jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Off up there, sir." He turned and pointed. "Then off round the corner along there—"

"Right," said Locke crisply. "Jack, this is where the White Hawk is going to show her horse-power!"

Panting breathlessly, the youngster found himself beside Locke in the front seat of the long white car, almost wondering how he had got there. With a roar of the powerful engines, the Hawk leapt away like a hound upon the scent!

"Guv'nor, there they are!"

Far away down the darkening road, Jack's keen eyes had picked out the speeding car ahead.

Thanks to Locke's promptness in getting on the trail, the black van had had but a few minutes' start of them. It had not been difficult to hang on the track of it, by questioning an occasional constable, or, as at one point, a gang of roadmenders at work. Very soon it had been obvious that the fugitive car was making for the main north-east road, and Locke had been able to speed up to the full at last.

The early winter dusk was falling, and a blustering wind was shaking the trees that flashed past. It was very cold, with more than a hint of snow in the air.

They had left the houses now, were roaring down a dark highway that

skirted Epping Forest. At Jack's sudden exclamation, Ferrers Locke nodded.

"Yes; we're on their heels, young 'un!" he muttered, with a short, grim laugh.

He switched on the headlamps, and the vivid beams darted out ahead. The wind was streaming past them in an icy torrent as the magnificent car leapt on like a live thing.

Jack's eyes were alight with the thrill of sheer excitement. The break-neck speed of it had got into his blood.

"They've vanished again now, guv'nor," he muttered. "My only hat, though—at this speed we sha'n't be long in overhauling 'em! Travers won't be long in the hands of the Wolves if I know anything of the Hawk!"

They swerved round a twist in the road, and once again their quarry was in sight, nearer now—the black van had nothing like the speed of the detective's car. Hands steady on the wheel, eyes steady on the road in front, Locke was at his best at such a time as this, when every ounce of nerve was wanted.

The car ahead disappeared, came into sight again, again vanished. It was clear that the fugitives were going all out. But they could not hope by sheer speed to outdistance the car that Locke was driving.

The Hawk raced for a bend, swung round with her speed barely checked—and from Jack Drake broke a startled cry.

Only a few hundred yards away was the black van, jerking into motion once more, swiftly gathering speed. A stone bridge separated the two cars, and across the bridge had been placed the pole of a telegraph-post that had been left lying at the side of the road, doubtlessly, by men repairing the telegraph.

The cry choked back in Jack's throat. His face was suddenly white as paper.

It looked as though disaster were inevitable. But Ferrers Locke's nerves were like steel, and they stood by him now. He snatched out the clutch, jammed on the powerful four-wheel brakes—

Already the black van was dwindling in the distance. There came the rasp of tyres on the road, and the Hawk seemed to buck like a wild horse. Jack was flung forward in his seat, and he only just saved his head from crashing into the wind-screen. With a screech, the car went skidding on, and Jack felt the sickening tremor as they struck the obstacle on the bridge. There came the noise of a bursting tyre.

Locke was out on to the road in a moment, Jack at his heels. Running round to the front of the car, the detective summed up the damage in a moment.

"That wheel's done in," he said crisply. "Badly buckled, and tyre in shreds. Lucky we didn't hit this thing square, or both wheels would have suffered. Quick, the jack, young 'un—"

A minute later they had the front axle jacked-up, and with swift, steady hands Locke was taking off the buckled wheel in record time.

Jack Drake stared down the road. No sign of the car in which Travers was a prisoner—that had vanished in the distance long ago.

"Got the spare wheel?" exclaimed Locke, and Jack gave it him, taking the damaged one.

With amazing quickness the detective had finished the job, the jack was taken away, and Locke called to Jack to help him remove the telegraph-pole.

It was no easy matter, but they managed it, and a few minutes later the Hawk was leaping off on the trail again.

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The long main road, broad, and with no side-turnings, but for an occasional narrow lane, was ideal for the pursuers. Jack glanced up at the inky sky. It was quite dark now.

"Wish the snow would come!" he muttered. "We could follow their tracks then. As it is, when we do come to a fork road, we're done!"

Even as he spoke, they bore down upon a point where the road branched. Locke brought the car to a standstill, the engine purring. At that moment Jack Drake caught sight of something pinned to the signpost at the grass patch between the forking roads. It was a sheet of paper, fluttering in the wind.

"What's that, guv'nor? See it?" he exclaimed.

"Bring it here, Jack!"

The youngster leapt out on the road and ran towards the signpost. He snatched down the fluttering sheet, and by the light of the headlamps he and Ferrers Locke examined it. Locke gave a short, curious laugh.

"My word, I'm hanged if it's not a little note from our friend Silva—telling us the way, too!"

