

SPECIAL 4-PAGE FOOTBALL SUPPLEMENT!

CARTOON BY JIMMY SEED, OF THE SPURS.

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Complete School Stories

EVERY
MONDAY.



WHAT HAPPENED IN THE HEAD'S STUDY?

(A trying ordeal for Mark Linley! See the long complete school story inside.)

THE WHITE FEATHER! Nothing hurts a schoolboy more than to be accused of funking a scrap. Yet this grave charge is levelled against Mark Linley, one of the pluckiest fellows at Greyfriars!



By FRANK RICHARDS

A New Long Complete Story of the Chums of Greyfriars, with Mark Linley, the Scholarship boy, filling the principal role.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

An Old Enemy!

"COMING along to the village, Bob?"

Mark Linley asked the question cheerily as he came into Study No. 13, which he shared with Bob Cherry, Hurree Singh, and Wan Lung. It was Wednesday, just after dinner, and only Bob happened to be in the study. He was busily engaged cleaning a pair of skates.

He looked up with a smile.

"Sorry, old scout—no," he replied. "My fascinating society is already booked—going with Wharton and the others down to the Sark, in fact. Why not drop the village idea and come along with us, Marky?"

Mark Linley laughed.

"I'm not yearning for a watery grave, Bob," he said. "My dear old chap, the river can't be safe yet. Besides, the snow will have mucked up—"

"This wind will have seen to the snow," said Bob confidently. "I bet the centre of the river is fairly clear, anyway. In any case, if it isn't safe, we shall trot along to Newman's Pool—Wingate and Gwynno have been on it already, I believe. It's O.K. What about joining us, Marky?"

"Want to get a new strap for my skates. Broke one during the last ice we had. I'll join you afterwards, though. I won't waste time by going to the Sark. I'll cut across to Newman's Pool from the village. I expect I'll find you there—if you haven't found a watery grave in the Sark in the meantime."

"Keep your peepers peeled, old chap," said Bob Cherry. "Those Highcliffe bounders are on the warpath, and with all this snow about—"

"Rot! I can look after myself all right," laughed Mark Linley. "Well, cheerio!"

With that, Linley twisted his scarf round his neck and hurried out of doors.

Out in the Close the snow was piled thick and deep—deeper still where it had drifted against the trunks of the old elms. Frost glimmered on windows,

and from sills and gutters and trees sparkling icicles hung stiffly, adding to the dazzling glitter of the snow in the winter sunshine.

Round the snow-covered roofs and old, red chimneys of Greyfriars the wind whistled, and it was biting cold. But despite the cold a swarm of fags were snowballing in the Close, and a fusillade greeted Mark Linley as he started for the gates. Being a wise and good-humoured junior, Mark did not stop to retaliate—and thereby earn a ragging! He wisely took to his heels, laughing as he ducked to avoid the whizzing snowballs.

At the gates the fags drew off, and Mark dropped to a walk, buttoning his coat tightly about him. In the lane the trodden snow was hard as iron, and slippery as ice itself. But Mark Linley put his best foot foremost, eager to get his errand over and to join Harry Wharton & Co. on the ice.

But Mark was not fated to do any skating that afternoon.

He was half-way to Friardale when he was startled by hearing yells of pain and anger ahead of him, and on turning the corner in the lane he came upon a scene which made his face, already ruddy with the glow of health, flush redder still.

Sprawling face downwards in the snow and struggling desperately was a village youth. He was struggling with two elegantly-clad youths, one of whom was kneeling on his back, jamming his face into the hard snow with cruel force, the other twisting one of his arms, making the hapless villager howl with pain.

"Ponsonby and Gadsby!" muttered Linley. "Up to their bullying games as usual."

The villager's face was white, save for a thin trickle of red that ran from his nose. A glance showed the Lancashire junior that this was no harmless ragging.

"Hold on, Ponsonby!" exclaimed Mark Linley indignantly. "That's enough!"

He ran in and, grasping Ponsonby by the shoulder, whirled him off his victim. Ponsonby staggered away, and his eyes glinted as he recognised the newcomer.

"Oh, it's you, Linley!" he snapped. "What the thump do you mean by chip-pin' in like this, you cad! Clear out!"

"I'll clear out when you've released that chap," said Linley quietly. "Can't you see he's had enough?"

Ponsonby rubbed his shoulder where Mark's grasp had closed on it. There was an ugly look on his features. It was not the first time he had come "up against" Mark Linley.

"Look here, Linley," he said furiously. "This village lout chucked a snowball at me yesterday. Think I forget things like that? I'm going to put the cad through it. And if you don't mind your own dashed business, we'll put you through it, you dashed factory cad!"

"He's had enough," said Mark calmly. "Let him go."

Ponsonby's answer was to rush to aid Gadsby, who was finding it more than he could manage to hold the villager. The latter was on his knees now, but Ponsonby reached him, and, though Gadsby was holding the youth's wrists, Ponsonby's fist caught him a brutal blow on the temple, and the youth went crashing down again.

"You howling cad!" shouted Linley.

Roused from his calmness now, Linley went at the Highcliffe dandy, and whirled him away again. This time Ponsonby spun round and sat down with a jar, on the hard snow.

He was up again the next moment, his eyes blazing with passion.

"Leave that kid, Gadsby!" he yelled furiously. "Help me with this cad! I'll teach him to lay his dirty paws on me, the factory lout!"

With that, Ponsonby went for Linley like a whirlwind. Mark Linley jumped back with upraised fists, but as he did so his feet went clean from under him on the slippery snow, and he went down with no little force.

In a flash Ponsonby had jumped on him, and the next moment, glad enough to release the village youth, Gadsby had joined him.

"Put the cad through it, Gaddy!" shouted Ponsonby. "He's asked for it, and he's going to get it."

The fall had shaken Mark Linley up considerably, and before he could recover himself the two Highcliffe black sheep had him pinned down in the snow.

"Hold him, Gaddy!" hissed Ponsonby, his lips curling cruelly. "I'll give the cad something to remember me by. Handle me, would he—the low beast!"

He started to ram the Lancashire junior's face in the snow with savage force. With Ponsonby's knee in his back, and with Gadsby sitting on his legs, the junior was almost helpless.

But it did not go on. Ponsonby and Gadsby had quite forgotten the village youth—or, at least, they had taken it for granted that he would take to his heels on being released, and save himself.

The youth did nothing of the sort, however; he was evidently built of sterner stuff. A knuckly fist, hard as iron, struck Gadsby suddenly on his chin, and Gadsby went rolling away with a yelp of surprise and pain.

"Good for you, kid!" gasped Mark Linley.

Taking advantage of the unexpected help, Mark gave a sudden heave, and sent Ponsonby sprawling away. Then he scrambled up.

"Good gad!" gasped Ponsonby, jumping up. "Look out, Gaddy!"

Even as he shouted the warning Ponsonby went reeling back as Linley's fist smacked home on his mouth. Mark followed him up, hitting out straight from the shoulder, and the Highcliffe leader staggered back, defending himself desperately, and yelling to Gaddy for aid.

But Gaddy had more than enough on his hands to look after himself. The village youth had found the two of them too much for him, but things were levelled out now. He was almost exhausted with the punishment he had received at the hands of the bullies, but he lowered his head, and went for Gadsby like a wild cat.

The youth hadn't the faintest idea of boxing, but he knew how to fight; moreover, he was almost mad with rage and pain, and he meant to settle his account with the bullies. The way he waded into the cowardly Gadsby was a sight to see.

With whirling fists he drove the yelling Gadsby round and round, until Gadsby suddenly ducked away and fairly ran for it.

With heaving chest and panting breath the villager turned to see how Linley was faring. But he need not have worried. The Lancashire lad was more than holding his own. It usually took a great deal to force the good-tempered and quiet Mark Linley into a quarrel, but his eyes were blazing now, and it was plain that he intended to give Ponsonby a hiding this time—a hiding the Highcliffe slacker richly deserved.

Ponsonby was panting and gasping now. His lip was cut, and crimson streamed from his nose, while one of his eyes was already swelling visibly. But he fought on savagely, desperately, backing always, and defending himself frantically. Had his opponent been anyone else but Linley, Ponsonby would, doubtless enough, have bolted as Gadsby had done. But the thought of fleeing before Linley—the factory "cad" he had always hated and despised—was more than the proud and haughty Ponsonby would allow himself to contemplate.

His pride cost him a terrific hiding, however. Had he shown the slightest desire for mercy, Linley would have stopped at once. But even when Linley did show signs himself of slacking off,

Ponsonby, almost beside himself with passion now, renewed the struggle savagely.

"My heye!" panted the villager.

Not knowing that the two were old enemies, the village youth watched the terrific struggle aghast.

But the fight was too furious and fast to last long. Both of the juniors had been down more than once, chiefly owing to the slippery snow. But a final drive from Linley's fist taking Ponsonby clean under the chin sent him crashing down, with every bit of breath in his body shaken out. And this time he stayed down.

He lay there gasping, and almost weeping with rage. Mark Linley stood panting and looking down at him.

"You asked for it, Ponsonby," he gasped. "I've licked you before, and you knew what to expect. But I wasn't going to pass by and see you brutally ill-treating that village chap."

Ponsonby glowered up at him, bitter hatred in his eyes. But he did not speak, and Linley found his cap and nodded to the village youth. They walked on towards Friardale together.

The villager was grinning as he mopped his damaged nose. The Highcliffe "nuts" had been "licked to the blooming wide," as he expressed it. But Mark Linley was not grinning. He knew the vengeful, spiteful nature of Cecil Ponsonby, and he didn't feel at all certain that the affair had ended there.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

To the Rescue!

PONSONBY watched Mark Linley and his companion as they vanished along the snow-clad lane, and then he struggled to his feet, mopping his bruised features with a handkerchief that rapidly grew crimson. He had scarcely done so when Gadsby came slinking out from the shelter of the trees bordering the lane.

"The—the cads have gone, then, Pon?" he muttered, eyeing his leader more than a little uneasily. "Look here, Pon, why the thunder didn't you run for it like I did? You must have known we couldn't handle the pair of them."

Ponsonby looked at him, his face twisted into a savage, bitter sneer.

"You beastly, rotten funk!" he hissed savagely. "You ran away and left me to it, Gaddy. Just the thing you would do."

"Look here, I wasn't—"

"Running away from a beastly gutter-snipe like that!" shouted Ponsonby. "You howling funk, Gaddy!"

"I—I wasn't going to soil my hands on him," said Gadsby surlily. "Why didn't you have the sense—"

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Ponsonby. "Think I was going to run away from that dashed factory brat? By gad! I'll make the little brute squirm for this. I'll make him wish he'd never seen Greyfriars. I'll—I'll—"

"Here's Monson and Vavasour, now," put in Gadsby, anxious to change the subject. "Pity they didn't come earlier. We'd have had those bounders at our mercy then."

Ponsonby looked quickly along the lane. From the Highcliffe Road which joined the Friardale Lane some hundred yards back two figures were walking.

Ponsonby's eyes gleamed as he sighted the two, who were Monson and Vavasour right enough.

"Good!" he breathed, his eyes glinting. "Dashed good, in fact! We

haven't finished with Linley yet, Gaddy, not by a long chalk. We're four now, and I fancy that factory scholarship bounder will find things a bit different when he comes back."

"What d'you mean?" muttered Gadsby, looking quickly at his leader. "You don't intend—"

"Yes, I do!" snarled Ponsonby passionately, taking away his handkerchief and revealing his puffed and bruised features. "Think I'm the sort to take this lying down, Gaddy? By gad, no! The brute will be coming back this way—bound to be. He had his skates in his pocket, and that means he's going on Newman's Pool, or the river. Well, he'll find us waiting for him when he does return. And when we do get the brute—well—"

Ponsonby did not finish, but the look on his face was not good to see. It made even Gadsby shiver, a trifle. And just then Monson and Vavasour came up.

They stared in astonishment at the bruised and dishevelled condition of their chums.

"Good gad!" gasped Vavasour. "What's happened? You both look as if you'd been through a dashed coffee-mill. Been scrapping with Greyfriars cads?"

Ponsonby nodded and scowled.

He very soon explained what had happened, however, and the newcomers whistled.

"Phew!" said Vavasour, "buttering up" his leader, as he was wont to do. "Gad, Pon, but you're not standing that, of course? Things are coming to a pretty pass when dashed charity louts like that chap Linley start knocking our fellows about!"

"Rotten!" agreed Monson. "We're on if you mean to catch the bounder as he comes back, Pon!"

"Oh, absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Come on, then!" snapped Ponsonby. "I know just the place to collar him—higher up here!"

And Ponsonby was just about to lead his cronies along the lane when Gadsby stooped suddenly and picked something up.

"Hallo, here's a letter belonging to Linley!" he said, glancing at the address on the envelope he held. "Must have dropped out of his pocket, I suppose. I'll rip the dashed—"

"Hold on!" snapped Ponsonby quickly. "Let's have that, Gaddy!"

He held out his hand, and Gadsby handed over the missive obediently. Ponsonby coolly drew out the letter, and glanced at it. Then his lips curled as he read it.

It was from Mark Linley's mother, and it was full of affectionate terms and homely references to family matters. Amidst joers and chuckles Ponsonby read it aloud, and the Highcliffe cads seemed to derive great amusement from the reading—especially certain references to Mark's father, who was expecting promotion, according to the letter.

"What a dashed scream!" chortled Vavasour. "So dear father is expecting to be made foreman—what? I suppose the old bounder works in a factory, like his dashed son did. We'll tell old Skinner and his pals about this, Pon. They'll just scream!"

Curiously enough, Ponsonby himself did not seem to derive enjoyment from the letter. He stood thinking a moment, and then he shoved the letter into his inside pocket, his eyes glinting curiously.

"You're right," he said, nodding. "We will tell Skinner and his pals about this. But not yet, mind you. I'll tell

you when. This needs thinking over a bit. Anyway, we'll leave it for now. What about this ambush?"

Ponsonby's chums grinned and followed him, as he led the way again along the lane; they saw their leader had something in his mind in relation to that letter. But he refused to say more concerning it, and suddenly he stopped at a spot where high, snow-covered banks lined the lane on either side.

"We'll nab him here nicely," he said. "He won't get the chance to bolt—or see us beforehand, either. Get behind these thickets, and don't move until I give the word!"

"Someone coming now," said Gadsby quickly. "From Greyfriars!"

"Get out of sight, then!" snapped Ponsonby, glancing quickly along the lane. "If it is a dashed Greyfriars cad he's got to go through it!"

"Oh, absolutely!"

A figure had come into sight from the direction of Greyfriars—a solitary figure, trudging along rather aimlessly. From the shelter of the thicket, Ponsonby watched it with eyes that gleamed with spite and malice. Ponsonby always had been "up against" Greyfriars fellows, and he was more so than ever now.

"Gad!" murmured Vavasour. "Dashed if it isn't that fool, Alonzo, that half-potty cousin of Peter Todd's. What about having a bit of fun with the dear chap, just to pass the time until Linley turns up?"

If anything, Vavasour was the most cruel and cowardly of any one of the four. But his suggestion met instantly with Ponsonby's approval, as it did with the others. Ragging a timid and harmless junior like Alonzo Todd was much more fun—and much safer—than ragging a fellow who would hit back, and might prove dangerous.

With gloating grins the Highcliffe juniors waited for the guileless and innocent Alonzo Todd to come up. He was trudging along slowly, hands in coat-pockets, his rather long nose red with cold, and his watery eyes blinking about him vacantly.

Danger was obviously far from Alonzo's thoughts just then, for he almost leaped from his skin as he found himself suddenly surrounded by Highcliffe fellows.

"Oh dear!" he mumbled. "Oh dear me!"

Alonzo had recognised them now, and his features took on an expression of deepest dismay and apprehension. He knew only too well what to expect from Ponsonby & Co.

"Dear old Lonzy," remarked Ponsonby. "What a delightful pleasure to meet you this afternoon!"

"Absolutely!" chuckled Vavasour.

Alonzo Todd blinked about him like a trapped animal.

"P-p-pup-pray allow me to pass, please," he stammered. "I happen to be in rather a—ah hurry, my dear fellows."

"His dear fellows, are we?" chuckled Vavasour. "I wonder how we can help him along, as he's in a hurry, chaps? Ah, I have it! A cold shock to freshen him up—like this!"

And, bringing a snowball from behind him, Vavasour rammed it down between Alonzo's scarf and his neck. The hapless junior yelled shrilly as the icy mass trickled down his back. He yelped still more as Ponsonby rammed another snowball into his open mouth, and then kicked his legs from under him.

The duffer of Greyfriars crashed down, and lay there, gasping and sputtering frantically, while the bullying Highcliffe cads roared.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was only the beginning, however, as Alonzo Todd quickly discovered. He was rolled and rolled, and snow was jammed down his back and his chest, and his face was rubbed in it until the unfortunate Alonzo howled dismally with pain and dismay.

So engrossed were the bullies in their task that they failed to notice a figure that had appeared far down the lane towards the village. Indeed, they scarcely had much chance to notice it, in fact.

It was Mark Linley, just returning from Friardale, and as he sighted the group in the lane he stepped swiftly into the shelter of the hedgerow.

In a flash—though it was too far for him to recognise the group, Mark had guessed they were enemies. It had already occurred to him that Ponsonby & Co. might attempt to ambush him on his return journey.

So the Lancashire lad was cautious, and ready for anything.

His first thought was to cut across the fields, and thus escape possible danger; but the yells of laughter rather puzzled him. Keeping in the shelter of the edge, though the snow was deep, Mark moved along until suddenly he stopped, and his mouth tightened.

He could recognise the voices ahead now, and he could recognise the forms of Ponsonby & Co. He could also recognise Alonzo Todd's dismal yelps of pain and distress. The Lancashire junior did not need to be told what it meant.

"Oh, the cads!" he breathed. "Fancy bullying a poor, inoffensive chap like Lonzy! Four to one—eh? Here goes, anyway!"

In a moment Mark Linley made up his mind. But instead of rushing blindly to the rescue, he slipped through a gap in the hedge, and started to work his way on swiftly towards the spot, unseen and unheard in the deep, soft snow of the field. He knew that his only chance of doing anything useful was to take the wretched bullies by surprise.

Intending not to show himself until the last moment, Mark left the hedgerow on reaching the high bank of the gully, and worked round it, keeping the bank between himself and the Highcliffe juniors, whose voices and laughter he could hear plainly now.

Reaching the spot opposite where he judged they were, Mark scrambled up the bank and glanced swiftly down into the lane below.

What he saw made him grit his teeth with angry indignation.

Only Alonzo Todd's head and shoulders were visible. Snow was piled up about him, and it was obviously the Highcliffe cads' intention to bury the hapless junior up to his neck in the hard, icy snow.

Poor Alonzo's face was blue with cold, save where sundry scratches showed redly. The sight made Mark's blood boil, and he was about to leap the low hedge to the rescue when two things happened.

At that moment Ponsonby sighted him and gave a yell, and at the same moment a distant cry reached Mark's ears from behind him.

There was something so appealing in the cry, so urgent and terrified, that it arrested Mark's attention at once. Moreover, it was a feminine cry, and it was a cry for aid.

"Help, help!"

The cry was faint and feeble, but it caught Mark's keen ears, and he wheeled round in a flash—and in a flash he saw what it was.

A couple of fields distant, and with a thin belt of trees in between, was a small

private lake. And through the wintry trunks of the trees Mark's eyes glimpsed an ugly, black patch on the white surface of the lake, and in the black patch of water something white that struggled.

"Good heavens!" panted Mark.

In that moment poor Alonzo Todd's troubles became as nothing; indeed, he forgot Alonzo Todd and Ponsonby & Co. as he glimpsed that alarming scene in the distance.

Turning abruptly, he dashed away across the fields towards the distant lake, and as he did so Ponsonby's alarmed yell was answered by another yell, in the well-known tones of Harry Wharton.

"My hat! Rescue, Greyfriars! Hold on, Alonzo—we're coming!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Amazing!

IT was the Famous Five. They were just coming from the river, having found the Sark far from being safe for skating. And they had turned the corner in the lane in time to see Ponsonby & Co. putting the finishing touches to their cruel ragging of Alonzo Todd.

They had also seen something else; they were just in time to see Mark Linley wheel round and dash away, vanishing from sight over the ridge of snow-covered bank, as Ponsonby yelled out the warning.

But they had not seen what Mark Linley had seen, nor had they heard that faint, appealing cry from the distant lake.

The Co. were naturally astounded at seeing a fellow like Mark Linley take to his heels in such circumstances.

Yet they scarcely gave Linley a thought just then. The sight of Alonzo Todd's miserable plight made their teeth clench and their eyes blaze with indignant rage. Had it been an ordinary Greyfriars fellow, it would have been bad enough; but a helpless, inoffensive duffer like Alonzo Todd being thus ill-treated made their blood boil. In the bitter enmity between Ponsonby & Co. and Greyfriars, Cecil Ponsonby had rarely, if ever, gone quite so far as this. They did not know that poor Alonzo was paying for the marks Linley had made on Ponsonby's features.

But Harry Wharton & Co. did not stop to ask for an explanation. They just came on like a whirlwind, and the next instant Ponsonby & Co. and the Famous Five were fighting tooth and nail.

The Highcliffe juniors got no chance to bolt, had they wanted to. Harry Wharton rushed at Ponsonby himself, Bob Cherry rushed at Gadsby, Vavasour had Hurree Singh to himself, while Johnny Bull tackled Monson with whirling fists. Frank Nugent's help was not needed, and he hurried to the weeping and exhausted Alonzo Todd, and started to release him from the bank of snow.

"Give it to the cads!" roared Bob Cherry. "Give them the hiding of their lives!"

As he yelled, Bob's right, like a lump of iron, caught Gadsby under the chin and fairly lifted him off his feet. He crashed down, and lay there groaning and gasping. But he made no attempt to get up again.

"Get up, you wretched funk!" roared Bob Cherry. "I've not finished with you yet."

As he spoke, Bob grabbed Gadsby and hauled him bodily up on his feet. For once the good-natured and cheery Bob



Sprawling face downwards in the snow, and struggling desperately in the grasp of Ponsonby and Gadsby, was a village youth. A glance showed Mark Linley as he came up that this was no harmless ragging. "Hold on, Ponsonby!" exclaimed Linley indignantly. "That's enough!" "Clear out!" snapped Ponsonby savagely. (See Chapter 1.)

was in a royal rage, and not in the mood to be merciful.

"Let me alone!" panted Gadsby. "Can't you see I've had enough? I've already had one licking——"

"Then here's another!" snapped Bob. "Put them up, you howling, bullying cad!"

And he came on again. Gadsby jumped back, and his fists went up; there was nothing else for him to do but fight. There was also nothing else for the others to do. The Famous Five were not disposed to give quarter yet. They went at it hammer and tongs, and the Highcliffe nuts were forced to defend themselves.

Like Gadsby, Ponsonby soon went crashing down, and he wanted to stay down, making the same excuse as Gadsby. But Harry was in too big a rage to see the marks on Ponsonby's features—obvious as they were—and he kicked Ponsonby to his feet again.

Round and round, and backwards and forwards, the combatants tramped and stumbled, the issue being never for one moment in doubt. Ponsonby & Co. were not fighting men—at least, they never fought unless they were in the majority, or had fellows of a weaker calibre to face.

The Famous Five could have ended the fight at any time they liked, but they were determined to give each of the cowardly bullies a richly-deserved hiding.

And they did. Ponsonby and Gadsby went down first—to stay down. There was no mistaking the fact that they had

had enough, and both Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry left it at that.

Hardly had they dropped out of the struggle when Vavasour, who had made more than one vain attempt to bolt, suddenly ducked and took to his heels, and this time Monson followed his example.

Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull were about to chase them when Harry Wharton called them back.

"Let the cowardly cads go," he said, his lips curling. "I fancy these two are the leaders, anyway. And they won't try games like this again in a hurry. Hallo! Poor old Alonzo! Here, hold up, kid!"

While Harry was speaking, Alonzo Todd, freed from the mass of snow, had staggered to his feet with the aid of Frank Nugent. But even as he did so he collapsed, and, but for Frank and Harry, would have fallen like a log.

"Oh, the brutes!" breathed Harry, his eyes gleaming with indignant rage. "Look at this kid, Ponsonby, you cad! Call this an ordinary ragging! You've gone too far this time!"

Ponsonby also saw that as he looked up at Alonzo Todd. The unfortunate Duffer's face was blue with cold, and he was shaking from head to foot. He looked what he was, on the verge of fainting. Such a "ragging" had proved more than a weedy, delicate fellow like Lonzy could stand.

"Hold the poor kid up, you chaps," said Harry Wharton, turning again to Ponsonby and Gadsby. "Now, you cads! You've got to carry that kid back to Greyfriars. You hear that?"

Ponsonby glared up at him. He was

almost weeping with pain and hysterical rage.

"I dashed well won't!" he raved. "Oh, you cad, Wharton! I won't forget this, I tell you!"

"Get up, you cowardly worm!"

"I won't, hang you!"

Harry strode to the hedge and tore a strong stake from it. He came back and stood over the grovelling Ponsonby.

"Are you going to get up?" he snapped.

Ponsonby, looking like a fiend, staggered to his feet. The sight of the stick was enough for him. Gadsby also got up, his face a mixture of fury and apprehension.

"Now you can take off your overcoats, wrap them round Alonzo, make a chair with your arms, and carry him to Greyfriars," said Harry Wharton grimly. "Sharp's the word, or you'll know about it. I'm just itching to lay this stick about your bullying hides!"

"Good wheeze, Harry!" said Bob Cherry. "Buck up, you cads, or you'll know about it. And no hanky-panky, mind!"

Ponsonby glared round at the juniors. But there was no mercy in their scornful glances. He nodded to Gadsby, though his eyes were glittering with helpless rage.

The next moment the two had stripped off their overcoats and wrapped them around Todd's shivering figure. Next, they made a chair of their clasped hands, and lifting Alonzo Todd up, they started to stagger towards Greyfriars with their burden. It was a far from easy task,

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as the road was in a shocking state for walking, and both of the rascally juniors were aching in every limb.

But they dared not refuse, nor yet try any tricks. Harry warned them what to expect if they dropped the hapless Duffer. More than once they stopped, panting and gasping, and protesting desperately; but Harry Wharton would listen to no excuses or pleadings. Ponsonby & Co. never lost an opportunity of bullying Greyfriars "non-combatants" when they got the chance; now the captain of the Remove had his chance to teach Ponsonby & Co. a lesson, and he was determined to make the most of it.

By the time Greyfriars hove in sight along the snowy lane, Ponsonby and Gadsby themselves were in almost as bad a state as Alonzo Todd. There were several Remove fellows snowballing round the gates, and as he sighted them Ponsonby stopped and refused to go further.

Harry Wharton insisted, however, and as he brought the stick into play, the Highcliffe nuts staggered on again, their faces white with humiliation and passion.

As they neared the gates the snowballers ceased their larking and came rushing up wonderingly. They howled when they learned the facts, and Ponsonby and Gadsby shivered apprehensively at the angry faces surrounding them.

"Look here, Wharton," stammered Ponsonby, "we've had enough! Keep these cads off! Can't you see we've had enough?"

There was a howl.

"Smash the cads!"

"Put the rotters through it!"

Harry Wharton held up his hand.

"They've had enough, chaps," he said, giving Ponsonby a scornful look. "We have already given them a thundering good hiding. Let the cads go now."

"Half a minute!" snapped Peter Todd, who came rushing up just then. "My hat! What have the brutes done to Alonzo?"

"They've been putting the poor chap through it," said Bob Cherry. "We found him buried up to the neck nearly in snow. He must be drenched through, Toddy. Better hurry him off to the matron."

"The cads!" breathed Peter Todd.

He seemed about to fling himself on the cowering Ponsonby, and then he drew back and went to help Bob Cherry, who was, with Frank Nugent, helping to hold Alonzo up. And just at that moment a newcomer appeared on the scene, and a deep voice broke on the ears of the juniors.

"What is the matter, boys?"

It was Mr. Quelch, who had just come towards the gates. He had been chatting to Mr. Prout on the School House steps, and he had seen the crowd round the gates, and had come to investigate.

He glanced keenly round at the juniors, and he started slightly as he saw Ponsonby and Gadsby. Then his glance rested on Alonzo Todd.

"Good heavens! What has happened to Todd?" he exclaimed, in alarm. "Wharton, what is the matter?"

Wharton was silent. But he need not have hesitated to speak, for Mr. Quelch's keen glance had taken everything in now, and he had already guessed what was the matter.

"Am I to understand that these Highcliffe boys are responsible for Todd's condition, Wharton?" he demanded, an angry light in his eyes.

Wharton knew it was useless to attempt to hide it.

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"Yes, sir," he said quietly. "We—we have already punished them, though."

"So I can see," said Mr. Quelch, a trifle dryly, his glance resting a moment on the bruised features of the Highcliffe juniors. "None the less, Wharton, it is my intention to make a complaint to Dr. Voysey, of Highcliffe, when I have heard the facts. What are your names?" he added, turning again to Ponsonby and Gadsby.

The Highcliffe juniors gave their names after a moment's hesitation, realising the futility of trying to keep them back. Mr. Quelch noted them, and then he told them to go.

"This is obviously beyond a school-boy ragging," he said sternly. "I shall report the matter at once to your headmaster. You may go! Todd, you had better hurry with your cousin to the matron without delay."

"Yes, sir."

Peter Todd and Bob Cherry hurried the shivering, still half-dazed Alonzo towards the school buildings, practically carrying him there. Ponsonby and Gadsby slunk away, and a hurricane of snowballs helped them to break into a run as they went. Even Mr. Quelch's presence did not save the Highcliffe cads from that. They vanished down the lane at a run.

Then, when the Remove master had also disappeared, Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh looked at each other. Now Ponsonby, Gadsby, and the hapless Alonzo were off their hands, they had time to think of someone else, and that someone was Mark Linley.

"Well?" said Harry Wharton. "What do you fellows think about it—about Mark Linley, I mean? You saw him on the bank?"

Hurree Singh and Frank Nugent nodded glumly. Johnny Bull gave a snort.

"Sheer funk!" he grunted. "The cowardly sweep simply turned and ran for it! He didn't see us coming, of course."

"The funkfulness is amazingly terrific," agreed Hurree Singh, looking far from happy. "I must say that the esteemed and ridiculous Mark has surprised me muchfully, my chums!"

"I could scarcely believe my eyes," said Harry Wharton, his brow dark. "Why, even a fat ass like Bunter would scarcely have left poor old Lonzy to those brutes without chipping in or doing something. It beats me hollow."

"Rotten!" said Frank Nugent. "Linley's the last chap I would have suspected of playing the funk, though. But—but—"

"There's no butting about it!" snapped Harry Wharton, his eyes gleaming angrily. "Linley funk'd it; he ran away and left a harmless duffer like Lonzy in the hands of those bullying cads. It was clear enough. I'm as amazed as you chaps; but there's no doubting it."

"He ought to be shown up, I suppose. But—"

"And he is going to be shown up," said Harry warmly, "unless he can give a good explanation. The Remove should deal with a matter like this. We'll jolly soon let him know what we think of conduct like that."

"What's that about Linley?" asked Bulstrode, who was standing near. "Was he there?"

Harry nodded, and after a moment's hesitation he told the story. Bulstrode whistled as he heard how Linley had turned tail and run for his life—as they supposed.

"Well, I'm blowed!" growled Bulstrode, his eyes gleaming. "That doesn't sound like Linley. But if he did, then he deserves to be shown up, the cowardly sweep! What are you going to do about it, Wharton? The chaps ought to know."

"So they shall—if Linley's got no decent excuse," said Harry grimly. "But I'm doing nothing until I've spoken to him. Have any of you chaps seen him come in yet?"

There was a general shaking of heads, and Harry Wharton grunted and led his chums indoors, having decided to neglect skating for the rest of that afternoon. They left Bulstrode and the others buzzing with the strange news. And it certainly was strange news. Linley was one of the last persons they would have suspected of cowardice. But it seemed plain enough. Linley had funk'd a fight with Ponsonby & Co. and had left poor Alonzo Todd half-fainting in their hands and saved his own skin.

By tea-time every fellow in the Remove had heard the story, and there was general disgust and anger against the Lancashire lad who had, according to the Famous Five, shown the white feather.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Saved from Death!

MARK LINLEY put all he knew into that mad dash across the frozen field. The snow, though frozen hard, was treacherous, and again and again he plunged headlong into a drift, only to stagger up and push on again desperately.

He had dismissed Alonzo Todd from his mind now in this new and unexpected peril. He had heard Harry Wharton shout as he dashed to the rescue of the Duffer, and it took away his fears on behalf of Ponsonby's victim.

Again and again he heard that appealing cry for help, ever growing nearer. He could not see the lake now. But it came into view again as he reached the belt of trees. He breathed freely again as a swift glance showed him the white figure still struggling in that ragged and sinister black patch.

He was through the trees in a flash, and as he ran down to the water's edge his heart jumped as he saw—as he had expected—that it was a girl who struggled for life in the black water—a girl of his own age or thereabouts.

"Help! Oh, help!"

The girl sighted him and gave a gasping cry for aid.

"Hold on!" yelled Mark Linley. "Hold on!"

He dashed out on to the frozen surface of the pond which had been cleared of snow. A glance showed him that the girl was clinging desperately to a length of fencing, though it was plain that she could not hold on much longer.

Even as Mark dashed on the ice her gloved fingers lost their grip, and as the length of wood slid away she vanished, with a faint cry, in the bubbling water.

The next second the Lancashire lad reached the gap, and he jumped in with a resounding splash; the black waters closed over his head.

Only for an instant, though. His hand shot up, and a hand grabbed desperately at the broken edge of the ice. It cracked and crumbled away; but the next moment Mark saw the girl appear barely a yard from him, and he plunged towards her.

Her face was white as chalk, her hair a bedraggled mass of auburn. In a flash Mark's arm was round her, and he

trod water, glancing about swiftly for the length of fencing.

He saw it a couple of yards away, and, swimming strongly, he made for it, the girl safe in his arms for the moment.

"Don't struggle!" he panted. "I'll soon get you out of this!"

The girl nodded; and even in that terrible moment Mark found himself admiring her courage. She lay limp in his grasp, and the next instant his hand closed on the baulk of timber. It was far from being enough to support the two of them, but Mark's intention was to use it in another way.

Mark did not attempt to call for aid; he realised every moment was precious, and he knew it would be minutes before Harry Wharton could reach the spot even if he were able to hear from the distant lane.

He must act himself, and act swiftly.

"Hold on!" he gasped, his teeth chattering like castanets. "It isn't far to the shore. We'll do it!"

The girl grasped his intention, and she clung on to the fencing as Mark started to ram it against the ice, swimming hard as he did so.

Crash, crash, crash!

The ice cracked and splintered before the Lancashire lad's desperate onslaught, and the water surged and swelled before them.

And then quite suddenly the girl gave a relieved cry as her feet touched bottom; and the next moment Mark's own feet touched solid ground.

The rest was easy—or comparatively easy.

On his feet now, with broken ice and water up to his shoulders, Mark attacked the few yards of ice that separated them from the shore with savage energy, though his half-frozen hands could scarcely grip the rough wood.

The last stretch of unbroken ice gave way at last, and through the channel of floating ice and surging water they half waded, half stumbled to the bank.

The girl was out first, and she dropped in a limp heap, gasping and exhausted. She had no skates on, and had evidently only been sliding.

The junior staggered after her, his breath coming in great gasps. That savage attack had taxed his strength to the uttermost, but he never gave himself a thought just then.

"Get up!" he gasped. "Here, let me help you. You simply must keep moving. Don't give in yet. Let me help you home, miss."

Mark half lifted, half dragged the girl to her feet. She stood swaying against him, her drenched form shivering. But her white face twisted into a faint smile.

"I'm all right—or soon will be!" she gasped, coughing chokingly. "I'm pretty tough, and this won't hurt me. Oh, I should have drowned had you not been at hand!"

"That's all right! Hurry, hurry! Are you from the house there?"

"Yes, yes. But, oh dear! What shall I do?" panted the girl, her eyes filling suddenly with tears. "I promised mother I wouldn't go on the ice; and now—"

"But you must run home!" said Mark urgently. "If you don't—"

"You don't understand!" gasped the girl. "My mother's ill—very ill. If she knows I've been in she will be terribly upset, and the shock may make her worse. Oh, why did I break my word?" she went on half hysterically. "I must slip in somehow without being seen. But you—"

"Never mind me! Go on—hurry!"

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said Mark frantically. "You'll catch your death of cold standing here!"

"I'll go now. But you won't mention this to anyone, please? I implore you not to say a word!"

"No, no! Hurry! I'll run straight back to school."

"Oh, thank you! You're from Greyfriars, and I sha'n't forget! I'll see you again—I must! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

Mark Linley stood and watched the girl as she ran away towards the house, a glimpse of which could be seen through the trees across the field. The girl's attitude and strange request had amazed him, but he saw she was almost hysterical, and he understood her fears. If her mother was ill it was more than likely that the shock of learning that the girl had been through the ice might prove serious to her.

"Well, I'm hanged!" he breathed. "She's a jolly plucky girl, anyway."

Another instant he stood until the girl vanished through the trees, and then he gave a shiver and turned away. His first thought was of Alonzo Todd, but even as he turned to dash in the direction of the lane he halted.

His help there was scarcely likely to be needed now. He knew that Bob Cherry and the rest of the Famous Five would be with Harry, and that they would very easily account for Ponsonby & Co. Indeed, he felt pretty confident that Harry Wharton alone could have settled the rascally Highcliffe juniors.

And there was his promise to the girl he had rescued. If he were seen in that state there would be awkward questions asked. He had assured the girl that he would not mention the happening to anyone.

And Mark Linley was a fellow who stuck rigidly to his word.

Moreover, Mark Linley was a fellow who had no desire to pose as a hero in any case. Had matters been otherwise, he would simply have slipped quietly home and said nothing to anyone about what he had done. His whole nature shrank from the thought of announcing he had performed a gallant act, as he certainly had. His one desire was to

get into dry clothes, and let the matter end there.

So now the Lancashire junior turned his back on the lane, and started across the fields towards Greyfriars at a jogging trot. Now the excitement and the danger was over he was beginning to feel the effects of his exhausting effort. His head felt dizzy, his limbs felt like lead, and his teeth were chattering with the bitter cold.

But he stumbled and lurched on at top speed, anxious to get his wet things off and avoid a chill. By the time he arrived in sight of the school buildings his clothes were fairly steaming, but his body was in a warm glow.

Avoiding the vicinity of the gates, Mark ran round to the rear of the school, and climbing the school wall at the back of the chapel, he made his way swiftly to the servants' entrance. Then he dashed up the back staircase to the Remove dormitory, luckily without meeting a soul.

There, behind the locked door, he stripped and rubbed himself down with a rough towel, after which he changed into dry clothes and went downstairs, feeling quite cheery and comfortable, and little the worse for his experience.

He little dreamed the matter was not to end there, however. But he soon did know.

As he walked along the Remove passage he saw Bob Cherry just about to enter Study No. 13. Bob stopped abruptly, and Mark was quite startled at the look on his face.

"So—so you're back, then, Marky?" said Bob in a curiously strained voice. "I was just coming for you."

"Well, here I am, Bob," said Mark, smiling. "Why, what's the matter, old chap? You look as solemn as an old owl."

"I'm feeling like that, too," said Bob glumly. "Look here, Marky," he went on awkwardly. "I'm afraid there's going to be trouble about this affair of Alonzo Todd. The fellows are frightfully pipped about it. As your pal, I think you ought to explain for your own sake."

Mark Linley stared in astonishment. "I don't understand you, Bob," he said blankly. "Explain—explain what?" Bob Cherry's face changed slightly. "Can't you guess?" he muttered. "I mean about what happened in the lane this afternoon, when you bolted and left poor old Lonzy to those Highcliffe cads. It—it looked as if you funk'd them. The fellows think so, anyway."

Linley gave a jump. In a blinding flash he understood now. Such a possibility had never even occurred to him before.

"Great Scott!" he gasped. "Do—you mean to say you think I funk'd a scrap with those cads?"

"I don't say anything of the sort, Marky," said Bob impulsively. "I think I know you better than that. But it—well, it looked like it to others, you know. In fact, I thought it funny myself at first. But I know you must have had some jolly good reason for running away just then. But—but the fellows don't know you as I do. You can't blame them for thinking things."

"Well, my hat!" gasped Mark.

He stared at his chum in dismay, and with more than a little bitterness in his look. Despite Bob's impulsive loyalty, he couldn't fail to see that his chum was puzzled and apprehensive as to what his answer would be.

"Don't you see how it looked to others?" said Bob, as he did not speak. "We came along and found Lonzy being ill-treated by Ponsonby and his pals. And we saw you just taking to your heels. If it had been anyone else—a fellow who could fight for himself—it would not have looked so bad. But scarcely a fellow in the Remove would have bolted and left a poor, helpless duffer like Lonzy to the mercy of those brutes. It was a rotten thing to do, unless you had a jolly good reason for doing it, Marky."

Bob spoke bluntly now, and Mark Linley coloured hotly. But he did not speak, and Bob went on hurriedly, though his face was grim now.

"We found Lonzy all but done in," he muttered savagely. "Those cads had put him through it—badly. He was drenched through and all but fainting. We gave Ponsonby and the others a hiding, and made them carry Lonzy back to school. He's in the sanny now, ill."

Linley was white now.

"I didn't know—I didn't dream it was as bad as that," he muttered. "And—the fellows think I funk'd?"

"Yes. We let it out that you were there, and bolted—at least, Wharton and the others did. They were feeling sick about it. They wish they'd said nothing until they'd seen you, though. But it's done now. The fellows are wild about it."

"I didn't funk!" said Linley thickly.

"I know you couldn't have done, Marky," said Bob eagerly. "I'm certain you can explain. That's why I've come for you now. There's a crowd of fellows in the Rag now talking about it. It will be best if you'll come and explain frankly just why you did it. Will you come?"

Linley nodded.

"Yes, I'll come now," he said quietly.

Bob Cherry gave him a curious look, and turned away. Mark followed him silently. He saw that Bob had expected him to give a good explanation at once, and that he was staggered and bitterly disappointed at not receiving one. And he knew only too well what the attitude of the rest of the Remove would be if he failed to give one. But his step was firm and his eyes steady and resolute as he followed his chum to the Rag.