Jack read the hastily scribbled words on the paper aloud:

"Your attempt to catch us is amusing. Rather than you should take the wrong fork at this point, and so give us no further fun, let me assure you that we are taking the right-hand fork, to Mattinmills. We challenge you to a race to that town."

Jack Drake stared at Locke in bewilderment.

"Of all the cool customers, this fellow Silva takes the giddy biscuit!" grinned the youngster.

"You believe him, then?" asked Locke.

Jack stared down at the paper again, then laughed outright.

"What an ass! Of course, I see now! It's all a bit of bluff! He wants us to take the right-hand fork, because they are taking the left!"

"You're satisfied with that reasoning?" persisted Locke, a quiet smile hovering at the corners of his mouth.

Jack Drake frowned.

"No," he said. "On second thoughts, that would be too obvious for a chap like Silva. He'll have argued we shall see through his bluff, and not take the fork he tells us to take. So he himself really will take the right-hand fork, as he says here! Cunning blighter!"

They were already climbing back in to the waiting car. Locke was still smiling.

"That your final conclusion, Jack?"

Jack gave a bewildered laugh.

"After all," he muttered slowly, "Silva is a thundering clever chap! He'll follow our reasoning from step to step. I'll bet he knew we should reason, as I've done, that he'd really take the right-hand fork, since apparently he would be taking the left, so that his paper should have bluffed us. Crumbs, it's a bit complicated! But since we've argued that what he'll do is to take the right-hand fork, I'll bet he's foreseen our reasoning and taken the left!"

"Left-hand fork, then, Jack?" murmured Locke, as he slipped in the clutch and the car glided forward.

"Yes," answered Jack confidently. "Left-hand fork, guv'nor, for my money!" He broke off, to cry quickly: "But this is the right!"

"Just so!" laughed Ferrers Locke; and he accelerated hard. "I agree with you that Silva is a very subtle customer. But I give his subtlety credit for just one more stage of reasoning than you did. I am convinced he reasoned that we should choose the left-hand fork, reaching that conclusion step by step as you did. Therefore, I know perfectly well, Jack, that he took good care to leave the left-hand fork well alone! This is the road he took."

"Oh!"

Down the dark highway leapt the Hawk. A gust of powdered snow came carried on the wind, driving into their faces.

With the delay at the bridge, and now the briefer delay at the branch roads, Silva and his men had got a long start. Mile after mile the long white car swept on through the stormy countryside. The snow was falling thicker, faster, settling on the roads. There came blinding gusts of it, in which Locke had to slow down to a crawl. Soon there were smooth drifts of it beneath the hedges, and it was so thick on the surface of the road that speed was out of the question any longer. Not that that worried them. They knew that their quarry, too, must be going slow.

The snowfall ceased suddenly, and left them with the clear tracks of the car ahead to follow. With the passing of the snow, the moon had broken through the clouds, lighting the road to silver whiteness, glittering on the trees and hedges as though they were festooned with diamonds.

They were far into Essex now, the flat countryside stretching away on either side. In the vast silence, the drone of the car's engines was the only sound to accompany the faint whine of the wind in the snow-laden branches.

They had left the main road now. By the twisting and doubling of the car-tracks in the snow, it seemed as though some sixth sense must have told the fugitives that they were still being pursued—that they had not, after all, succeeded in outwitting Ferrers Locke and throwing him off the track.

Through lonely villages they followed, through dark woods, where the broken moonlight scarcely was bright enough to reveal the tracks of the black van. Then they came out upon a stretch of road that ran beside a black backwater—that gradually widened as it approached the main river.

And suddenly from Jack Drake broke a swift cry:

"Look! Look!"

The youngster had flung out a pointing hand, and his eyes were wide and startled as he stared ahead.

A low stone wall ran between the road and the stretch of water on their right. A couple of hundred yards away, by a turn in the road, they could see a motor-car that had smashed its way through the wall and was hanging with its front wheels over the water.

As they drew nearer, they saw that it was a small black van—the black van in which Tom Travers had been kidnapped so audaciously from the football-ground at White Hart Lane.

An utter wreck!

(What's happened to Tom Travers and the green spider? Will Ferrers Locke be able to overcome this early set-back in the frantic chase after the kidnapped footballer? See next week's grand instalment.)

FACING THE WORLD!

(Continued from page 22.)

believe that he was living honestly without an assurance from him.

"Oh, well, what does it matter, anyway?" Vernon-Smith asked himself, with a hard and bitter laugh. "They called me the Bouncer once. Give a dog a bad name—I suppose they'll call me the Bouncer again now!"

The junior took a last glance at the closed door of the Cross Keys, and dusted himself down. Then he glanced quickly at the money in his pocket-book. He possessed less than four pounds.

Four pounds!

It was not enough to keep him for a week, and he was without a job, or the prospect of getting one.

"I'll leave this part of the country for good," he murmured savagely. "That's what I should have done at first."