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He had an explanation, and a very good one. But it was an explanation he could not and would not give. Come what might, he was determined not to break his word to the girl he had saved, thoughtlessly as the promise had been asked for and given.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

What Bunter Heard!

PONSONBY and Gadsby slunk away from Greyfriars like whipped curs, cowering beneath the rain of snowballs as they ran. But once out of range they dropped to a walk, panting and gasping.

It had been a strenuous and far from pleasant afternoon for the Highcliffe cads, and they were aching in every limb, and sore in body and mind. They had both had two lickings that afternoon, and to the proud and haughty Ponsonby the humiliation of having been forced to carry back the Duffer of Greyfriars was the worst experience of all. Moreover, they now had the prospect of a caning at least from their own headmaster, if Mr. Quelch reported them as he had promised.

Ponsonby himself was raging, and his eyes were blazing with the bitter, helpless passion that consumed him. The thrashings, coupled with the humiliation he had suffered, had brought out all that was evil in his nature. He had always hated the Greyfriars fellows, but it was against Mark Linley alone that his hatred was directed now. It was the Lancashire junior that he blamed for all he had suffered that afternoon.

"Oh, the cad—the low hound!" he breathed, brushing the snow from his clothes savagely. "By gad! I'll make that sweep Linley squirm for this, Gaddy!"

"They're all cads!" hissed Gadsby. "Why did you drag me into this, Pon, you fool! It's all your fault! Why did you stop to fight with Linley, in the first place?"

"Shut up!" snarled Ponsonby. "I tell you it's that brute Linley's fault, and, by jingo, I'm going to make him pay dearly for this. I'll find a way—in fact, I've already got one, I fancy. I'll ruin the cad! I'll get him hounded out of Greyfriars before I've finished! I'll teach the low factory brat to lay his dirty paws on me! Oh, hang him!"

Gadsby glanced curiously and somewhat apprehensively at his chum. He was quite startled at the deadly menace in Ponsonby's tone.

"Look here, Pon!" he said uneasily. "Chuck it! Haven't you had enough? Don't start any more games with those Greyfriars cads, for goodness' sake! I've had enough, if you haven't!"

"I tell you—" Ponsonby was beginning savagely, when his chum gave a warning hiss. "Someone coming!" he muttered.

Gadsby had heard—or fancied he had heard—footsteps round the bend in the lane ahead. But as the two Highcliffe juniors turned the corner they found no sign of anyone near enough to have been heard approaching. But some distance ahead three juniors were walking towards them.

Ponsonby stopped with a muttered grunt of satisfaction as he recognised them.

"Skinner and his pals!" he said. "Oh, good—dashed good!"

"Hang Skinner!" said Gadsby impatiently. "Come on!"

"We're waiting here for Skinner!" snapped Ponsonby, his eyes gleaming curiously. "I told you I fancied I had a

way of settling Linley's hash, didn't I? Well, friend Skinner's going to help us. He hates that cad Linley just as much as we do, Gaddy. Wait!"

As he spoke, Ponsonby took something from his inside pocket. It was the letter he had picked up after Linley had left them—Linley's letter from his mother. Ponsonby's next move amazed his chum.

Shoving the letter between his teeth, Ponsonby took out his pocket-wallet, and, opening it, he extracted a slip of paper that rustled crisply. It was, as Gadsby saw, a five-pound note. Ponsonby's people were wealthy, and he was well supplied with money—far too well for his good.

Folding the note up, he slipped it inside the envelope with Linley's letter, and doubled the envelope up.

"What's this game, Pon?" gasped Gadsby as his chum replaced the wallet in his pocket. "You—you—"

"Wait and see!" said Ponsonby. "Hallo, here's old Skinner!"

Skinner, Stott, and Snoop hurried up. Skinner gave Ponsonby an angry look.

"Oh, here you are, Pon!" he said warmly. "Where the thump have you been? We waited over half an hour for you! Hang it all—Great pip! What have you chaps been up to?" he added, noting the Highcliffe juniors' bruised faces and dishevelled appearance.

"We've had a little bit of trouble with some of your chaps," said Ponsonby coolly. "Your old pal Linley did most of this," he added, pointing to his features. "I haven't paid him yet for doing it, but I'm going to!"

Skinner grinned.

"He's made a good job of your chivvy, anyway," he said. "What happened? Was that why you didn't turn up?"

Ponsonby nodded, and told what had happened in cool tones.

"Phew!" whistled Skinner, eyeing Ponsonby curiously. "No wonder you want to pay the cad back! But it was a bit thick handling that duffer—"

"I'm going to pay him back!" said Ponsonby, his eyes glinting. "I think you know I'm not the fellow to forget things like that, Skinner. I'm going to pay him back in full, and you're going to help me!"

"Oh, am I?" ejaculated Skinner.

"Yes. You hate him as much as I do, I fancy. I've heard you say you'd like to see the brute kicked out of Greyfriars."

"Yes, but—"

"You're going to help me," said Ponsonby smoothly. "If you don't, I'll make you sorry. I think you owe me two quid and more for bets, Skinney!"

"I'm going to pay you back—"

"You'll have no need to pay me back if you do this for me, Skinner," said Ponsonby calmly. "We'll call it square."

Skinner eyed the rascally tempter uneasily, and Stott and Snoop did likewise. Skinner & Co. were of the same kidney as Ponsonby & Co., but not one of them came near him in rascality.

"What is it?" grunted Skinner. "If it's anything risky—"

"It won't be risky for you," said Ponsonby. "Quite simple and safe, in fact. I take what risk there is, and I do the paying. I just want you to slip this envelope quietly into Linley's locker, or his desk, the moment you get in. I suppose he has a desk in his study—or a locker?"

Skinner nodded slowly, and took the envelope Ponsonby held out to him. He unfolded it, and glanced at it. Then he started, and looked blankly at the Highcliffe junior.

"Why, it's addressed to Linley—an old letter from his home!" he gasped, glancing at the postmark. "How the dickens did you get hold of this, Pon?"

"Never mind that. You see it belongs to Linley. You'll only be giving him back what belongs to him. Only don't let him see you doing it. Just slip it quietly into his locker, and then keep mum and say nothing. I'll do the rest."

Skinner stared at the envelope, and then he stared at Ponsonby. He was about to open the letter when Ponsonby stopped him.

"No; don't look inside! Better if you don't—much better!" said Ponsonby grimly. "Just do as I ask you, Skinner, and leave the rest to me. Quite simple and safe, you see."

But Skinner did not see. He was an exceedingly careful youth, and he was not the fellow to buy a pig in a poke, so to speak. He gave Ponsonby a sharp look, and then he opened the letter swiftly, and drew out the contents.

Then he saw the banknote, and understood, or thought he did.

"Oh!" he gasped. "So—so that's the game?"

"Just that!" said Ponsonby, with an evil grin. "Well? I warned you not to look inside. It would have been much better if you hadn't!"

Skinner drew a deep, deep breath. All the juniors were staring hard at Ponsonby now. Gadsby was eyeing his leader in amazement and alarm. Skinner, Stott, and Snoop did not know how Ponsonby had come by the letter. But they guessed what his rascally game was now.

"You—you put that banknote inside there," said Skinner, his face angry. "And you wanted me to plant it on Linley? Then you'll come along and say he's stolen it?"

"Don't ask questions," smiled Ponsonby. "Just do what I ask you to, Skinner!"

Skinner replaced the note, and folded the letter. Then he rammed it into Ponsonby's coat-pocket.

"I'll see you hanged first, Pon!" he said savagely. "Take the dashed thing and do your own dirty work! I'm not a saint, but I draw the line at that. In any case, it's too thundering risky. I'm having none. What do you fellows say?"

"Rather not!" said Stott.

"No, fear!" said Snoop emphatically. "Too risky for us!"

Ponsonby's face darkened. His eyes glinted as he stared at Skinner.

"You won't do it?" he said. "Not for two quid, and to get your own back out of Linley?"

"No."

"I'll make you sorry if you don't!" said Ponsonby savagely. "I'm the wrong fellow to vex, Skinner."

"I don't care," said Skinner. "Take my tip and drop the idea, Pon. It's a bit too thick, and it's not safe!"

"I'll find a way of doing it, if you don't!" hissed Ponsonby. "I'm going to pay that hound back, I tell you!"

"Please yourself about that," said Skinner. "I sha'n't split, of course, though I think it's too thick. But I'm not having a hand in it—not for a hundred quids, Pon!"

"You rotten funk—" Ponsonby was beginning, when he stopped with startling abruptness, and dashed across the road. The others saw what he had just spotted—a fat form through the thin hedge in the ditch beyond.

"Bunter!" ejaculated Skinner.

It was Billy Bunter right enough. He started to run, but even as he did so, Ponsonby crashed through the gap,



As Mark Linley glanced swiftly down into the lane below he saw a sight that made him grit his teeth. Alonzo Todd was buried up to his neck in a mound of snow, and Ponsonby & Co. were dancing round him, grinning. (See Chapter 2.)

and there followed a startled yelp as Ponsonby's savage grasp closed upon the fat junior.

"Come out!" snarled Ponsonby, his features flushing with rage. "Come out, you fat spy!"

He hauled the fat junior bodily through the gap in the hedge, and Bunter yelled again.

"I didn't—I wasn't spying!" he howled in dire alarm. "I didn't hear a word, Ponsonby. Lemme go, or I'll tell everything, you cad!"

"Then you did hear, you little sweep!" hissed Ponsonby.

"Of course he did!" said Gadsby, in alarm. "I know I heard someone just as we were coming round the bend, Pon."

"I haven't—I didn't!" yelled Bunter, squirming in Ponsonby's cruel grasp. "I only stopped to tie my bootlace. I didn't hear anything. I know nothing about your rotten plot on Linley. I mean—"

"You spying little toad!" hissed Ponsonby, shaking the fat youth viciously. "You hid there to listen—"

"Ow! I d-d-d-didn't! I swear I didn't!" howled Bunter. "I hid because I heard your voices round the bend. I thought you might want to roll me in the snow. You know what a bully you are, Pon—I mean— Ow! Stop shaking me, you beast! If you don't, I'll tell Wharton everything."

"You little rat—"

"Chuck it, Pon, you fool!" said Skinner, who was feeling thankful from the bottom of his heart that he had not agreed to the rascal's plot. "No good putting the fat cad's back up."

Ponsonby released Bunter abruptly. He saw the sense in Skinner's remark,

Bunter saw that he did, and after a moment of breathless grunting, he grinned, feeling himself master of the situation.

"That's it," he said, blinking magisterially at Ponsonby. "You'd better be careful, Pon. I've only got to go to Wharton, or Linley, and tell 'em what I heard."

Ponsonby bit his lip, and then he smiled. He fancied he knew the way to deal with Bunter.

"But you wouldn't do that, Bunter, I know," he said, rattling some coins in his pocket. "After all, it doesn't matter to you what happens to Linley. You don't like him, I know."

"He's a low, factory cad!" said Bunter loftily. "I don't hold with scholarship cads at all, of course. Cheek, I call it—pushing into a school for gentlemen, you know. But I must say I think you're a bit thick, Pon—playing a trick like you're going to do."

"But you don't mind," said Ponsonby smoothly. "Especially if I were to make it worth your while to say nothing, and keep out of it, Bunter?"

Bunter's eyes glistened. The chink of coins in Ponsonby's pocket fascinated him.

"Make it a quid," he grinned, "and it's all serene, Pon."

"I've only ten bob on me," said Ponsonby.

"That'll do to be going on with," grinned Bunter. "Hand it over. This is between pals, of course—just a little loan, mind you."

"Half a minute," said Ponsonby, taking his pocket-book out, and tearing out a leaf. "We'll have this business-like, Bunter."

With his fountain-pen, Ponsonby wrote on the sheet, and passed the pen and paper to Bunter.

"Sign that first, Bunter," he said carelessly. "I know you. You'll say I didn't pay out afterwards, and want it again."

"Oh, all right!" grinned Bunter.

He took the sheet and glanced at the writing. It read as follows:

"Received the sum of ten shillings from Cecil Ponsonby for keeping my mouth shut in regard to the planting of a five-pound note in Linley's desk."

Bunter grinned as he read it. The obtuse fat junior saw nothing to alarm him in the document. He signed it with a flourish, and handed paper and pen back to Ponsonby. Ponsonby smiled and placed the note in his pocket.

"Now clear out, you little rat!" he hissed, his face changing.

"But—but the ten bob—" gasped Bunter.

"You'll get no ten bob out of me!" snapped Ponsonby. "You can't prove I didn't give it you, or that I did, Bunter. But, listen to me, Bunter," he added with deadly menace. "I have proof now that you blackmailed me. Understand?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"If you dare to split, you fat worm," hissed Ponsonby. "If you split and it all comes out, I've only to show this to your Head, and it means the sack for you, and perhaps prison, my fat black-mailer. This document you've signed proves that you condoned it, and that you blackmailed me. See? Now clear!"

"Oh dear! Oh, you awful beast! Gimme that paper back, you rotter!"

"Get out!"

"Oh, really—I say— Yaroooooh!"

Smack, smack!

Ponsonby's hand sent Bunter's head one way, and his other hand sent it back again. Bunter howled and sat down in the snow with a thump. Ponsonby was about to rush at him, fury in his face, when Skinner caught his arm.

"You fool, Pon! Pay him his ten bob and let him go. He'll split!"

"He daren't!" hissed Ponsonby. "I've got him tight with this signed paper."

"But you know what a little fool he is. Only the money will satisfy him, and make him keep his mouth shut," said Skinner, in alarm.

Ponsonby drew back, holding himself in with an effort. But he realised Skinner was right. Bunter was a fool, and only the actual money would shut his mouth. Swiftly Ponsonby took out his wallet and extracted a ten-shilling note. He stooped over Bunter, and rammed it into his fat hand.

"There you are, Bunter," he said thickly. "I meant to pay you, of course. But I lost my temper. Now clear out! And don't forget, I've got this note. If I get into trouble, you do, too!"

Bunter scrambled up, his fat face red with wrath. He hesitated a moment, and then, noting the glint in Ponsonby's eyes, he crammed the note in his pocket and scuttled away.

"Think he'll split?" muttered Gadsby.

"No fear!" said Skinner, grinning.

"He'll be after you for more cash tomorrow, Pon. But you've only got to threaten him with that note he signed. And I'll see the fat fool when I get in and warn him what to expect if he does think of splitting. But he won't—I know him!"

"Not much," said Stott.

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"But look here, Pon," said Skinner, frowning uneasily. "You won't try the rotten game on now, I hope?"

Ponsonby gritted his teeth.

"I'm doing it," he vowed, his eyes glinting. "I'm going to hound that cad Linley from Greyfriars. I've said it, and I mean it. You mean it when you say you won't help, Skinner?"

"Yes; count me out!"

"Then you can go hang!" snarled Ponsonby. "And you know what to expect if I fail, Skinner. If I go down, you funks go down, too. I'll see to that. I'm doing it—I've got another way if you won't help. I know a few things that'll get you sacked, Skinner. Remember that!"

And with that deadly threat, Ponsonby swung away, and Gadsby went with him, looking far from happy. Skinner & Co. watched them go, and then they followed in Bunter's tracks. And their faces were more than uneasy. They knew that Ponsonby was capable of any rascality, and they knew he would not hesitate to drag them down with him if he went down. Skinner & Co. had good reason to feel uneasy.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Having It Out!

THERE was a buzz of voices in the Rag at Greyfriars. Most of the fellows had come in from skating by this time for tea, but the news of what had happened to Alonzo Todd drew them to the Rag. It was not, however, the fact that Alonzo Todd was in the sanny, or that Ponsonby's cowardly conduct was responsible for his illness that had caused the sensation. It was the amazing news that Mark Linley of all people, had played the coward, and had left Lonzy to his fate.

Linley had not been bound to go to the Duffer's rescue, of course—especially as the odds had been four to one, counting Alonzo Todd as of no account. But it was generally agreed that there wasn't a fellow in the Remove—not excepting Bunter even—who would not have gone to aid the innocent and in-offensive Duffer. No decent fellow would or could have taken to his heels without doing something in such circumstances.

It was generally agreed also, that Linley had let the Remove down—had disgraced the Form. And the Remove were angry and disgusted, and they were determined to get an explanation from Linley.

It was not a personal matter, but a matter for the Form to deal with as a whole. The Remove were determined to show Linley what they thought of such conduct.

The Famous Five were there, but all of them were looking far from happy. Harry Wharton himself regretted now that he had let the matter out—until he had seen Linley, at all events. He had always liked Linley, and he felt certain that the Lancashire junior would have some explanation to offer.

The buzz of voices ceased as the door opened suddenly. But it was not Linley or Bob Cherry. It was Skinner, Stott, and Snoop. They looked round curiously.

"What's this yarn about Lonzy and Linley?" asked Skinner carelessly.

Bolsover told the three black sheep of the Remove, and Skinner whistled. Skinner & Co. had not been in long, and they had not yet heard the facts.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Skinner. "Well, the rotten funk!"

Skinner's astonishment was genuine. Ponsonby had not told any details; indeed, it was doubtful if Ponsonby had attached any importance to Linley's running away. It was the sort of thing he would have done himself.

"A dashed disgrace to the Remove!" said Stott, darting a significant glance at Skinner.

"My hat! I should jolly well think so," said Skinner, with pretended indignation. "Just the sort of thing the dashed scholarship cad would do."

"Don't talk rot!" snapped Harry Wharton angrily. "You've no thumping need to crow, Skinner; you've played the funk too many times to talk about anyone else. Shut up!"

"You leave Skinner alone, Wharton," growled Bolsover. "I suppose you mean to back the funky cad up?"

"I mean to do nothing of the sort," said Harry quietly. "If Linley can offer no decent excuse I think it's up to the Remove to show what they think of that sort of thing. But until he's had a chance to defend—"

Wharton paused, for at that moment Bob Cherry came in with Linley behind him. All eyes turned on Linley's face which was quiet and composed.

"You fellows want me, I believe?" he asked, addressing Harry Wharton.

Harry Wharton coloured.

"Yes. I think you can guess why—if Cherry hasn't told you already, Linley," he said grimly. "It's about this afternoon's affair. The fellows know you were there, Linley, and they know you ran away without lifting a finger to help poor old Lonzy. You must admit that it looked as if you funk'd those Highcliffe cads."

"I admit that," said Linley quietly.

"Oh, you do," said Harry Wharton, rather taken aback. "Well, we want to know if you actually did play the funk," he went on steadily. "If you did, it was a rotten thing to do, and you've disgraced the Remove, Linley. You know what Pon is. He'll crow about it at Highcliffe—say you funk'd a scrap, without mentioning the facts. In any case it was a miserable, cowardly act—unless you had a reason. The Remove want to know if you had a good reason, Linley?"

"I didn't funk those Highcliffe cads," said Mark Linley calmly. "I'd already given that brute Ponsonby a good hiding less than fifteen minutes before-hand."

"You had?"

"Yes. I was hurrying to Friardale, and I came upon them bullying a Friardale chap—a chap named Sutton, a pal of Dick Trumper's. I chipped in and gave Ponsonby a hiding."

"Did you give them all a hiding?" jeered Skinner.

"No. There were only Ponsonby and Gadsby there then. I licked Ponsonby, and Sutton licked Gadsby, who bolted. Then we walked on to Friardale together. On my way back I came on the four of them—I believe they were waiting for me. Anyway, they were ill-treating Lonzy. And then—"

"And then?" asked Stott grinning.

"I—I went!"

"He just went," grinned Snoop. "He didn't run away, of course. He just went!"

"Shut up, Snoop!" snapped Harry Wharton. "Look here, Linley! Did you see us coming when you—you went?"

Linley hesitated, and flushed. But his voice was quite steady as he answered.

"No, I didn't," he said. "But I heard your voice just as I was going."

Harry Wharton looked grim. He had hoped Linley would say yes.

"Then you didn't go because we came along, and you knew we'd save Lonny?"

"No."

"Then why did you go like that?"

Linley was silent a moment.

"I've told you all I am going to tell," he answered slowly. "I had a reason for going, but I'm not at liberty to tell it."

There was a silence. Linley flushed hotly at the looks around him.

"What rot!" snorted Bolsover. "You funk it, you cad! It's plain enough for anyone. What's the good of saying you'd already licked Pon—as if that was any excuse. You didn't funk Pon and Gaddy when there were two of you to deal with them. Who would have done? But you funk facing the lot of them alone."

"Hear, hear!"

"Yah! Funk!" howled Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, this comes of letting a factory cad come among us. Just what we must expect from these low scholarship cads—disgracing the Remove like this. I vote—Yooopp!"

Bunter roared as Bob Cherry, his face red with anger, raised his boot and fairly lifted Bunter a yard away.

"Dry up, you fat ass!" he cried. "You disgrace the Form every day of your life, you fat worm!"

"You leave Bunter alone, Cherry," said Bulstrode warmly. "Bunter's only saying what we all think—Linley has disgraced the Remove."

"He's done nothing of the sort," shouted Bob Cherry angrily. "It's all rot! Linley's worth any dozen of you, and I'm absolutely certain he had a jolly good reason for going when he did."

"Has he given you a reason, Bob?" exclaimed Harry Wharton quickly.

Bob coloured.

"No. I don't pretend to understand it," he said hotly. "But Linley's word is good enough for me. He says he didn't funk, and I believe him."

"You're bound to back him up, being his best pal!" sneered Bolsover.

"I am going to back him up," said Bob stoutly, "for all I'm worth! If the Form are going to deal with Linley they can count me in with him, too. That's flat."

There was an angry murmur. Mark Linley gave his chum a grateful look.

"You keep out of this, Bob," he said in a low tone. "It's my affair, and I can fight my own battles."

"Don't be an ass, Bob!" said Harry Wharton gruffly. "It's no business of yours!"

"I'm going to make it my business, then," said Bob Cherry, his eyes gleaming. "I'm standing by Linley. I know he didn't funk."

"How do you know?"

"Because I know old Marky," said Bob. "He's not the chap to funk anything or anybody."

"Then why doesn't he give his reason—if he has one?" said Harry, his anger rising. "I know what I saw, and I know what it looked like to me. Let him give his excuse here and now."

"I have said all I am going to say," said Linley, setting his mouth hard.

"You know what the fellows will think, then?"

"I can't help that. I'm sorry. But I've said all I mean to say."

Harry Wharton set his lips. He knew the feeling of the Form in the matter. And as the captain of the Form he felt it his duty to take the matter up. Because Linley was a chum of his made no difference to Harry.

He was not a fellow to shirk duty, however distasteful it was to him personally.

But he was worried and dismayed. He simply did not know what to make of it.

"Very well, Linley," he said grimly. "I'm sorry about this, and we'll give you until bed-time to think it over. If you haven't decided to speak out then we shall know what to think and what to do."

Linley nodded, but Bolsover gave a snort.

"What rot!" he shouted. "Deal with the matter now, Wharton. The Remove won't stand any rot just because Linley's a dashed pal of yours. He won't give a reason because he can't. He funk it—it's plain as a pikestaff."

"You take too thumping much on yourself, Wharton!" sneered Skinner. "The Form wants the matter settled now. Linley's had his chance."

"You can deal with me now if you like," said Linley quietly and steadily. "My answer to-night will be just the same as now. I've said all I can say."

"Yah! Funk!" bawled Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, let's send him to Coventry!"

"That's the idea," said Skinner, his eyes gleaming with spite. "Send the rotter to Coventry. Let him see what we think of him."

"Hear, hear!"

It was a howl of acclamation. Linley stood quietly by, seemingly careless of the scornful glances.

There had always been a section in the Remove who professed to look down on the scholarship lad, and who hated him for reasons they would not

have cared to admit. And now his popularity was at a low ebb they were making the most of their chance.

"You hear what the chaps think, Wharton," said Bolsover hastily. "They demand that Linley be sent to Coventry. He deserves to be shown that the Remove doesn't approve of that sort of thing. If it had been any other fellow but a chum of yours you'd have come, the Boss of the Remove stunt before this. Anyhow, I vote, chaps, that we don't wait for Wharton's high and mighty approval."

"I'm with you there, Bolsy," said Bulstrode. "Send him to Coventry until he chooses to give his excuse—if he has one."

"Well, that's fair enough," said Tom Brown, though he was looking as uncomfortable as the Famous Five. "We'll let him out when he chooses to speak."

Harry Wharton bit his lip hard. He was angry—furiously angry at Bolsover's charge of favouritism. He was angry with Mark Linley—more than angry. He could not conceive any reason why the Lancashire junior should not give a reason, if he had one. There was only one thing he could think, and that was that Linley had no reason. He had shown the white feather.

"Very well, then," he snapped. "It's Linley's own fault if we are treating him unjustly. I vote that if Linley won't speak then we send him to Coventry for a fortnight as a mark of the Remove's disapproval. If he chooses to speak in the meantime and gives a satisfactory explanation we'll let him off. Hands up those in favour."



In a flash Mark Linley's arm was around the girl, and, treading water, he glanced about him for the length of fencing. He saw it a couple of yards away and swam towards it. "Don't struggle!" he panted. "I'll soon get you out of this!" (See Chapter 4.)



Every hand in the room went up excepting Linley's own and Bob Cherry's. Bob's face was savage and bitter.

"You can count me out, Wharton!" he cried in a tone he had rarely ever used to his chum. "I tell you you're treating Linley unjustly. You aren't taking into account the times he's proved he wasn't a funk. If you send him to Coventry you can send me, too."

"Bob?" ejaculated Frank Nugent, aghast.

"I mean it," said Bob.

"You fool, Cherry!" shouted Bulstrode. "If you speak to Linley that's just what we shall do—send you to Coventry, too. That's the rule."

"I'm standing by Marky!" said Bob, his eyes blazing. "You can go to pot, the lot of you!"

"Bob, don't—" Linley was beginning huskily; but Bob Cherry grasped his arm.

"Come on—hang the lot of them!" he said. "Let's get out of this!"

Linley hesitated, his eyes shining queerly, and then he turned and walked out. Bob Cherry was following him when Harry Wharton jumped forward and grasped his arm.

"Bob, old man," he gasped in astonished dismay, "don't be a fool! It means breaking up the Co. We can't speak to you if—"

Bob Cherry shook off his arm roughly, and then, with a defiant glare, he strode out after Linley. Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Hurree Singh, and Johnny Bull stared after him in blank dismay. It certainly did look like a break in the Co.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

An Amazing Affair!

"WHAT a dashed scream!"

"How are the mighty fallen!" chortled Skinner.

"And the best of it is it's fairly busted up the giddy Famous Five, as they called themselves. It's too rich for words!"

"Think the cad really did funk Ponsonby's lot?" asked Snoop.

"No, I jolly well don't!" said Skinner, who was a very sharp youth indeed. "I'm blessed if I understand it. But I'm jolly glad the factory cad's come a cropper at last. He's punched my dashed nose too often for me to love him. I wonder if Quelch will be as fond of him when he hears about it. We must find some way of letting Quelch know how he played the funk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Skinner & Co. roared. The downfall of Mark Linley had pleased the dingy black sheep of the Remove not a little. But they had waited, wisely enough, until reaching their study before showing their feelings too much.

"Wharton and Cherry will be scrapping over it before they've finished," said Skinner gleefully. "Wharton's wild with Cherry over it. My hat! Old Pon needn't try any of his games to dish Linley after that. He's dished already. Even the Upper Fourth and Fifth are sick with him about that silly duffer, Alonzo. Temple's crowd say they're sending him to Coventry, too."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The cads of the Remove were still laughing when the door opened and a tall, lanky junior entered the room, closing the door quietly after him. Skinner & Co. jumped to their feet in astonishment as they recognised him.

It was Cecil Ponsonby, of Highcliffe.

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Skinner & Co. fairly blinked at him. That Ponsonby had dared to visit Highcliffe at all was amazing. But that he dared after what had happened that afternoon was far more amazing.

"You, Pon?" gasped Skinner. "Great pip! Are you mad? If the fellows see you here, they'll lynch you!"

Ponsonby smiled. It was not a pleasant smile, for his eyes were glittering. One of them, too, was badly discoloured, his nose was swollen, and his lip was cut, in addition to other bruises on his features. He did not look a pleasant sight.

"I don't think so," he said smoothly. "I've already met one or two. I told them why I'd come, and they dropped all ideas of mobbing me. They were too astonished, I suppose."

"But—but why have you come—to see us?" said Skinner, with sudden uneasiness.

"No; to see your high and mighty skipper, Wharton," said Ponsonby calmly. "Failing satisfaction from him, I shall ask to see Mr. Quelch. In fact,

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I particularly wish to have Mr. Quelch on the spot."

Skinner started.

"You—you're not going to try on that dangerous trick—" he began, aghast.

"I'm after a banknote I've lost," said Ponsonby, smiling again. "I dropped it when I was scrapping with Linley. He must have picked it up and kept it. I'm going to have it back, if I have to see your Head. Is Wharton in his study?"

"Oh, you madman!" hissed Skinner, in alarm. "It's bound to fail—I tell you it's bound to fail, Ponsonby. And it's too thick. Drop it!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Ponsonby smoothly. "I only want to get my fiver back. If Wharton's in, I'll run along to see him about it. As skipper of the Remove, I suppose I ought to see him about such a serious matter. Coming, Skinner?"

"You fool— Oh, you fool!" breathed Skinner. "Look here, there's no need to try any games like that, Pon. Listen! That cad Linley's already in the soup!"

And Skinner swiftly related what had developed from the Alonzo Todd affair. Ponsonby's face was the picture of spiteful glee when he had finished.

"Good gad! That's top hole, Skinner!" he exclaimed. "Is—is that the absolute fact?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then it couldn't be better! By gad, this is luck! Your chaps will just be ripe for what I'm going to spring on them. It'll just about finish that factory cad off, Skinner, my friend!"

"Look here, Pon—"

"Ta-ta!" said Ponsonby, turning to the door. "You'd better not come with me. Stroll along and see the fun later."

"Pon, you fool—"

But Ponsonby was gone. Skinner & Co. looked at each other with alarmed faces. They realised now that the treacherous, vengeful Highcliffe cad was in deadly earnest, that he was determined to ruin Linley by fair means or foul. But Skinner & Co. were not worrying on Linley's behalf. They were thinking of their own precious skins. If Ponsonby failed, and if he kept his threat—

The thought terrified the cads of the Remove.

"Oh, the fool!" breathed Skinner. "But—but how on earth is he working it? We refused to do it, and there's not a fellow in the school who hates Linley enough to go as far as that. How's he going to plant it?"

"Goodness knows!" groaned Stott. "I tell you, and I always have told you, Skinner, that Pon's a dangerous friend as well as a dangerous enemy."

"We'd better go along presently and see how things are going," muttered Skinner.

The cads of the Remove had been getting tea ready when Ponsonby had looked in, but they none of them felt like tea now. They stood discussing the dangerous turn of events gloomily. And meanwhile Ponsonby had reached the door of Study No. 1 and knocked. The next moment he entered the room, his face grave now.

More often than not the Famous Five tea-ed together in Study No. 1. But though Hurree Singh and Johnny Bull were with Wharton and Nugent now, Bob Cherry was conspicuous by his absence. And the chums were just discussing him in gloomy tones when Ponsonby looked in.

As he entered the room all the juniors jumped up and stared in amazement and sudden anger at the Highcliffe dandy. They could scarcely believe their eyes.

"You, Ponsonby?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, his voice savage. "Why, you cheeky, daring hound, get out before we sling you out neck and crop, you sweep!"

It looked for the moment as if the Greyfriars juniors would throw themselves at the rascal, but Ponsonby held up his hand hurriedly, his eyes holding more than a trace of apprehension in them.

"Hold on!" he said quickly. "I'm not here for a rag; I'm here on business, Wharton. If you refuse to deal with the matter, I shall have to go straight to Quelch or the Head."

The juniors stopped, staring.

"If—if this is more of your rotten trickery—"

"It isn't," said Ponsonby quietly. "I've come on dashed unpleasant business, Wharton, and I'm only too sorry to have to come. It won't be pleasant to me—"

"You can drop that soft-soapy talk," said Harry, his lip curling. "We know you, Pon. You're here to cause more trouble, I can see. Out with it—sharp! What's the game?"

(Continued on page 17.)



Harry Wharton's Football Supplement

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I have managed to secure the services of some of the finest football experts in the country as contributors to our new Supplement. MAGNET readers who follow it regularly can be sure of getting the very latest and most exclusive news, interesting gossip and information.—H. Wharton, Ed.

Flag-Kicks and Penalties

PARS ABOUT FOOTBALL MEN AND MATTERS.

By The Man in the Street.

THERE are records and records. The Bradford club dropped from the First to the Second Division and from the Second to the Third in successive seasons. No other club has done that, but we have not noticed signs of jealousy.

In arranging their fixture list the Corinthians left the date of each Cup tie round, including the Final tie, open. We shall now refer to them, not as Co-rinthians, but as Co-optimists.

Bailio, the young goalkeeper of West Ham, helped to build the club's new stand. It is said that he is very cross when anybody kicks a dirty ball on to it.

The pitch of the Tottenham Hotspur club is acknowledged to be the best in the country. The reason why is easy—there is Seed on it so often.

One of the most promising of the younger school of referees is Mr. A. E. Fogg. If he had to retire he would be very much "mist."

In the first season after the War West Bromwich Albion and Tottenham Hotspur each scored over a hundred goals. No other club has done it since, so it looks as though we shall have to have another war to get shooting practice.

Dick Pym, the Bolton Wanderers goalkeeper, used to get his living by bringing fish into his net. Now he earns his money by stopping footballs from going into the net.

According to the rules, the English Cup can never become the absolute property of any one person or club. The burglar who stole the Cup years ago had evidently forgotten to read the rules.

The Scottish footballers' chorus—an up-to-date version of a very old song:

"Ye tak the high road and I'll tak the low road,
An' I'll be in England afore ye."

English footballers have not won the International championship since 1913. A friend of mine tells me there is one way in which England could make sure of winning again—by picking a team of Scotsmen!

Noel George, the goalkeeper of Wolverhampton Wanderers, has such big hands that he can pick up a full-sized ball with either of them. Obviously he won't need anybody to help him carry the money home when he gets his benefit in the near future.

Here is a bit of good advice for all watchers of football: The game is like most gramophone records—two-sided. The "needle" part of the business can well be forgotten.

Before one recent match on the Sheffield United ground fifty tons of sand were spread over the pitch. No wonder the Sheffield United players have this season shown themselves so full of grit.

Get-Rich-Quick Footballers!

BIG TRANSFER FEES.

What the Player Gets.

IN football the transfer business seems always to be with us. I don't think anybody likes the idea of star players being transferred from one club to another, with fat cheques changing hands over the deal. Alas! the fellow who tries to reform this side of big football is very much like King Canute, and the efforts to bring about a change in the transfer system seem no more successful than the struggles of the mad-hatter king to hold back the tide. However, I am not going to talk here about transfer reform. What I do want to do, though—because it is so necessary—is to state some clear facts about the transfer business. There is no phase of football over which there is so much talk, and no side of it on which there are greater or more widespread fallacies.

It is not unusual, for instance, for some writers, hearing of the transfer of some well-known player from one club to another, to draw harrowing pictures of a human auction sale. These people would have their followers believe that the player who is to be transferred is just put up to auction and knocked down to the highest bidder, and that the player himself has no more voice in the matter than a sheep or a cow would have in similar circumstances.

Hence it may surprise you fellows to know that no player can be transferred from one club to another without the consent of that player. We hear when a player is transferred, but we don't often hear when a player refuses to go to the club which wants him; yet there are plenty of such cases. Last season the Arsenal fixed up everything with Bolton Wanderers for the transfer of Cassidy, now with Cardiff City. But when the player himself was approached, he refused to join the Highbury side.

Then about the fees. When this or that player is transferred for five or six thousand pounds a lot of people imagine the player getting all that money. Of course, he doesn't do anything of the sort. The maximum amount which any one player can get as his share of the transfer-fee when he moves from one Football League club in England to another is £650, and, in order to get that much, he must have served five successive seasons in the service of that club. As these five successive years entitle him to a benefit up to £650, it doesn't need a mathematician to see that the transferred player is no better off by going to a new club than by staying with the old.

All the same, there are people who can get rich quick out of their transfers, and these are the Scots who join English clubs. I suppose somebody will think I am being humorous at the expense of a race of people whose liking for "siller" is proverbial. I am not, really. I am stating facts. There is no limit to the amount a player transferred from a Scottish club to an English club may receive. And one can add, in all seriousness and truth, in the foregoing lies the explanation of the coming of so many Scots into English football during the present season.

What usually happens when a Scottish club is willing to transfer a star footballer to an English club is this: The selling club fixes the amount which it hopes to pocket from the transaction. After that it remains for the English club to settle with the player himself. And the amount which the player wants is simply added to the transfer-fee. There are Scottish footballers who, on coming to England, have made two thousand pounds or more at one fell swoop—a nice little nest-egg, obviously. It is rumoured that when goalkeeper William Harper left the Hibernians to join the Arsenal a couple of months or so ago, he got two thousand pounds as his share of the fee.

Mention of the Arsenal reminds me of the unique terms on which Buchan went from Sunderland to that club. The fee was so much down and one hundred pounds for every goal Buchan scores for the Arsenal this season. Lots of folk think that Buchan gets the hundred-pound cheques. He doesn't get a penny; he wouldn't be allowed to by the Football Association.

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ASTON VILLA TO-DAY.

Record Gate Receipt of Five Shillings and Threepence.

THE best and most complete summary of the story of the Aston Villa club, is this sentence—the officials hit on a fine motto, and right through the years have tried to live up to it. This motto is now emblazoned over the balcony at the Trinity Road entrance to the ground at Birmingham, and it consists of just one word—"PREPARED." How well the club has lived up to this idea can be gathered from a mere statement of the fact that they have won the championship of the First Division more times than any other club in existence; they have a similar record in the Cup competition, with six successes to their name, and right through their glorious history the mention of the name Aston Villa has been sufficient to conjure up a vision of all that is highest in football. The players who have worn the famous claret-and-blue colours have been prepared to meet and beat all sorts of opponents. The other side of the story is that the officials have prepared an arena second only to Wembley in some respects, and not even second to Wembley in others. For the moment it is about the Villa ground rather than the Villa players that I would chat to you.

To get the present superb and well equipped edifice in its proper perspective, let us throw our minds back to early days in the history of the Aston Villa club. Long ago, a number of young lads, attending a school at Aston, decided that they would start a football club of their own. A farmer was induced to lend them a field at Perry Barr, with a nominal rent. This nominal rent took some raising, however, as will be realised when it is mentioned that the first match which the club played at Perry Barr was witnessed by such a "tremendous" crowd that the gate receipts mounted to five shillings and threepence.

From that little acorn, though, the giant oak has grown, steadily and ever-increasing in size and splendour through the years until at Villa Park to-day it would seem that the very last word in football ground construction has been said. Sometimes, as I have walked into that stately ground during the past few months, I have wondered what those Sunday School lads must think. Many of them have passed to the great beyond, but some, grown old and bearded, still remain to be righteously proud of the fact that they were in at the start of this amazing football club.

SPENDING GATE MONEY ON THE PUBLIC!

At one time the old stand on the Witton Road side of the ground was regarded as something wonderful, with its accommodation for nearly five thousand people. But within the last year or two a new stand, pavilion, offices, etc., have been erected, at a cost of nearly ninety thousand pounds. When it was announced a little while ago that the cost of the latest alterations had assumed such a gigantic figure, some of the shareholders were staggered, but there is no necessity for worry about the future. There is no club in the country which gets attendances greater than the Villa, and while many clubs waste their surplus in gambling with high-priced players, the Villa somehow manages to find the material, in the raw state, train it on to the highest standard, and spend their "gate-money" in the way it ought to be spent—in providing additional comfort for the watchers. I like the words of Mr. Rinder, then chairman of the club, spoken a few months ago. "Twenty-five years ago," he said, "we had nine hundred pounds in the bank when we entered upon a reconstruction scheme which cost twenty-five thousand. We didn't know, really, where the money was coming from, but we had faith in the supporters of the

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club, and we got it. We prepared for big gates, and we got them."

In the new stand there is room for nearly eight thousand people, with comfortable, tip-up seats for every one of that number. Below, there are spacious and well-appointed offices, with furniture which would not disgrace a Park Lane home. Then there is a pavilion where the shareholders may congregate, a huge dining-room, with facilities for providing meals on match-days, the like of which I have never seen at any other football ground. Last, but by no means least, there is the luxury accommodation for home and visiting players. When I put my head into those dressing-rooms a week or two back, I wondered what the footballers of other days would have thought if they had been so provided with luxuries—those footballers who used to dress in a barn a mile or so from the ground; who had to re-dress after the match without so much as a bath. For these Villa players of to-day, and their guests, there are baths of all descriptions, hot, cold, and showers. Whether the football player displays any greater ability because of this so-called pampering is open to question. But I think the provision of such accommodation must have done its bit towards raising the status of the professional footballer. Surely he must feel that he has something to live up to, and that he does feel this is shown by the immaculately-dressed fellows who emerge from those spacious dressing-rooms when the match has been duly fought and won.

There is, too, at Villa Park, another innovation, unique so far as football grounds are concerned. This is an X-ray room in which any injuries to footballers can be examined immediately, and the proper treatment begun without delay.

All the foregoing tales of luxury must not lead us to suppose that the needs and comforts of the frequenters of the popular side of the ground—the "hobbits," as we might call them—have been neglected. In the parts of the arena not occupied by the stands there are terraces ascending high towards heaven and sloping down to the level of the pitch.

Behind the two goals the terraces rise to ninety rows, and much of the terracing is so covered in that there is accommodation for over 20,000 people under cover. And when the whole is full packed with a mass of enthusiastic supporters of football it is a wonderful sight—a sight which takes the old 'uns back to Perry Barr once more, and convinces them that the age of miracles is not past.

LIGHTNING SKETCHES OF FOOTER CELEBRITIES.



An Impression of Clem Stephenson, the famous English International inside-left of Huddersfield Town, by JIMMY SEED, of Tottenham Hotspur.

TRAINING FOR FOOTBALL

HOW TO KEEP FIT.

Standing the Pace.

By PERCY LONGHURST.

CHUMS, have you ever found yourselves filled with the eager longing to hear the ref's whistle go for half-time? And when that blessed time for rest—much too short!—did arrive; have you ever confessed to yourself that you were "whacked to the wide"? Some of you have, I'll be bound. I've known the feeling myself. And in time I learned the cure for it, and, what is a lot more useful even than the cure—how to prevent it.