Over the fields a green light on the railway winked. There came the sound of a distant whistle. The last train for London was approaching the village station.

Vernon-Smith broke into a run.

The station booking-office was about to close for the night.

The ex-Removite quickly purchased a ticket and pocketed his change as the train roared in.

A few seconds later he flung himself into a stuffy, third-class carriage.

"Might have better luck in London," thought the junior grimly. "Anyway, it can't be much worse than down here!"

As the train roared out of Friardale and through the fields, Vernon-Smith leaned out of the window. In the distance he could just make out the ancient pile of Greyfriars School. A light flickered here and there through the tall windows, showing where some master or prefect was still abroad.

A lump came into the junior's throat.

Greyfriars!

And he would probably never see it again.

He recalled an interview with Mr. Quelch years before when he had first arrived.

"I don't care two straws whether you learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, or whether you don't!" the Form master had said. "You come here to learn to play the game."

"Well, I've learned!" the junior reflected bitterly. "But—but it seems hardly worth while."

The train roared through a tunnel—blackness. Ahead loomed the great metropolis.

And what?

THE END.

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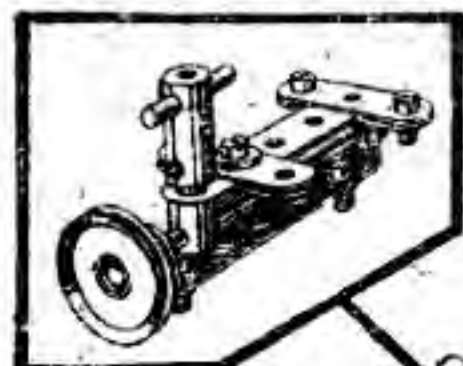
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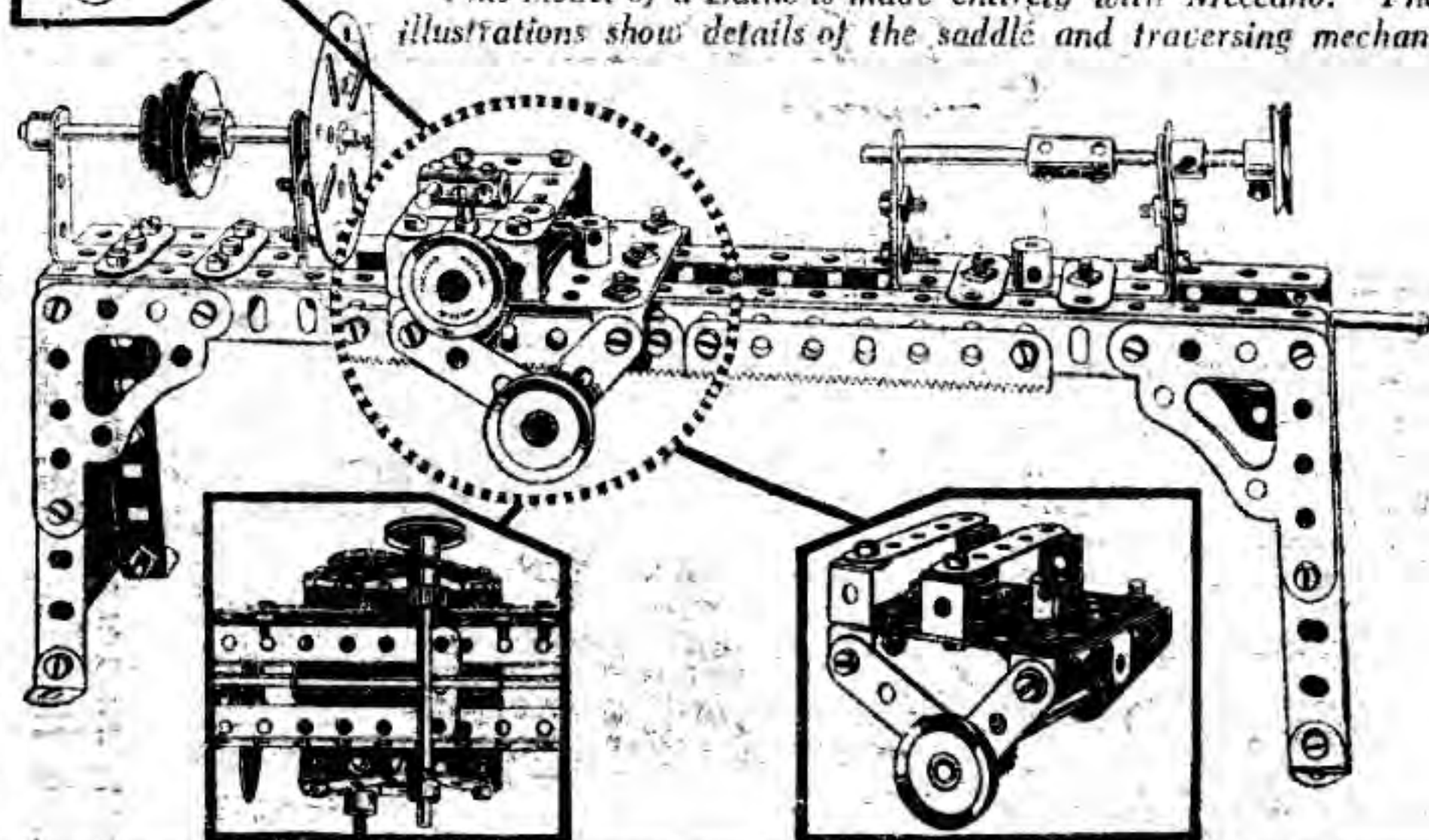
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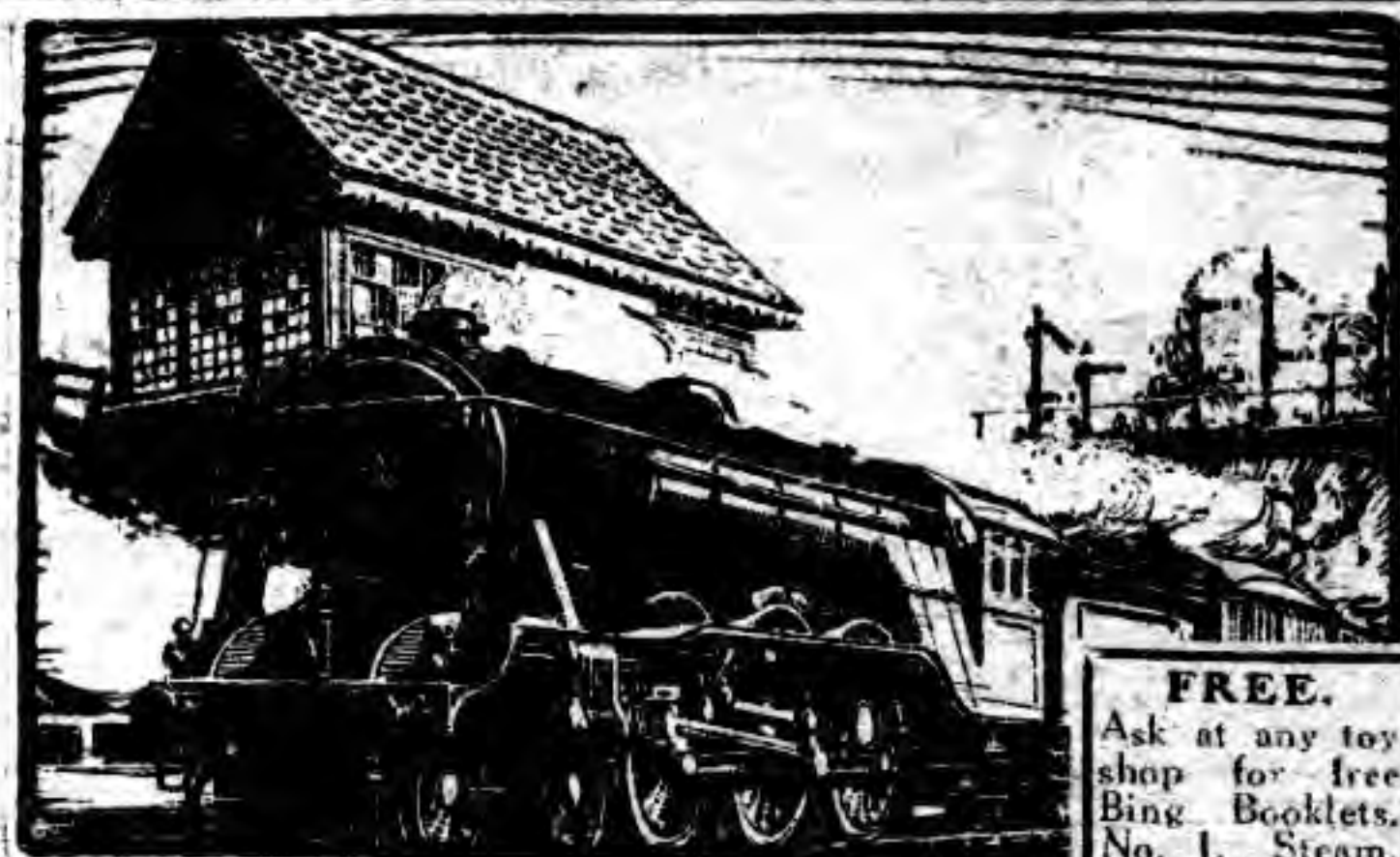
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