Cure and preventive are quite simple, and they won't cost you a penny—only a little trouble. And both are contained in a single word:

Training!

Probably you have explained your "done up" feeling by telling yourself that the game has been extra fast and hard. Perhaps it has. But unless you can truthfully declare that you have tried your level best to get trained and keep trained, that explanation isn't worth much. What isn't realised by you chaps—and by plenty of others older than you are—is that training not only gives one the ability to play faster and harder, but it creates a reserve of strength that enables you to go on playing hard and fast long after the untrained chap has shot his bolt. Training creates staying power. And often enough it is the side which "stays" best that wins.

It doesn't matter what you are—goalie, back, or forward, you need training to help your side to win. And the training needn't be hard work. The best form of training is slow running. A slow two-mile run two evenings a week is going to make such a difference in your play that you'll hardly know yourself. What's that? No time for training! If you want to find the time you'll find it all right. What about your evenings? I know one player—and he is an International—who is so keen to keep fit that in his lunch-time he goes off for a run—not after his lunch, but before. True, he doesn't have much time to eat or dawdle about the streets or play dominoes, but he's fit.

Try it; get some of your pals to try it with you, for running alone can be weary work. Turn out two hours after a meal, and start off at a slow run. Wear footer togs, and if you have a sweater put in on. Have rubber-soled shoes for choice. Don't try to make a race of it; there's no need to see who can get back first. That spoils the whole business; it discourages the slower runner, and they won't turn out next time. Keep together. If some chap's wind gives out—most likely to happen on your first runs—all stop running and break into a walk. Then start running again when his wind has come back. You may, at first, have to do this three or four times, but stick it out. Go the full two miles. You'll be doing yourselves—heart, lungs, and muscles—more good than you know of. How do I know? Why, because I have done it and reaped the benefit of it.

At the end of the run have a brisk rub down, and massage a little olive oil or embrocation into the muscles of each calf and the front of the thighs and behind the knees before you dress. You will be a bit stiff after the first few runs, but that will soon wear off if you keep up the weekly run.

And suppose the weather is bad, too wet, ground too muddy, or there's nowhere to run (though there are roads everywhere)? Well, I'm going to tell you about that later on. No fellow worth his salt is going to shirk training by making the weather an excuse. I'll tell you of a way of beating the weather next week.

Just recently a player of the Plymouth club ran into a goalpost and knocked the whole lot down. The supporters of the club are said to be rather nervous as to whether the player will now turn his attention to the stand and perform the same feat.



(Continued from page 12.)

"I've come to you personally, Wharton," said Ponsonby gravely, "in order to save trouble if at all possible—serious trouble for one of your chaps. If I went to the Head or Mr. Quelch, it would mean grave trouble for the fellow I mean. I'm anxious to save that if it's possible. But I'm going to get satisfaction. The thing's got to be thrashed out, Wharton. We've been enemies, I know, but—"

"Cut all that out!" snapped Wharton. "What is it, you rotter? What have you come about? I should think you'd have given Greyfriars a jolly wide berth after what happened this afternoon."

"So I would, if this hadn't happened," said Ponsonby grimly. "But this matter's too serious to be held over. It wants dealing with at once. I've lost a five-pound note, Wharton, and Linley's the chap who's got it."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Just that," said Ponsonby. "I can't afford to lose fivers. And I'm thumped if I'm going to allow that low cad to keep it. I want it back, and I mean to have it back. Now you know what I'm here for!"

The juniors stared at him blankly.

"You—you've lost a fiver, and you think Linley's got it?" gasped Frank Nugent.

"Yes. I know he has."

"You think he's stolen it?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it, not for one moment," said Harry Wharton, his anger and indignation rising. "It's a rotten lie, Ponsonby. It's another of your dirty tricks! Linley isn't a thief, whatever else he is, you plotting hound!"

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull savagely. "It's a rotten trick, Harry. Linley may be a funk, but he isn't a thief. We've no thieves at Greyfriars."

"Kick the brute out!" snapped Frank Nugent. "Kick him and his dirty tricks out!"

Ponsonby gritted his teeth with rage.

"Then you don't believe me?" he growled.

"Of course we don't! Get out of this!"

"Very well," said Ponsonby in deadly tones. "I told you I'm determined to get justice done. I shall go straight away to Quelch, and let him thrash the matter out."

He turned away. Wharton hesitated, and then he called him back.

"Hold on!" he snapped, biting his lip. "Are you ready to make that charge to Linley's face?"

Ponsonby turned at the door and nodded.

"Yes, of course I am!" he said, his eyes glinting. "I want you to take me to him, and I want witnesses to be there."

"Right!" said Wharton grimly. "You shall meet Linley face to face. And I hope he'll ram your false accusation down your throat, Ponsonby. Come on!"

Ponsonby moved aside, and Harry Wharton went out with his amazed

chums at his heels. There were several fellows in the passage outside already. Ponsonby had purposely left the door open, and he had purposely spoken in loud tones for all to hear who could. As he stood in the passage there was a threatening growl, but Wharton held up his hand. He felt certain that Ponsonby wanted trouble to attract a master to the spot, which was perfectly true as it happened.

"Leave Ponsonby alone for a bit," he said quickly. "Don't play his game. He's here to cause trouble. Come on, you sweep!"

He led the way to Linley's study, and the rest followed, giving Ponsonby threatening looks. Whatever their attitude towards Mark Linley, there was no doubting their attitude towards the rascally Ponsonby.

But Harry Wharton himself was looking rather disturbed now. That Ponsonby should be willing to face Linley with such a charge made him feel rather uneasy. It began to look as if Ponsonby was really in earnest, and that he was sure of his ground.

Tapping at the door of Study No. 13, Harry pushed open the door and went in. He found only Mark Linley and Bob Cherry in the study, and they were having tea, with gloomy faces.

They started to their feet in utter amazement as Harry Wharton, followed by his chums and Ponsonby, entered the room. Behind them they could see a crowd of curious fellows. Ponsonby had wanted a crowd on the spot, and he had got it.

Neither Linley nor Bob Cherry spoke. Harry Wharton opened the proceedings despite the fact that both Linley and Cherry were supposed to be in Coventry. But this matter looked like being too serious to think of matters like that.

"Linley," said Harry Wharton grimly, "I've brought Ponsonby here to see you. He has just made a charge against you—a charge of theft. Knowing Ponsonby as I do, I don't believe it for one moment. I believe it is more of his rotten trickery. But I had to bring him, or he would have gone to Quelch—or he said he would go. Now, Ponsonby, you can go ahead. I warn you, though, that if this proves to be trickery, the Remove will know how to deal with you."

Ponsonby licked his lips. He had steeled himself to carry the rascally game through, though he knew it would be far from easy, and far from safe. The moment had come now. His face was a trifle pale, but he was as cool as ice.

"I don't charge Linley with theft—yet," he said calmly. "He has the note, I'm certain. But he may have kept it intending to give it up, though he should have stayed and given it up this afternoon, it seems to me. Anyway, I'm asking him now to give me my banknote back. That's all I want. If he'll hand it over, I'm willing to let the matter go no farther."

Ponsonby paused, his eyes fixed shiftily on Linley's face. That junior had remained quite calm, though his burning eyes showed the state of his mind.

But Bob Cherry did not remain calm. As Ponsonby finished speaking he sprang like a tiger on the Highcliffe junior. His fist shot out, and the next instant Ponsonby had measured his length on the study carpet.

"I don't know what Linley's answer is going to be," he panted, standing over his fallen enemy, "but that's my answer, you plotting hound!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

What did it Mean?

THERE was a silence in the room. Cherry stood there with blazing eyes and clenched fists, waiting for Ponsonby to rise. There was no murmur of approval, though it was obvious there was no sympathy for Ponsonby—far from it. Perhaps the fact that Cherry was, like Linley, in Coventry, accounted for that, though. On the carpet Ponsonby lay, leaning on his elbows his face distorted with passion and pain.

Harry Wharton jumped forward and grasped his old chum by the arm in alarm.

"Hold on!" he said. "Stop that, Cherry! We don't want any masters in on this, you ass. Let Linley answer the cad. Let him get up."

"Stand back!" shouted Bob Cherry furiously. "Let him get up and face me, and I'll ram his rotten lies down his throat, the hound! Get up, you brute!"

But Ponsonby did not get up. He did not want a third thrashing that day, and he saw only too clearly that Bob Cherry was roused as he had rarely been roused before. Bob was the best-tempered fellow in the world, but Ponsonby had succeeded in enraging him now with a vengeance.

It was Mark Linley himself who stepped in.

"Leave him alone, Bob," he said quietly, laying his hand on Bob's wrist. "I don't understand what his accusation means, but I'm ready to answer it myself. Let him get up and explain what he means."

"Yes; for goodness' sake don't let's have any masters on the job," said Frank Nugent in alarm. "Can't you see that's just what Ponsonby wants?"

Bob Cherry drew back abruptly and lowered his fists. He saw the force of Frank's remark only too clearly now. Ponsonby scrambled to his feet, his handkerchief to his chin, his eyes blazing with passion.

"I'll soon explain what I mean, Linley," he snarled, giving Bob Cherry a bitter glance of hatred. "It's your own fault if this matter gets to the ears of the authorities. As for Cherry—"

"Never mind him," said Linley quickly. "I'm ready to answer you, Ponsonby. You say I've stolen, or got a banknote of yours? What grounds have you for thinking that?"

"I'll soon tell you that!" hissed Ponsonby. "After we had fought this afternoon I missed the five-pound note. I'd just been going through my wallet some minutes before, and when that beastly council school brat turned up I crammed it into my pocket loose. And then I remembered that I'd seen you pick something up—a bit of paper it looked like—just as you walked away."

"I picked nothing up," said Mark Linley quietly.

"Of course you did!" hissed Ponsonby. "Why should I say you did if you didn't?"

"Because you are a rascally liar, Ponsonby."

Ponsonby gritted his teeth.

"We'll see who's the liar!" he said significantly. "Now, tell me this, Linley. Gaddy and I met Vavasour and Monson just afterwards, and we waited for you in the lane lower down. You slunk along the inside of the hedge, hoping to pass us unseen. Why did you do that?"

"I didn't want any further trouble with you, Ponsonby."

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"Bunkum! You know what we wanted you for—you knew I should demand my fiver back. These fellows, I understand, think you ran away because you funk'd a scrap with us. It was nothing of the sort. It was because you dare not face me—dare not risk being searched with my fiver on you!"

"Oh!"

"It was a murmur from the juniors. They looked at Linley in a strange way now—most of them, at all events. Was Ponsonby right? After all, was it possible that there was something in Ponsonby's charge, and that was the real reason why Linley had bolted? Even the famous five looked strangely at Linley now. They could scarcely believe that even a rascal like Ponsonby would bring such a charge without reason. And his suggestion that Linley had run away because he feared being searched was certainly sound on the face of things.

Linley flushed crimson as he met the looks of his schoolfellows. He could not fail to see that they had been impressed by Ponsonby's words. Ponsonby's eyes gleamed as he noted the looks. He thanked his luck for having seen Skinner first, and thus learning how matters stood. He now knew that Linley would not give any satisfactory explanation as to why he had run away.

"It—it's false!" said Linley thickly, going white to the lips now. "I ran away for another reason altogether!"

"Look here, Linley!" said Harry Wharton, in a low voice. "If you've got a reason why you ran away, for goodness' sake give it now, and don't play the goat! This is too serious a matter to keep anything back!"

"You—you think that there's something in what Ponsonby claims?" said Linley huskily.

"No, I do not!" said Harry, after a moment's pause. "I think that he's either making a big mistake, or that this is one of his dastardly plots. Let him give any real proof if he can!"

"I've no proof," said Ponsonby calmly, "excepting what I've already said. But I mean to get it. Isn't that proof enough, though?"

"No, it isn't!" said Harry flatly. "You've no right to come here making such a rotten charge with as little proof as that!"

"Haven't I?" said Ponsonby, raising his voice furiously. "I might have expected you'd take that cad's part, Wharton! Hang you! But I haven't finished yet! I demand, here and now, that Linley has his belongings and this dashed study searched! If you refuse, I shall go to Mr. Quelch!"

"Linley can please himself about that!" snapped Wharton. "But I should jolly well refuse to allow you to!"

"You're backing up that thief, then?"

"If Linley was a thief, I'd be one of the first to see him brought to book," said Harry. "But I've told you what I think."

"All right, you rotter!" shouted Ponsonby, raising his voice shrilly. "I expected this! But I'm not losing my money! Linley's a thief, and I'll prove it! I'll go to Mr. Quelch!"

"Mr. Quelch is here now, boy!"

It was a deep voice from the doorway—Mr. Quelch's voice. There was a gasp, and the crowd of staring juniors round the door opened to let the master through. He came into the study, and his glance settled curiously on Ponsonby.

"What is the matter here?" he demanded sharply. "What is this Highcliffe boy doing here, Wharton?"

Wharton was silent.

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"I heard him making a serious statement as I came along," said Mr. Quelch, looking quickly at Linley. "Something about Linley being a thief. Such a statement requires an explanation."

"And I'll soon give it!" said Ponsonby, his eyes glittering with triumph. "I've come, sir!"

"Kindly be silent!" snapped Mr. Quelch icily. "Wharton, I have asked you for an explanation!"

Harry Wharton did not answer again. Linley stepped forward, his features composed and determined.

"I will tell you why Ponsonby is here, sir," he said, in a steady voice. "He has charged me with the theft of a five-pound note. It is false! I know nothing about any note, and have seen nothing of one!"

Mr. Quelch looked grim.

"This is most serious!" he said, turning abruptly to Ponsonby. "What grounds have you for making such a charge, boy?"

"Because I know he took it!" said Ponsonby. "I saw him pick something up, sir—a bit of paper. I knew afterwards it must have been that!"

"Give me the facts as you know them, please!"

Ponsonby told him just as he had told the juniors.

"And you have come here, making such a grave charge on such flimsy evidence?" said Mr. Quelch angrily. "It is monstrous! We do not harbour thieves at Greyfriars, Ponsonby—at least, I sincerely hope not. I attach not the slightest importance to what you claim. Did you pick anything up before leaving, Linley?"

"No, sir. He is speaking falsely when he says I did!"

"I'm not!" said Ponsonby angrily. "I tell you I saw you do it! You've got it—you've got my note hidden somewhere! I—I demand that Linley's belongings are searched! That's all I want! If he hasn't taken it, then he won't object to that, sir!"

"You have no right whatever to demand anything of the sort, you impudent boy!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Linley shall certainly not be subjected to such an indignity without good and sufficient reason!"

"I am quite willing for my things to be searched, sir," said Linley quickly. "In fact, I should prefer it. It will be fairer to me, sir, if they are searched. Perhaps Ponsonby will be satisfied then."

"Very well, Linley, if you wish it," said Mr. Quelch, after a pause. "Wingate?"

"Yes, sir!"

Wingate was standing by the door, looking on in wonder. He stepped forward.

"You will kindly carry out a search of Linley's person and his belongings. Gwynne can help you," said Mr. Quelch impatiently.

In silence Wingate and Gwynne of the Sixth started to search, though neither looked as if they relished the task. They searched Linley's clothing, and they searched his locker, and everything in the room that belonged to Linley.

The juniors looked on in silence. Linley looked on calmly, with a face that showed little indication of his feelings. Only Bob Cherry showed his feelings. His face was red with pent-up rage.

They finished at last.

"There's no trace of a banknote here, sir," said Wingate.

"Very well. You will please conduct a further search of Linley's belongings in the Remove dormitory. One moment, though. Have you the number of the note you claim to have lost, Ponsonby?"

"Yes, sir," said Ponsonby promptly, taking out his wallet and handing the master a slip of paper. "That is the number, sir."

"Very good!" said Mr. Quelch, glancing at the number on the paper. "Wingate!"

He nodded, and Wingate and Gwynne left the room. They were not long away, and when they returned both were looking relieved.

"No sign of any banknote up there, sir," said Wingate, with rather a hard glance at Ponsonby.

"You have searched thoroughly?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I did not expect for one moment that you would find anything," snapped Mr. Quelch, turning to Ponsonby, who did not seem very disappointed. "Well, boy, are you satisfied now?"

"I'm satisfied that it isn't in Linley's things now," said Ponsonby, with a sneer that made Mr. Quelch's eyes gleam. "But that doesn't say he hasn't had it. He's got rid of it by this, of course."

"You thundering liar!" shouted Bob Cherry, utterly unable to restrain himself any longer. "Look here, sir, it's all rot! Ponsonby, the howling cad, hasn't lost a banknote at all! He hates Linley like poison! It's a dirty plot to ruin Linley! This is Ponsonby's revenge for the thrashing Linley gave him this afternoon!"

"Nonsense, Cherry!" thundered Mr. Quelch angrily. "No boy would be so utterly wicked as to attempt such a dastardly trick as you suggest! Ponsonby has made a mistake. He ought never to have come here making such a charge on such flimsy grounds, however. I am perfectly satisfied that Linley knows nothing of the missing note. If you are not satisfied now, Ponsonby, you must make a complaint to your own headmaster. You will now kindly leave this school."

"Very well, sir," said Ponsonby, with unexpected coolness. "You have the number now, sir, and I know you will let me know if it does turn up here. You will keep the number to refer to, of course, sir."

"I shall keep the number by me," said Mr. Quelch icily. "But I have not the slightest belief that I shall ever have any necessity to refer to it, Ponsonby. Kindly see this Highcliffe boy off the premises, Wingate."

"Certainly, sir!"

Wingate nodded to Ponsonby, and followed him out, looking very much as if he would like to see Ponsonby off the premises with his boot. As they passed out, the Remove master laid a kindly hand on Linley's shoulder.

"The matter is now ended in so far as you are concerned, Linley, my boy," he said. "Such a charge ought never to have been brought up against you."

He was turning away, when he paused, as if a thought had suddenly struck him.

"Within the last hour," he exclaimed quietly, "it has come to my knowledge that you are at loggerheads with the rest of your Form-fellows, Linley. Why is that, may I ask?"

Linley did not reply.

"Is it because of this absurd and unfounded charge made by that Highcliffe boy, Linley?" asked Mr. Quelch.

Linley shook his head.

"No, sir," said Harry Wharton, feeling called upon to answer. "We knew nothing of that until Ponsonby came in to-night."

"Then what is the trouble?" asked Mr. Quelch. "I do not often interfere in such matters, but I feel that it must

have some connection with this bank-note affair."

There was silence. Linley was scarlet now. Then a voice came from the door—suspiciously like Skinner's voice:

"Because he funk'd going to Todd's help, sir."

Mr. Quelch recognised the voice.

"Step forward, Skinner!" he snapped. "What did you say?"

Skinner came farther into the room sulkily.

"I said Linley played the coward, and he did, sir," he stammered. "I think he ought to be shown up, the funk! He ran away and left Alonzo Todd to be bullied by those Highcliffe cads."

Mr. Quelch's face changed. He gave Linley a curious look. Linley flushed to the roots of his hair, but he said nothing.

"I am sorry to hear that," said Mr. Quelch quietly, after waiting for Linley to speak. "However, it is a matter that concerns Linley himself. I feared that the reason was in connection with the missing banknote, and that is why I asked. You will disperse now, boys."

Mr. Quelch, with another look at Linley, passed from the room. Mark Linley watched him go. He had not failed to understand the master's look. From the day Linley had arrived at Greyfriars Mr. Quelch had been kind to him, and had helped him. Linley was grateful, and he valued Mr. Quelch's good opinion as he valued few things. And now, that look had told him plainer than words that the master was disappointed—disgusted that he had, as he must have supposed, played the coward that afternoon.

Linley had been scarcely moved by Ponsonby's charge, serious enough as it was. But he was moved now to the depths by that look of Mr. Quelch's. He felt suddenly sick, and his eyes went misty.

But only Bob Cherry noticed, and understood, and he gripped his chum's arm hard. The rest of the juniors dispersed, with curious looks back at Linley. They were astounded and puzzled at the curious turn events had taken. But nobody at Greyfriars was as puzzled that night as were Skinner, Stott, and Snoop. They couldn't understand it at all. What was Ponsonby's game? That it was a deep game, and that it was not finished yet they felt certain. Why had Ponsonby made the charge at all? Why had he gone to such lengths, apparently, for no purpose at all? He must have known that his charge would fall through unless he could prove something substantial against Linley. He had obviously not "planted" anything, or he would have taken good care that it should be found when the search was made. But nothing had been found, and Ponsonby had gone away, apparently satisfied. It was all very curious to Skinner & Co.

They were destined to understand, and before many days had passed. Ponsonby had certainly not finished yet.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. A Bombshell!

THE Remove talked of nothing else for the rest of that night but the affair of Alonzo Todd, and the still more curious and serious affair of Ponsonby's banknote. And it was talked of almost as much in other Forms at Greyfriars. Few seriously believed that Ponsonby had lost a bank-note at all, and fewer still believed that



"Oh dear! You awful beast!" gasped Bunter. "Gimme the paper back, you rotter!" Smack, smack! Ponsonby's hand sent Bunter's head one way and his other hand sent it back again. "Yaroooooh!" With a roar of pain the fat junior sat down in the snow. (See Chapter 5.)

Linley knew anything about it. But there were a few who did, or professed to believe he had taken it. Among those who professed to believe it were Skinner, Stott, Snoop, and Bunter, though all four had the best of reasons for not believing it. But as they hated Mark Linley, it suited them to make things look as black as they could against the unfortunate Lancashire junior.

The majority took the other view—that Ponsonby was working the whole thing out of sheer spite and revenge, and that Linley had run away from Ponsonby & Co. because he funk'd a scrap against such odds.

Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh, simply did not know what to think. But they were absolutely certain that Mark Linley was no thief, though they could not help feeling just as certain that he had run away from the Highcliffe juniors in a momentary fit of cowardice.

The only fellow who flatly refused to believe either charge was Bob Cherry, and he wasn't slow to let all see what his views were. Mark Linley had given him his word, and that was quite enough for Bob.

That he had been sent to Coventry with Linley didn't trouble Bob in the

slightest—or didn't appear to. The only fellows who were troubled about it were his old chums, Wharton, Nugent, Hurree Singh, and Bull. And they were worried and upset about it. They knew Bob, and they knew that he honestly believed Mark Linley innocent of the charge of funking. Their anger against him had gone now, and they would have gone against the Coventry sentence and spoken to him had they been certain that Bob would speak in return. They were wretched and miserable.

But Bob showed no sign that he wanted them to speak. He was bitter and angry still with them for not believing in Mark Linley. As a matter of fact, Harry Wharton himself was beginning to feel more and more doubtful about it. Linley had never been known to play the funk, and Harry regretted bitterly now that he had been rushed into taking sides against him by fellows like Bolsover and Bulstrode.

It seemed too late to change matters now, however. But it was a rotten state of affairs, and if Bob had shown signs of wanting to be friends again, his old chums would have jumped at the chance to heal the breach.

Unfortunately, that chance never came, and matters were still at the

same stage when—four days later—the bombshell dropped.

Harry Wharton, with his chums, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurreq Singh, were in Study No. 1 at tea when Tubb, of the Third, brought a letter and threw it on the table. It was addressed to Harry Wharton, and he fairly jumped as he saw the postmark. It was that of Bowdley, a town in Lancashire—the town Mark Linley came from.

"Well, my hat!" said Harry, staring at the writing on the envelope which was rather familiar to him. "This is from Mark Linley's place—I'm certain I've seen that writing before, too. I believe it's from Linley's mother."

"Sure it isn't addressed to Linley?"

"Look!" said Harry.

He showed the envelope to his chums. They stared.

"What on earth can Linley's mother be writing to me about?" said Harry uneasily. "That's if it is from her."

He tore open the letter. He noted the address at the top—it was Mark Linley's address right enough. Then Harry opened the notepaper out, and as he did so something dropped on the table—a piece of thin paper, at sight of which all the juniors jumped.

It was a banknote, and at a glance they saw it was for five pounds.

"What the thump—" began Harry, utterly bewildered.

He looked at the letter and read it swiftly. Then he gave a startled exclamation—an exclamation of horror.

"Good heavens!" he gasped. "Read this, you chaps."

He held the letter out, and his three chums read it together. Then they looked at each other with scared faces. And no wonder! For the letter read as follows:

"Dear Harry Wharton,—I expect you will be surprised to have a letter from me, and more surprised to have the money returned to you with it. But I know you will understand, and will not think we are vexed with you for giving it to Mark, and that we are too proud to accept it. Really, Mark should not have asked you to lend him the money, and you should not have insisted upon it being a gift. Please do not think we are ungrateful—we are not, and both Mark's father and Mabel join me in thanking you all very, very much indeed for your generous good nature. But I am returning it because there is now no urgent need for the money, as Mr. Linley has got the foreman's job he hoped for, and now our money troubles are over, I hope. Mark has told me all about you, and how eager you were to help us in our troubles. My dear boys, it was too good of you, and I am writing to you myself instead of through Mark so that I can thank you personally for your very kind wish to help. With kind regards from us all,

"Yours very sincerely,

"(Signed) ALICE LINLEY."

That was the letter. It was no wonder Harry Wharton and his chums stared at it in petrified amazement.

"Well, well—"

That was all Harry could say at the moment. He felt suddenly sick. The significance of the letter was too obvious not to be seen at once.

"Rotten!" groaned Frank Nugent. "Oh, what a rotten business, Harry!"

"It's all that," said Harry, his voice grave. "You fellows understand what it means, of course?"

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"Of course—only too well!"

"It's rotten!"

"Too rotten for words!"

Harry Wharton groaned, his brow clouded.

"What the thump are you going to do about it, Harry? That's Ponsonby's money—it must be. Where's Linley got a fiver from, and we never gave it to him, of course," gasped Frank Nugent.

"There's only one thing to be done," said Harry, in a low voice. "The money must be given back to Ponsonby, of course. We can do nothing else."

"It's the sack for Linley," said Johnny Bull gruffly. "And—and his own mother's given him away. Isn't it frightful? It'll have to come out now—that brute Ponsonby will see to that! And we thought the cad was spoofing."

"I never dreamed it could be otherwise," said Harry. "But it's plain enough now. Linley knew his people were hard up, poor beggar! And when he found Pon's note it was too great a temptation to resist. He kept it and sent it home, telling his people we had given it him—had a whip round for it, I suppose. He knew his people would want to know where he'd got such a sum from."

"That's it, of course. Oh, what a rotten business!"

Harry Wharton set his lips.

"Come on," he said. "It won't be pleasant, but it's got to be done. The money's got to be given back, and Pon will see that the truth is brought out—the authorities here and at Highcliffe will want to know the truth, in any case. I'm going to see Linley now. I'm going to advise him to make a clean breast of it—for his own sake. It will be better for him if he does. Come on."

He took up the letter and banknote and walked out. His chums followed him, their faces grave and disturbed. As Harry had said, it was not a pleasant task—doubly unpleasant to fellows who had, until a few days ago, been close chums with Linley.

They knocked at Linley's door and entered. To their relief only Linley was in the room. Tea was over, for the crockery was half-cleared away. Linley looked up, and he coloured at the way the juniors looked at him.

"Linley," said Wharton quietly, after closing the door carefully. "We've come on an unpleasant job, but a job that's got to be done. Will you look at that?"

He threw the letter on the table, with the banknote.

Linley gave a violent start as he saw the note. He gave a still more violent start as he saw the writing on the envelope and the postmark.

"Why, what—what's this mean?" he faltered, eyeing the letter and banknote in dumbfounded amazement.

"Read the letter," said Harry curtly.

Mark Linley opened the notepaper and read the letter. As he did so every spot of colour left his face. He sank back into a chair with a stupefied cry.

"I'm sorry about this, Linley, believe me," said Harry gently. "Your motive was to help your people, and a fellow can't help considering that. But—but it's a fellow's duty to see justice done, and to see that money goes back to its rightful owner."

Linley did not speak.

"That's your mother's handwriting, isn't it?"

Linley nodded dizzily. He looked up at them like a fellow in a dream.

"Well, there it is, Linley," said Harry in a quiet tone. "If you'll take my advice you'll go straight with that to Mr. Quelch, or the Head. It will be

better for you if you do. The authorities know the note's missing—or was missing. Ponsonby will see that they know where it's turned up. It's useless trying to hide the truth now, even if we tried to."

Linley stood up slowly, a dull red flush staining his face.

"You—you cads!" he said thickly. "You asked me if that was my mother's handwriting. I said it was. It's just like it, and I thought for the moment that it must be. Now I know it can't be. My mother never sent that letter, or the note; she can't have done. I tell you it's utterly impossible. I never sent her that banknote. I know nothing whatever about it."

"You mean to bluff it out, then?"

"Bluff it out? Of course not!" stammered Linley. "I just mean what I say. That letter was never written by my mother; or if it was, the banknote was sent to her by someone else, not me. Oh, you rotters, to think a thing like that!"

"What else are we to think?" said Harry, unable to restrain his sudden anger. "It's as plain as a pikestaff, Linley. Do you mean to deny the truth after this?"

Linley's lips trembled.

"Of course I mean to deny it!" he said, in a burst of half-hysterical rage. "I tell you I know nothing about that banknote—absolutely nothing! Someone's played a trick—it must be a trick."

"Rubbish! You'd better own up, Linley."

Linley stared at Harry Wharton with burning eyes, his face white and set.

"You—you really think I stole that banknote and sent it home?" he panted.

"What are we to think? Don't be a fool!"

"You say that I'm a thief, Wharton?"

"I've said what I think plainly enough," said Wharton calmly.

"Then there's my answer!" hissed Linley, in a sudden burst of passion.

His clenched fist struck Wharton clean between the eyes, and Wharton reeled back against the table, sending it crashing against the bookcase. There was a smashing of glass and crockery as the teapot and a cup and saucer went crashing to the floor, while glass fell to the floor from behind the bookcase doors.

The next moment the doorknob turned, and Wingate looked in quickly.

"Now, you kids," he began, "what's going on—"

He broke off as he saw the faces of the juniors and came into the room. Wharton had his hand to his face, and Linley stood before him with glittering eyes and clenched fists. The other juniors were looking on, with tense faces.

"Hallo! What's wrong here?" demanded Wingate. "Linley, put your fists— Ah!"

Once again Wingate broke off—this time because his eyes happened just then to fall on the banknote lying on the table. He picked it up swiftly, his eyes turning to Linley again.

A banknote was far from being a usual thing to see in a junior study. Wingate could not help his mind going back to the affair of Ponsonby days ago.

"Where did this come from?" he demanded sternly. "And what does this mean? Wharton, tell me at once!"

Wharton said nothing. Linley was silent a moment, his chest heaving. Then he spoke.

"Ask Wharton again!" he said, his voice trembling and defiant. "He says I stole it! He's just called me a thief! I'm not a thief! I know nothing about that banknote!"



with the number of the "missing" bank-note on it. He compared the number with the number on the note. Then he looked at Linley. It was a look that made that hapless junior feel suddenly ill.

"Linley," said Mr. Quelch, in utter amazement and horror, "you know that the number of this note agrees with the number of the banknote Ponsonby, of Highcliffe School, claimed you had taken?"

"I didn't know it, sir," said Linley faintly.

"Is this your mother's handwriting?" asked Mr. Quelch gravely. "I presume this letter is from your mother?"

"It—it seems to be," stammered Linley wearily. "It's just like my mother's writing. But it can't be. My mother wouldn't write a letter like that."

glance of compassion as he went. Mr. Quelch turned to Linley.

"You will come with me to Dr. Locke, Linley," he said quietly. "I am grieved and shocked at this discovery. I strongly advise you to make a clean breast of this miserable affair to him, for your own sake, my boy. Come!"

Without a glance at Harry Wharton or the others, Mark Linley followed him out. It was only too clear to the unhappy boy that Mr. Quelch had already condemned him.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Expelled!

MR. QUELCH was a very kind-hearted master and a very just master. He was the last man to pass judgment upon anyone without a thorough investigation into the facts.

"Then—then——" Wingate was beginning, when he checked himself and turned to Nugent. "Nugent, just run and bring Mr. Quelch here. This matter wants looking into, I fancy!"

It was only Wingate's duty to do that on the face of things. But he did it, and all the juniors stood stunned now. It was done, and Linley had got to face things. They waited in silence.

Nugent was soon back, and a moment later Mr. Quelch rustled in.

"Well, Wingate?" he asked, staring at the juniors. "What is the matter?"

Wingate handed him the banknote.

"I came in here just now and found Linley and Wharton fighting. I also found that on the table here, sir," he said grimly.

Mr. Quelch started as he took up the note, and his glance rested on Linley's white face.

"Whom does this belong to, Linley?" he asked, his voice stern. "Where did this come from?"

Linley pointed dully to the letter lying on the table.

"I'm not afraid of speaking, sir," he said huskily. "I've done nothing wrong, and I've nothing to hide. It came in that letter to Wharton, sir. Wharton will let you read it, sir, I know," he ended bitterly.

Mr. Quelch looked at Wharton, and then he picked up the letter and read it. His face was a study as he did read it. He gave a muttered exclamation, and then he took out his pocket-wallet and drew from it a slip of paper. It was the slip Ponsonby had given him



"You say that I'm a thief, Wharton?" said Mark Linley, his eyes gleaming. "I've said what I think plainly enough," replied Wharton calmly. "Then there's my answer!" snapped Linley in a sudden burst of passion. His clenched fist struck Wharton clean between the eyes, and the captain of the Remove reeled back against the table. (See Chapter 9.)

And I swear I never sent her any money whatever. I know nothing about that banknote. I'm not a thief, sir!"

Mr. Quelch eyed Linley steadily for some moments. Then he turned to Wingate.

"This is a very serious matter, Wingate," he said. "I am glad you sent for me. Will you please get on the telephone to Highcliffe? Ask Mr. Mobbs if he will kindly allow Ponsonby to come here at the earliest possible moment."

"Very good, sir!"

Wingate hurried out, giving Linley a

Yet in his own mind he had already passed judgment upon Mark Linley. To him the matter was proved without any possibility of doubt. Obviously Linley had found the note and kept it. His people had been in sore straits for money, and he had sent it on to them. It had been a severe temptation to the boy, he understood that—a temptation older individuals might easily have succumbed to under like circumstances. In the meantime, unknown to Linley, the circumstances of his people had changed

for the better, and his mother—being deeply grateful to the boys she had been led by Linley to understand had sent the gift—had sent it back to them, little dreaming that she was bringing dire disgrace on her son by doing so.

That was how Mr. Quelch reasoned it out—how everybody else practically reasoned it out. It was clear enough. What else could Mr. Quelch think? That any fellow could be so treacherous and rascally as to plot to ruin Linley never even occurred to him. Had it done so he might not have been so confident that the matter needed no further investigation.

But such a possibility did not cross his mind. Mr. Quelch was aware that Ponsonby had not a very good character, but he little dreamed the sort of rascal he really was. Mr. Quelch reflected rather bitterly that there had been no justification for his keen regret that Linley had played the coward the previous afternoon over the affair of Alonzo Todd. He had not played the coward after all—not in that way. He had run away simply because, as Ponsonby had claimed, he was afraid of being caught with the stolen banknote on him.

In the Head's study Linley stood by with white, strained face and trembling lips as Mr. Quelch related the facts—as he believed them—to Dr. Locke. The Head had already been told of Ponsonby's visit by Mr. Quelch, so that he very quickly grasped the situation.

He bent a stern, penetrating glance on the wretched junior.

"Linley," he said quietly, "this has come as a great shock to me. I am amazed and dismayed to find that a boy of this school could have been brought before me on such a charge. If you have anything to confess, my boy, I hope for your own sake that you will do so—though I cannot hold out any hope that by so doing you will escape the extreme penalty. Have you anything to say, Linley?"

The Lancashire junior held up his head and looked at Dr. Locke with glistening eyes.

"Only this, sir," he said, in a voice trembling with indignation. "I did not steal that note; I know nothing whatever about it. You are condemning me without a trial, sir. It is unjust!"

Dr. Locke remained quite calm, though his mouth set a trifle harder.

"I have not condemned you yet, Linley," he said gravely. "Yet I fear the matter is only too clear. I shall give you every opportunity to defend yourself. I understand that this boy Ponsonby and his friend are willing to swear that you picked something up after the quarrel. Do you deny picking anything up?"

"Absolutely, sir! It is false!"

"Very well. You have admitted, I understand, having tried to avoid those Highcliffe boys in the lane on your way back from the village?"

"Yes, sir. I knew they intended to attack me because I gave Ponsonby a thrashing."

"Why do you refuse to state exactly why you ran away, Linley? Cannot you see that your very silence condemns you?"

Linley was silent.

"You also refuse to account for your movements immediately after running away from the scene?"

"Yes, sir. I have a reason of my own for not explaining that," said Linley thickly.

Dr. Locke's face was grim.

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"It seems useless to question you further, Linley," he said sternly. "This letter from your mother is more than enough. You do not deny that it is in your mother's handwriting, I suppose?"

"It is like her writing; yet it can't be from her," said Linley wildly. "I can't understand it at all. I swear I never sent my mother that note, sir."

"The letter bears your home address and the envelope bears the postmark of your town," said Dr. Locke.

"I don't understand it at all, sir—I simply can't understand it. It must be a plot—a plot to ruin me. Someone either sent the banknote to my mother pretending it was from me, or they sent the letter themselves."

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Locke angrily. "No person, either at Greyfriars or Highcliffe, would do anything so utterly unscrupulous and wicked. Such a thing is beyond all reason, Linley. This letter is undoubtedly from your mother."

"Then write and ask her—prove it that way, sir," said Linley, with trembling earnestness. "My mother wouldn't lie."

"I cannot do that, Linley. I do not say for one moment that your parents would shield you to the extent of denying the authorship of that letter, or of having received that banknote from you. But I should be obliged to refuse to accept their statement on the matter under the circumstances."

He paused; and Linley's face went whiter still. He had held to that hope from the beginning that the Head would do that. He stood trembling, his mind in a confused whirl, when a knock sounded at the door, and a moment later Ponsonby was shown in.

He stepped before the Head's desk quite calmly, without glancing at Linley.

"You sent for me, sir," he said respectfully.

Dr. Locke gave him a penetrating glance, but Ponsonby did not flinch. He was quite cool and collected.

"Yes, I wish to question you further in regard to the matter of your lost banknote, my boy," said the Head quietly. "I shall not keep you a moment. Is that the note you have lost?"

He handed the banknote to Ponsonby, who looked at it carefully. Then he compared it with a number on a slip of paper he held. He handed both note and number to Dr. Locke.

Next Monday's Programme.

"BACK TO THE FACTORY AGAIN!"

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YOUR EDITOR.

"It is the one," he said. "That is the number, sir."

"Very well," said the Head. "You may take it, Ponsonby. I will speak with Dr. Voysey in regard to the matter."

"Yes, sir," said Ponsonby, taking up the banknote. "I only wanted my money back, sir. I hope this will not mean serious trouble for anyone," he added, with a glance at Linley. "I should not like to think that my carelessness has caused any one to suffer."

"The boy who was responsible for stealing the note will be suitably dealt with," said the Head coldly. "You may go, Ponsonby."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Ponsonby.

He left the study quietly. Dr. Locke sighed and turned to Linley.

"You still have nothing to say to me, Linley?" he asked.

"I didn't take that banknote, sir," said Linley. "I can only say that. I am not a thief. Believe me, sir, I didn't keep it, and I didn't send it home," he went on hoarsely.

"I am sorry that I cannot believe you under the circumstances, Linley," exclaimed the Head in quiet, steady tones. "It is sad to think that your own parent was the means of bringing your guilt to light. Mr. Quelch agrees with me that there is no possible room for doubt. For such a crime as you have committed there can be only one possible punishment. It is impossible for you to remain at this school."

Mark Linley panted.

"I—I am to be expelled?" he stammered huskily.

"Yes, Linley. You will leave this school by the first train in the morning. The fact that you did not take the money for your own use, but in order to help your parents at home is in your favour. I can find some excuse for that. For that, and in consideration of your hitherto excellent character, I will not expel you publicly. Mr. Quelch, will you see that Wingate escorts Linley to the station in the morning?"

"Very good, sir," said Mr. Quelch, with a glance of deep compassion at the condemned junior. "Come, Linley!"

Linley strove to speak. He faced the Head appealingly, but the words would not come. He turned away with quivering lips, and Mr. Quelch led him out. Outside the door Mr. Quelch pressed Linley's shoulder, and then he walked away, his face grim. Linley little dreamed how the scene had affected the master of the Remove, and that Mr. Quelch had walked away because he could not trust himself to speak the kindly words he had intended to speak.

With bowed head and white set face, Linley walked slowly along the passage, scarcely realising that the blow had indeed fallen. At the end of the passage a group of juniors were standing in scared silence. They looked curiously at Linley as he came along. Bob Cherry was among them, and he jumped forward and caught his chum's arm with anxious apprehension.

"Marky," he panted, "what has happened? You—you look——"

"It's all up!" stammered Linley dazedly. "I'm sacked, Bob—expelled."

"What?"

Bob Cherry shouted the word. His frank, healthy face was full of utter dismay and incredulity.

"Sacked?" he repeated. "Marky, it——"

"It's true!" muttered Linley bitterly. "Ponsonby's won—he's got what he's

been working for. The fellows have got what they wanted, too. They said I was a disgrace to the Remove. I shall disgrace it no longer after the morning. I—I—"

His voice broke, and he stumbled away, unheeding the scared faces of the juniors who listened.

As he went three juniors came along the passage. They were Skinner, Stott, and Ponsonby. As Linley passed them Ponsonby smiled in his face—a bland, mocking smile.

Linley ignored it, and walked on. His heart was too full of bitterness to leave room for feelings of any sort against his enemy. But Bob Cherry noted the smile, and his honest face blazed with sudden, overpowering fury. His fist shot out straight from the shoulder, and Ponsonby went down like a log.

Bob Cherry didn't even glance down at him—he hurried after his chum. He found him in Study No. 13. He was seated at the table, his arms folded on it, and his head resting on his arms. His shoulders shook.

Bob moved over to him, and laid a hand on his shoulder. He said no word, but that gentle squeeze meant more to the condemned junior than any words could have done just then.

The news stunned the Remove. Whatever views they had held in regard to Linley's guilt they could only feel a deep pity for him now. The fact that he had not taken the money—as they believed—for his own selfish ends made them look at the matter in a different way, from what they would have had it been otherwise.

After that night the Remove saw nothing more of Linley. The next morning—a wet, dismal morning—Linley walked to the station, and Wingate walked with him.

They had just reached the station when a junior caught them up. He was coatless and capless, and he was drenched with rain.

It was Bob Cherry. Wingate glared at him in amazement.

"Cherry," he gasped, "what in thunder are you doing here? You should be in your Form-room. Get back at once, you young idiot!"

"I won't, Wingate!" said Bob Cherry thickly. "Linley's my chum. I'm not allowing him to leave Greyfriars without a friend to see him off. Hang Quelchy, hang Greyfriars, and hang you!"

"Cherry, you young scamp! How dare you! Go back! D'you hear me?"

"I won't!"

Wingate stared at Bob as though he were transfixed. Then a curious look came over Wingate's face.

"You'll get it hot for this, Cherry!" he said grimly. "But—come on!"

Bob Cherry took his chum's bag, and they passed on to the station. Linley had given Cherry a long look—that was all. He did not speak until he was in the train. Then he took Bob's hand.

"Good-bye, Bob!" he said, his voice trembling. "You've been a real pal! I—I sha'n't forget. It—it was good of you to risk trouble just to see me off. This is good-bye, but I sha'n't forget you!"

He shook Bob's hand. Wingate hesitated a fraction of a second, and then he held out his hand frankly.

"Good-bye, kid!" he said gruffly. "I'm sorry. Good luck!"

Bob Cherry could scarcely speak. He was blubbing almost openly. But he got it out at last.



"Cherry!" said Wingate sternly. "What in thunder are you doing here? Get back at once to the Form-room!" "I won't!" said Bob Cherry thickly. "Linley is my chum. I'm not allowing him to leave Greyfriars without a friend to see him off!" (See Chapter 10.)

"Good-bye, Marky!" he said huskily. "It's not good-bye, though. I know you'll come back—I swear you'll come back! I—I—"

The whistle shrilled, and the train began to move. Mark Linley leaned out and waved his cap, and Bob Cherry watched him until the train vanished round the curve. Then he turned away with a heavy, bitter heart. Mark Linley had gone, and, despite his last words, Bob felt he had said his last good-bye indeed to his chum. Wingate glanced at him.

"Come on, kid!" he grunted. "No good weeping over spilt milk, is it? He—he wasn't a bad kid. It was just a moment's temptation, I suppose. I'm thundering sorry about it!"

Bob Cherry's eyes blazed, and he turned on Wingate with a suddenness that made the captain of Greyfriars jump.

"Temptation!" he cried. "It was nothing of the sort, I tell you! Marky never touched that hound Ponsonby's banknote! That rotten, filthy banknote was never lost!"

"Rot!"

"It isn't rot!" blazed Bob Cherry. "It was all a plant—the work of that plotting, dirty hound Ponsonby! He vowed to hound Linley out of Greyfriars! He's done it—done it, the crawling worm! Poor old Marky's gone! But listen, Wingate! He'll come back—I know it! I'm going to see to that. I know Ponsonby's plotted

this—know it's his work, the hound! And I'm not going to rest until I've brought it home to him—until I've proved Linley's innocence and brought that plotting scoundrel to book!"

"Rot!" said Wingate again.

But as he glanced at Bob Cherry's resolute face and glinting eyes Wingate looked thoughtful, and he wondered. Was it possible that there was something in Cherry's wild claim? The thought made Wingate rather uneasy.

But by the time they had arrived at Greyfriars Wingate had dismissed the thought from his mind as absurd. And he smiled at Bob Cherry's vow, thinking it was spoken idly in a moment of fierce excitement at the loss of his chum.

But Wingate was wrong there. Bob Cherry, loyal friend and stout-hearted fighter that he was, was in deadly earnest, and he was to prove before many days had passed that his words were not idle words, and that his claim was no idle claim.

Ponsonby was flattering himself that his task was finished, but Bob Cherry's task was by no means finished.

THE END.

(Don't miss the splendid sequel to this magnificent yarn, entitled: "Back To The Factory Again!" by Frank Richards—which will appear in next week's topping issue of the MAGNET.)
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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Football Tragedy!

"**W**HERE'S the ref?"

Something like an uproar followed hard on that initial roar of derision as, for the third time, within ten minutes, the centre-half of the Treadwell F.C. deliberately fouled his man.

But the referee seemed either blind to this transgression of the rule, or afraid to "pull up" the offender. He shivered a little as a wave of protest boomed out from the stands, and heartily wished now that he had stopped the game.

"Where's your glasses, ref?"

Some cynical patron of the great winter sport raised his voice aloft as the rest of the crowd fell to muttering, and the thin humour in his remark seemed to please them, for they smiled.

The ref heard it, too, and it put new life into him. Now he came to reflect a bit, the centre-half of the Treadwell eleven was a menace to the good name of sport.

The home side, Langsdale Wanderers, were wonderfully patient and controlled, as became the leaders of the League; but there was a limit to human endurance, and it was rapidly approaching. Five times now had Curly Taylor been dispossessed of the ball by the deliberate fouling tactics of the opposing centre-half.

Taylor's blue eyes had gleamed deeper with every fresh infringement, but, sportsman as he was, he kept his growing anger in check, preferring, as must every true footballer, to "wait for the whistle" of the referee rather than to indulge in any individual recriminations.

"Good old Curly!"

The crowd was in good humour again as the home centre neatly trapped a pass from his right-back, turned swiftly, and raced off at a tangent.

After him, calling up a mental picture of the latest tank in action, lumbered the opposing centre-half at a

speed that was astonishing for one of his cumbersome build. There was a nasty glint in his eyes as he dogged the flying footsteps of Curly Taylor, that, wonder of wonders, did not escape the "new" vigilance of the ref.

"Look out, Curly!"

A score of voices rattled out the advice, as the centre-half drew nearer. But even as the last echo died away an ugly foot shot out directly in front of the Wanderers' twinkling footsteps, and—

Crash!

Down he came, arms and legs all asprawl, his youthful face finding a temporary burial ground in a soft patch of mud.

"Foul!"

"Ref—ref! Hi, ref—"

Pheep!

For the first time the referee's whistle had shrilled out in judgment of this shady tactician of the visiting side. And there was a note of condemnation and authority in it that sent spasms of anger and apprehension down the spine of the offender.

He glared round, seeming to invite opposition.

The ref came running up, his mild features now alive with indignation, and the players surging round, knew that a storm was about to break.

Meantime, the victim of the foul clambered to his feet and began to scrape the mud from his face. But all the mud in the world would never have hidden the blaze in his eyes as he drew near the little knot of players. His lips trembled, and he was on the point of bursting into a tirade of heated words when the ref gestured him to remain silent.

"Wilson!" he snapped, turning to the Treadwell centre-half. "You have been guilty of at least four fouls within twenty minutes—"

The centre-half, arms akimbo, towered over the little figure of the ref insolently.

"Ho!" he sneered. "And yet this is the first time you've blown your whistle."

The ref coloured, for there was truth in the statement. But his weakness had gone.

"Get off the field!" he ordered. "You are a menace to the fair name of football. You will be reported to the Association. Get off!"

His words rang out clearly enough, so clearly that a portion of the spectators heard them. Instantly, round the stands, there waged a heated controversy. From some of the supporters of the Treadwell F.C. came heated roars of protest which seemed to encourage Wilson, the centre-half.

His big face grew red with passion.

"You send me off, would you, you skinny wretch?" he hissed. "Why, I'd—"

His passion got the better of his common sense, and swift as light, a huge, gnarled fist swept full in the referee's face. But even so, another fist was swifter.

An inch away from the referee's face that gnarled fist stopped, for Curly Taylor, allowing his pent-up feelings free rein, now that the opportunity justified itself, leapt in.

Smack!

It was a beautiful straight left that connected full to the point of the centre-half's jaw, and the crack of it could be heard within a radius of thirty yards.

The centre-half of the Treadwell F.C. went down like a log, sprawling face downwards in a pool of mud and water, for he had swivelled round as the blow landed.

And as he fell a storm of cheering, booing, hisses, and all the kindred noises that make up a football match that is not "running straight" were let loose.

"Thank you, Taylor!" said the ref, wiping the beads of perspiration from his brow. "If that blow had landed I should have been in hospital, I've not the slightest doubt."

A group of officials came running to the scene, and stemming the host of questions that were showered upon him, the referee ordered the trainer and his assistants to remove the inert form of the visiting centre-half from the field.

He was carried off to the accompaniment of a deep and prolonged groan from the home faction, for Treadwell F.C. had gained the unenviable reputation of being a "dirty" side.

The supporters of the visitors, and they, naturally, were in a minority, wisely remained silent, for even the worst type of sportsman knows in his heart of hearts that "dirty" methods are ruinous in the long run.

In less than five minutes after the restart the incident had been forgotten by the crowd and teams alike, with perhaps two exceptions, and those were the referee and Curly Taylor.

Up in the magnificent grand stand the home directors were smiling their satisfaction, for the Wanderers were now three up. And two of the marginal successes were due to Curly Taylor.

"That nephew of yours is some lad," exclaimed Silas Chisholm, to an eccentric-looking individual by his side. "Ever since he came to Langsdale the side has done wonders."

"Yes, he's a good lad!" came the rather grudging reply, and the tone of it drew a sharp look of inquiry from Silas Chisholm.

"A good lad?" echoed Silas. "Mr. Taylor, our eleven would be nowhere without him."

Marchant Taylor frowned.

His was not a prepossessing countenance, being tainted with a certain narrowness of expression that bespoke the miser. Certainly none looking at Marchant Taylor would credit him with a bank-balance of seven figures. Nor did he look like the managing Director of this famous League club.

Yet such he was—and more so. Football, indeed, had been unheard of in Langsdale until the coming of Marchant Taylor seven years ago. But in that seven years the eccentric owner of the Rookery, a fine mansion on the outskirts of the town, had worked the seemingly impossible. He had bought the spacious grounds of the club, he had found the players, he had conducted his own publicity campaign. And this was the result. Why, the newspaper scribes referred to the Wanderers as being the finest side in Great Britain, and prophesied that the Cup itself would go to Langsdale this year.

The townsfolk had rallied round this eccentric whim of the "old man's" and had patronised it with an enthusiasm that was entirely unexpected, although few there were who had a good word to say in favour of the founder of Langsdale football.

Hard and heartless—these two words summed up Marchant Taylor completely. A great Shylock where his pound of flesh was concerned, this unenviable trait had estranged him from his fellow-men.

In the fullness of their generosity, the Langsdale folk gave unto Marchant Taylor the cloak of eccentricity. No matter what he did now, that well-known term which can cover the unorthodox in all its perplexing phases, was always closely allied to his name and movements.

And as the world judges eccentricity, Marchant Taylor was certainly entitled to the distinction. Friends he had not, and seemed not to want them. Even the idol of the crowd, his nephew "Curly," was kept at his distance, although he lived his days at the Rookery, and sighed for a closer knowledge of the old man and the birth of a bond of affection.

Old man Taylor stood there in the stand, his wrinkled features frowning a disapproval of the world and all its

ways. Really, he was to be pitied, was this Croesus of Langsdale, but woe betide the charitable fellow who tried to exercise this human trait—he was soon sent scuttling about his business!

"Goal!"

"Oh, good, Curly!"

Another roar went up from the packed stands as Curly Taylor sent in a smashing ground shot that left the visiting custodian wondering dimly whether a cannon had been loosed off at him.

"Four—nil!"

"Fine!" exclaimed Silas Chisholm, slapping his hands together heartily. "Oh, that nephew of yours is a lad to be proud of, Mr. Taylor. That's three goals he's bagged!"

"Hum!"

Taylor's face was still set in its accustomed frown. No light of enthusiasm glowed there, and Silas wondered if, deep down in the old man's heart, the enthusiasm was still burning brightly there, and that the face was but a mask. How else, he argued silently, could one account for the foundation of this football club that had been the old man's absorbing task when first he had come to Langsdale?

"What's the time, Silas?" snapped Marchant Taylor.

It was remarkable that the millionaire didn't boast a watch of any sort. Yet it was a fact in the case of Marchant Taylor.

Silas Chisholm grimaced.

"That's the fourth time you've asked me the time within fifteen minutes—" he began.

"How long has the match to go now?"

Marchant Taylor's mood was aggressive and authoritative at the same time.

"Fifteen minutes to go," replied Silas curtly; and he moved away.

For a fleeting second something in the nature of a smile crossed Marchant Taylor's sour face. In a child such an expression would be put down to the dawning of a mischievous adventure. But mischief of that kind could hardly be reconciled with the founder of the Langsdale Wanderers.

And yet the moment Silas Chisholm was out of sight Marchant Taylor did something he had never been known to do since the day Langsdale had first donned the Royal blue jerseys.

He cheered!

At least he meant it for a cheer. But few indeed who heard it placed it in that category. One or two in the stand glanced round as a croaking voice rasped out, and at once put this local effort of their managing director down to "eccentricity."

Really, it is astonishing what eccentricity can be capable of!

As if he read the mild toleration in the faces momentarily turned in his direction, Marchant Taylor thrust out his lower lip, narrowed his eyes, and relapsed into his accustomed silence.

The game, meantime, had taken on the form of a procession, as is usually the case when the sides are unevenly matched. Eleven Wanderers against the demoralised Treadwell team of ten seemed to be magnified into a hundred Wanderers as the minutes passed. Here, there, and everywhere were the famous Royal blue jerseys. And the visiting "ten" were literally raced off their feet.

It came as no surprise when Curly Taylor received possession of the sphere that a youthful optimist bellowed "Goal!" long before that point materialised. As a matter of fact, that particular goal was fiercely contested.

The moment Curly had glanced round the field and set off on his mission the opposing half-backs closed in. Then the crowd was treated to a pretty piece of football finesse. Curly allowed the burly halves to come close enough to practise the "Noah's Ark" trick of sandwiching. It was obvious that they intended to carry out this part of the programme, but theory and practice are two entirely different things.

A quick look flashed between the Treadwell halves as they ranged alongside the home centre-forward. Incidentally, too, a flicker of a smile curved the lips of Curly Taylor. Then—

Thud!

The sound of two bodies meeting in violent contact was heard for yards around. But the victims of the charge were the two half-backs from Treadwell, for at the critical moment Curly had checked his forward pace and then had stopped dead in his tracks.

The two half-backs saw too late that their victim had escaped and desperately tried to change their tactics. But the charge had been launched.

So vigorous was that charge that the two exponents of the sandwiching trick gasped and spluttered on the ground for at least two minutes, all the breath, or most of it, at any rate, knocked out of their bodies.

A derisive cheer rang out from the vast concourse lining the field of play for the especial benefit of the two half-backs, but as swiftly the cheer was re-directed to Curly Taylor, and the tone of it changed to approbation.

"Bravo, Curly!"

The home centre had flashed round the left-back with an ease that made the bigger fellow look silly, and the goal that was to follow looked easy meat for Curly. But with that generous instinct that made him so popular with players and spectators alike Curly gave that certain goal to his inside-right.

Boomp!

The inside-right did not let the grass grow under his feet. He sent in a glorious shot that was a goal from the moment it left his boot. The custodian of the visiting eleven "never saw it." True, he made a feeble attempt to spring in the air and arrest its passage, but the leap started at the very moment the muddled ball sang its pleasing song against the rigging at the back of the net.

"Good, Johnson! Bravo, Curly!"

The centre and the inside-right divided the cheers of the crowd, so to speak.

"Five—nil!"

Silas Chisholm in the stand rejoined Marchant Taylor.

"Isn't he great?" declared the former.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Taylor. "Isn't there anyone else in the team you can shout about for a change?"

Silas looked amazed, but refrained from making further comment. He was about to stroll away from Taylor's undesirable company when the "old man" grabbed him by the sleeve.

"How many more minutes to go?" he queried, and there was a suggestion of excitement in his voice.

Silas, with a bottled sigh of protest and impatience, pulled out his watch.

"Three minutes—"

"You're sure?" snapped Marchant Taylor.

"Three minutes—less five seconds!" said Silas dryly. "And for Heaven's sake go and buy yourself a watch! I'm sick of it!"

He stamped away, and Taylor glared after him.

"Impertinent fellow!" he muttered, as if Silas might have been a school-boy. "Ugh!"

Still muttering, the old man moved away and no one marked his exit, for the game offered far more entertainment to the spectators than the sour-faced Marchant Taylor.

Treadwell were rallying for a last-minute offensive. You can walk over a team, you can pile up the goals, yet there always comes that spasm of energy from the under-dog when they have, apparently, been trodden into insignificance.

It was so with the Treadwell "ten." Their skipper urged his men to notch one point at least, and so strong was his appeal and so moving his brief oratory that the demoralised Treadwell men woke up for a glorious ninety seconds.

The skipper himself led the raid into enemy territory, and, giving credit where credit was due, his manipulation of the ball, his nursing of the forward line was superb.

The Treadwell inside-left found the net with a low, rasping shot that should have been in evidence in the earlier stages of the game. It gave the visitors their first point, and it gave the referee the task of blowing his whistle twice with a break of about a second or two between them.

The game was over. Langsdale were the victors to the tune of five goals to one, and of those Curly Taylor was responsible for the lion's share.

The delighted roars of the spectators made pleasant music in Curly's ears; for who is not human enough to revel in the cheers and approbation of one's fellow men?

And the home team were not to be outdone, either. At a nod from the two sturdy backs the rest of the wearers of the blue jerseys surged round their centre-forward and hoisted him aloft.

In this triumphant fashion the procession headed for the dressing-room, two of the three Langsdale directors bringing up the rear.

But on the threshold of the dressing-room the jubilation died down of a sudden, for the unmistakable sound of a revolver shot screeched out.

"What's that?"

In a moment Curly Taylor had been lowered to the ground, and the whole team crowded into the narrow doorway of the dressing-room.

And what those sturdy, healthy-minded fellows saw was enough to send a shiver down the spine of the sturdiest of them.

For stretched out in a significant heap upon the floor was the figure of Marchant Taylor. And kneeling over him, a smoking revolver in his trembling hand, was Sanky Badger, the trainer.

Mysterious!

"GOOD heavens!"

The cry was wrung from Curly Taylor's lips as he pushed his way forward, and it was echoed by Silas Chisholm.

Sanky Badger's face was white and horror-stricken. The revolver dropped with a clatter to the floor.

For a few tense seconds no one in the dressing-room seemed capable of speech. Then Curly Taylor, recovering from the shock, cleared his throat.

"What have you done, Sanky?" he faltered in a tone of deep reproach.

"I haven't killed him!" Sanky found his voice, and his passionate denial jarred and echoed round the dressing-room. "I swear I haven't killed him!"

"You scoundrel!" roared Silas Chisholm. "You—"

"I found him stretched out like this!" explained Sanky, cowering under the sting in the director's outburst. "I swear I haven't killed him. I found him dead! I found the revolver by his side when I came rushing in!"

"You lie!" stormed Silas. "I for one know your past, you scoundrel! I it was who strongly advised poor Marchant Taylor not to have anything to do with you. I know, and always have known you for an ex-convict who has served ten years for manslaughter. Oh, you scum of—"

Silas Chisholm's words sent a thrill through the players.

"Look at him!" said Silas, his voice trembling in his passion. "Look at the man whom Mr. Taylor helped along when he was down and out! See how he has repaid the kindness!"

An angry murmur rang through the assembly, and kindly hearts became anxious to avenge the murdered man. In the heat of the moment no one seemed capable of bringing a clear and unbiassed mind to bear upon the situation. Marchant Taylor was dead, there was no doubt in anyone's mind, though beyond a cursory glance at that still figure on the floor no one had taken the trouble to make an examination.

Curly Taylor it was who first became calm. He made a step forward to see if anything could be done for his stricken uncle. But Sanky waved him back.

"Don't touch him!" he said hoarsely. "He's a gonner! Don't let him be touched until the police arrive!" he pleaded.

Curly fell back.

"I can see that I shall be accused of his death," said Sanky hoarsely. "For Mr. Chisholm speaks the truth when he says that I'm an ex-convict. In all fairness to me, then, send for the police.

Mr. Taylor must not be touched until official eyes have seen things for themselves. I claim it as my right."

There was a stir in the crowded dressing-room. Sanky would undoubtedly be accused, and it was a reasonable request of his that the dead man should not be touched until the police made their investigation.

Silas Chisholm turned on his heel and strode away hurriedly. In less than three minutes he was back in the dressing-room amongst the awed and horror-stricken footballers.

"I've phoned for the police and a doctor," he said harshly. "Meantime we'll make certain of this scoundrel. Seize him! I know him for a slippery customer."

It was a few seconds before the Wanderers found any enthusiasm for the job. Sanky the trainer was popular with them, whatever his past might have been. They wavered, and another glance at the still figure on the floor seemed to unnerve them.

And in those few seconds Sanky Badger acted.

With surprising agility for a man of his bulk he sprang straight as a die for the nearest window and passed through. And those who saw that amazing leap were astonished to hear no sounds of breaking glass. It was not until they surged to the window that there came enlightenment, for the window frame held no glass.

"After him!" yelled Curly Taylor. "We mustn't let that man escape. After him!"

The inaction of the Wanderers was gone now. They crowded to the window and the doorway. Those at the former saw Sanky leaping astride a waiting motor-bike, and those at the door saw a figure astride a snorting machine flash like a streak of light across their vision, and then was gone.

"After him!"

The cry was taken up on all sides now as the players raced out of the dressing-room. Silas Chisholm and his fellow-director panted after the players, hardly reconciled to the fact yet that a tragedy had happened in their midst.

And not a thought was given to the victim of the tragedy—that still, ominous figure lying stretched out upon the floor of the dressing-room.

By the time the footballers had reached the road running alongside the club grounds Sanky Badger and the cycle were almost lost to view.

Silas Chisholm was the man to come to the rescue.

"My car!" he panted, racing across a stretch of asphalt. "Quick, boys!"

In less than a minute the touring car was requisitioned, and the footballers clambered on board. Silas himself took the wheel.

With his foot hard down on the accelerator, the director swung the car out on to the main road, and with a zip and a roar the chase started.

Pedestrians turned and stared in mild surprise at the sight of a crowd of footballers, still in their muddled attire, seated like a pack of sardines in the big car and Silas Chisholm at the wheel.

"There he goes!" exclaimed Curly Taylor, who was watching the road ahead. "He's just turned into Welbeck Street."

Silas nodded grimly, and screwed another mile an hour out of the big car. Meantime the footballers were yelling to the townsfolk to stop the fugitive.

"Stop him!"

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"Speed her up!" shouted Curly Taylor as the big car swung round the corner.. "Can't you see Sanky's game?" There was the sound of an approaching express as the fugitive on the motor-cycle raced through the level-crossing just before the gates slammed home. (See this page.)

"Him" being an unknown quantity to the people who heard these injunctions, it is not surprising that they simply gaped with open-mouthed astonishment at the car load going by.

But the chase was narrowing. Already Silas had gained on the fugitive. Welbeck Street had been reached, and at the foot of the slope of this well-known thoroughfare could be seen a motor-bike travelling at a pace well above the speed limit. Undoubtedly that was Sanky Badger.

"Speed her up!" exclaimed Curly Taylor. "Can't you see Sanky's game? The level crossing. The six o'clock express is due in about a couple of minutes. Oh, let her rip, sir!"

Silas started in his seat. He had forgotten the level crossing that lay some distance away from the end of Welbeck Street. He set his teeth grimly, and his knuckles showed white against the black rim of the steering-wheel. Silas was no real friend of Marchant Taylor, but he was going to see a thorough rogue brought to stand his trial.

Suddenly above the whistle of the wind came the shriek of a train.

"That's the express!" breathed Curly Taylor through set lips. "We shall just manage it, sir."

The level crossing was in sight now. Indeed, the motor-cycle and its fugitive was just crossing the track. Away to the right could be seen a smoke trail that betokened the nearness of the six-thirty.

It was a question of doubt whether the touring car would reach the crossing before the gates slammed home.

"We'll do it!" panted Silas, his foot

jammed hard on the accelerator, "or I'll bust!"

He never said a truer word, for at that moment there came a loud report, and the car almost lurched over. It swung round in a complete circle before Silas, his hands a-tremble, brought it to a standstill. No need to look far for the trouble—everyone in the car knew that a tyre had burst. Everyone knew too, that he had had a lucky escape from a serious accident.

It was a bitter blow to Silas Chisholm, and he ground his teeth with rage as he saw the gates at the level crossing were shut, that the express was thundering through, and that all sight of the fugitive was lost.

"Confound the luck!" he exclaimed. "That man will get a clear run now, and Heaven only knows when the police will apprehend him. He's a wily bird. I knew it from the beginning."

Ruefully he turned to where a couple of the players were fixing on a spare wheel.

"Take your time, lads," he muttered. "We've lost the trail. Nothing for it but to turn back. Sanky could take any road out of the five that branch at Mer-rard's Cross and we should be none the wiser."

The spare wheel was ready at last, and the footballers clambered aboard the car. Then came the run back through the town, where news of the chase had circulated, as news of that type will.

And as they headed for the football club a police car swept past them to take up the trail of the flying fugitive.

It was a very dismal group of players that at length reached the club's en-

closure. Very quiet and respectful as befitted the occasion, they entered the dressing-room.

And then came a murmur of surprise that grew into a miniature uproar.

"Where's the body?"

They might well have asked the question, for the room in which Marchant Taylor, supposedly dead, had been left was now empty save for themselves.

All trace of the dead man had gone!

For some few minutes the footballers gazed in open-mouthed astonishment at that section of the flooring upon which they had last seen their managing director. Then the snappy tones of Inspector Towley, of Langsdale, broke in upon their silence:

"Where in the name of thunder is the murdered man?" he boomed, flashing a deprecatory look at Silas Chisholm. "Here am I, and the doctor, hunting through the Langsdale Club premises for signs of a murdered man. Where is the man?" he thundered, looking fiercely at the speechless director.

Silas Chisholm licked his dry lips.

"It might sound like a fairy-tale," he ejaculated at length. "But when we left here twenty minutes ago poor Taylor was lying stretched out on the floor dead. But—well, look for yourself, inspector. There's no body here now!"

The local inspector looked the scorn he felt as the director told his tale.

"If you're having a game, Mr. Chisholm—" he said pompously.

"It's no game, you fool!" Chisholm was frank to the point of rudeness. "Do you think me capable of that kind of

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thing. That body's gone, inspector, and as you're a representative of the Langdale police it is up to you to find it before there's any trouble."

"I require no orders from you, Mr. Chisholm," said the inspector stiffly. "Will you kindly acquaint me with the details of the case?"

Silas Chisholm obliged.

As he concluded the police-officer's face broke into a scornful smile.

"I suppose you were all too busy playing the policeman to give a thought to the murdered man!" he sneered. "That is, if he was murdered."

"What do you mean—if he was murdered?" demanded Silas Chisholm hotly.

"Well, nobody seems very clear upon that point," said the inspector. "Nobody examined him—"

"But Sanky, who is fairly skilled in medicine, declared that Mr. Taylor was dead," retorted Silas hotly.

"Humph!" The inspector scratched his chin. "I suppose it must be taken for granted that he was dead," he muttered. "Seeing that Sanky whom you accused of the crime did a bunk. But it's going to be a ticklish job to satisfy the coroner, I'm thinking."

His glance rested on Curly Taylor, and it rested too long for the peace of mind of that sensitive youth.

"You're Mr. Ronald Taylor, aren't you?" queried the inspector.

"I am!"

"And I suppose his next of kin," muttered the inspector, half to himself.

"Yes, I am! What about it?" said Curly stiffly.

The reply certainly pulled up the local inspector with a jerk. All unthinkingly he allowed his half-formed theory to get the better of his official common-sense. Everyone in that little group sensed the train of thought that had passed through

the inspector's mind. He was hunting for a motive of the tragedy, and his intellectual powers had seized upon the name of the person whom he thought would benefit by the old man's end.

"I beg your pardon," he said gruffly. "I must visit the—ahem—alleged deceased man's house. Will you accompany me?"

Biting his lip, Curly Taylor nodded in assent.

The journey was accomplished in silence until the great iron gates at the end of the drive of the Rookery were reached.

"Will you lead the way?" said the inspector politely.

Curly pulled himself together and walked along the well-kept drive, answering in monosyllables the quick-fire questions the inspector put to him.

"Had your uncle any reason to fear an attempt on his life?"

"No."

"Has he an enemy?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Hum!"

Thus it went on until the twain entered the house. An ancient-looking individual in uniform met them at the door.

He had heard the news, evidently, for there was a suspicion of moisture about his eyes, and his wrinkled hands shook tremulously.

"The master—" he began, giving Curly an imploring look.

"We fear the worst," said Curly quietly.

And then the gruff tones of the inspector broke in:

"Put aside this sentiment for the moment," he commanded. "And give me your help. Do you know of anyone or anything that can throw light upon this tragedy?" he added, turning to the servant.

"I—I thought something was wrong, sir," muttered Turville, the man-of-all-work.

The inspector looked interested; whilst Curly's face registered surprise.

"Why should you think something was wrong?" said the inspector gently.

"Well, sir, when I took the master's paper in this morning I saw he had been reading a letter that had upset him. His face was all drawn and—"

"Go on," said the inspector encouragingly.

"The master tried to pass it off as I came in the room, sir," continued the servant. "His hand closed round the letter, crushing it, and then with a careless laugh—I remember that laugh—and the servant shuddered—he threw it into the fireplace."

"Ah!" The inspector's face fell.

"But I took the liberty to retrieve that letter, sir," said Turville, rather uncomfortably. "I—"

"Oh, good!" The inspector's face brightened again.

"I have it here," resumed the servant. With trembling hands he withdrew a piece of crumpled paper from his pocket and straightened it out.

"Let me see it."

Inspector Towley was eagerness itself to read that strange missive.

And strange enough it was in all conscience, for the message was couched in the following words:

"TO-DAY AT FIVE-THIRTY WE STRIKE!"

No signature, just those few words that could mean so little and yet so much!

(Was the writer of this strange missive responsible for the murder of Marchant Taylor? On no account, chums, should you miss next week's rattling fine instalment of this magnificent serial—there's a thrill in every line.)

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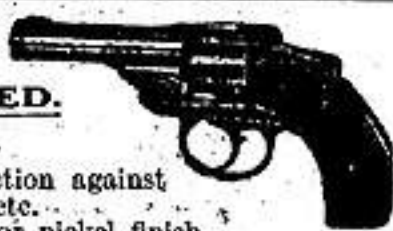
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BUCHAN *the* BRILLIANT!

A Nutshell Biography of the Famous Arsenal Inside-Right.
By "REFEREE."

If you asked the average football enthusiast whom he considered the greatest English forward of the day, I dare say he would pause between two names—and those two would be William Walker, of Aston Villa, and Charles Buchan, now of the Arsenal, and, until the beginning of the present season, Sunderland F.C. It is difficult, if one is making a comparison, which of these two players to put first; but we are not making comparisons, thank goodness. This article is simply written to tell you the story of Charlie Buchan.

I suppose quite a few of you ardent footer fans have seen the great Charlie in action. If that's the case, I know you are looking forward to seeing him again. I have heard it said that he is not vigorous enough in football, that he does not run about sufficiently. Out of what ignorant mouths such words come! There is no need for Charlie to be either vigorous or speedy. Half his football is played with his head.

He gets through twice as much effective work on the field of play than any forward I know. Rarely is it that, receiving the ball, he does not do something with it. You watch him next time you see him—and you mark what I'm telling. Charlie is the man who does the maximum amount of work with the minimum amount of effort.

A wonderful footballer indeed, and one of whom London is particularly proud. For Charlie was born at Plumstead, on September 22nd, 1891.

Very keen on football was Charlie in his boyhood days. He was always one of the first at school in the mornings, and after the morning break for dinner one of the first

back. Not that scholastic ambition inspired him at that time. Not a bit of it. By getting to school early there was always a chance for a kick-about in the school playground before lessons. It was not until he had reached the age of ten that he found a place in a real team, however. Charlie's debut with this team was as a goalkeeper, if you please—the goal in question being two piles of coats and caps!

He was not a success in that position. Charlie itched to score goals himself, not to stop other people scoring, and very shortly he was fishing for a place in the recognised school eleven. Very shortly, too, his talent was recognised, and he was selected to play as a centre-forward in a practice match. He did—scored four goals off his own bat, and thereafter established himself!

When, at the tender age of eleven and a half, Charlie left Bloomfield Road Higher Elementary School the club missed him sadly. He had to leave, as a matter of fact, for his scholastic abilities had won him promotion, and it was the headmaster of Woolwich Polytechnic Secondary School who welcomed this budding football genius upon his transfer. Almost immediately Charlie won a place in the school team, and with that team remained until he was nearly sixteen.

It is worth remarking, in passing, that young Buchan's first position in the Polytechnic eleven was as a left half-back, but even here he could not crush down the urgent desire, always present on the field of play, to score goals. As a left-half he scored four in one match; and there was another match, which the "Polly" won by nineteen to nil, in which Charlie scored—oh, I forget the number!

Despite the fact that the Polytechnic played two matches per week—on Wednesday afternoons and Saturday mornings—the football appetite of Charles was by no means appeased, and so, with the idea of getting in a bit more practice, he joined a Saturday afternoon club called Bostall Albion. For a whole year he served them and the school in the capacity of centre-forward. The following year, however, he transferred his affections from Bostall to another strong local junior side in Plumstead Celtic.

With his third year at the Polytechnic Charlie was made skipper of the team, a position he kept until he left the school, at the age of sixteen and a half.

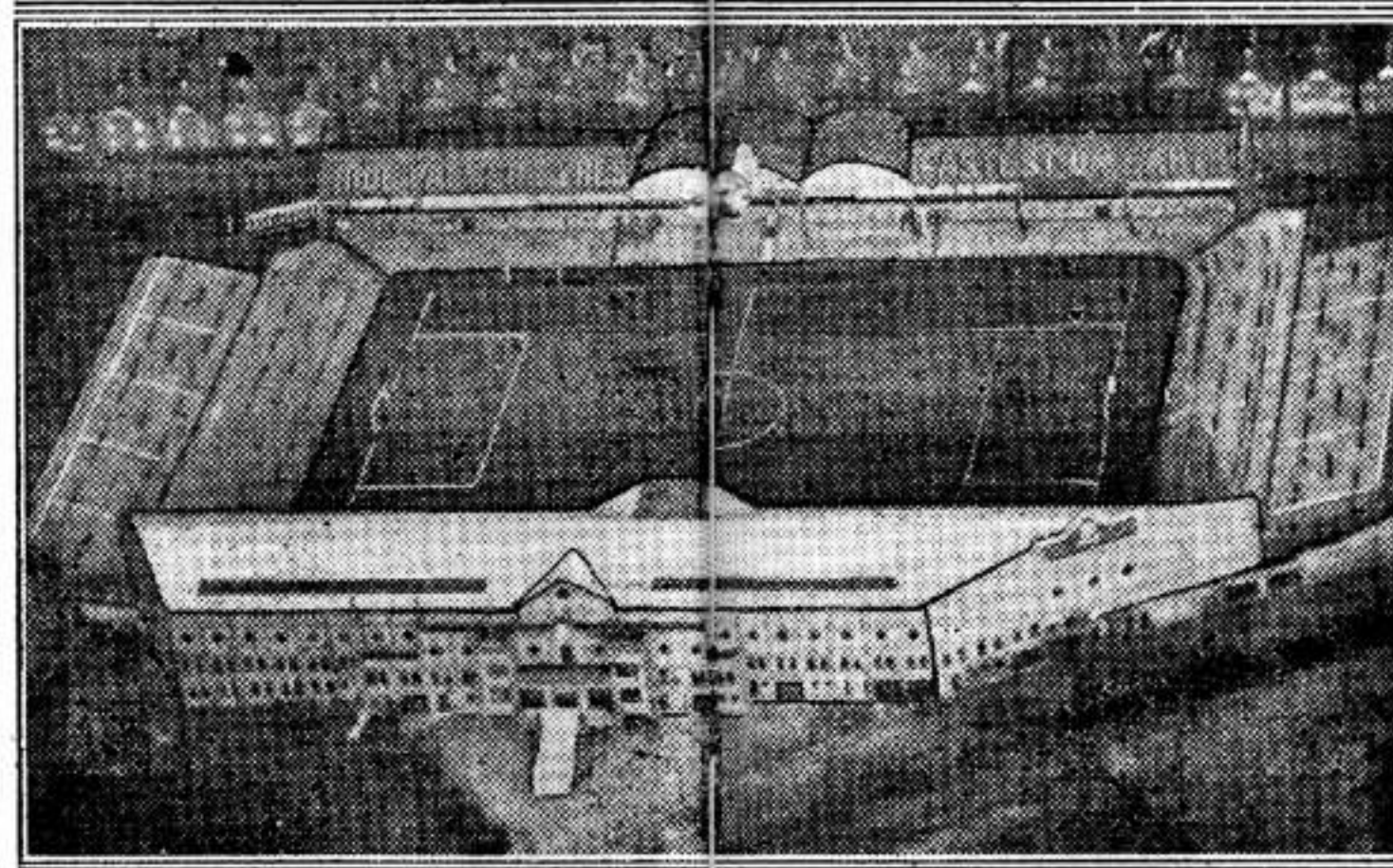
His first experience of senior amateur football came in 1908, when, having left the Polytechnic, he joined the school's senior team—and so well did he account for himself that ere a full year had passed he was playing in the ranks of the local senior team, Plumstead F.C. It was there that the Arsenal first spotted him, and, persuading him to sign amateur forms, played him in four reserve matches, and on two other occasions selected him as first reserve to the League team itself.

But playing possum did not suit energetic Charlie, and, as he could not see any regular opportunities with the Arsenal, he joined up with Northfleet, and from there, after a brilliant four months in which he assisted the club to lift every county trophy they had entered for, was transferred to Leyton F.C. Fulham were keen on him at the time, and invited him to sign professional forms—on terms, however, which did not suit Charlie.

So to Leyton he went, and with them became a "pro." He played his first game for them in September, 1909, but in March,

1910, he was transferred to Sunderland for a fee of £1,000. It was with Sunderland that his real genius came to the front, with the result that in 1913 he played for his country against Ireland. Up to the beginning of the present season he served Sunderland consistently, the years of war excepted, when he served his country, first as a private soldier, then as a commissioned officer in the Scots Guards. Is there any need for me to delve further into Charlie's history? Beyond appending this table of his honours, I think not. It is too well known to you all.

ASTON VILLA FOOTBALL GROUND.



A bird's-eye view of the famous ground at Trinity Road, Birmingham.

INTERNATIONALS.

1913.—For England v. Ireland.
1920-21.—For England v. Wales.
1924.—For England v. Scotland.

"VICTORY" INTERNATIONALS.

1919.—For England v. Wales.

OTHER INTERNATIONALS.

1921.—For England v. Belgium.
1923.—For England v. France.

AMATEURS AND PROFESSIONALS.

1925.—For Pro's v. Amateurs.

TRIAL MATCHES.

1913-20-23.—For England v. North, South, and the Rest.
1913-21.—For North v. England.

INTER-LEAGUE MATCHES.

1912-13-15-21-23.—V. Scottish League.
1913-15-22.—V. Irish League.
1913.—V. Southern League.



Interesting Information about the King of Winter Games

By **GEORGE WINGATE**

(Captain of Greyfriars.)

"WHERE did football come from, Herbert?" might very well form the basis of a new and very popular song. For "Where did football come from?" is a question that, with the yearly growth and development of the most fascinating of all winter pastimes, clamorously shouts louder and louder for ventilation.

I don't think anybody knows, really. In this, as in other historical matters, the experts are hotly at variance. We know, of course, that the official birth of football was in October, 1863; when the Foot-

ooter's birth is that it took place in Egypt some 2,000 years B.C. I base the view on the copy of a papyrus, I was once privileged to see—in the British Museum, I think.

I was a whale on Egyptology some years ago, and I've always remembered this picture. There were three Egyptians in it, and between them they were kicking some round object towards a pair of sticks which might easily have passed for modern goal-posts. They weren't in footer togs, of course, and they didn't wear sandals even; but the idea was there, all the same. If those chaps weren't playing footer, what, in the name of Billy Bunter, were they doing?

Still, that's only my view. The evidence is thin, perhaps, but what of the others? The gentlemen who proclaim Phoenicia, Babylonia, Denmark, and the rest, have, I gather, no possible proof to back up their assertions. The Greek champion bases his discovery on the fact that ball games were popular among the Greeks, but mentions that such games were especially favoured by Grecian ladies and girls, who loved them because "it improved their figures and added to their gracefulness." Now, I ask you—is there anything in modern football which tends to improve figure or add to gracefulness?

There is not. Modern football rather tends to the opposite direction, though it must be admitted that it takes a fellow of remarkable stamina and speed to play it. Coming to the Roman version—here, at least, we have something slightly more satisfactory to go upon.

This was a game played about 60 B.C. The field was laid out with three parallel lines—one at each of the extreme ends of the pitch, the other in the centre. Two parties of players lined up on the central line, a ball was thrown among them, and it was the lot of the players to carry the ball over the goal-line to their immediate front. There's a Rugger flavour about that, and it is possible that Rugger was born out of it. If that's the case, then there's small doubt that this rather tame Roman game was the parent of Soccer, for Soccer, as we know, grew out of Rugger.

Well, that's the very early history. A span of several hundred years elapses between that and my next record of footer history, and this is the Chester Legend, which concerns a very impromptu game played in the town of that name somewhere about the time of the Danish Conquest. In this the inhabitants chopped off the head of an invading Dane, and with much gusto used it as a football to celebrate the fact. What happened to the Chester footballers after this great game history does not say, but it is pretty safe to imagine that someone got it in the neck!

Then there was the Scottish footer, in which a large stone was used as a ball, the stone being succeeded later by an inflated pig's bladder, and later still by the oval-shaped ball.

A little story regarding this Scottish Soccer is among my records here, and I think it may interest you to pass it on, for, could it be proven, it might fix the date of the first International match ever played between England and Scotland.

This story goes back into the Middle Ages, somewhere about the time when Bruce was tickling the spider. You remember—well, you don't remember, of course, but you've heard—flat about that time the

border which divides the land o' cakes from our own was the scene of frequent and terrible strife. When there was no big scrap in the offing, the fierce tribes of Northern England would make occasional sallies into the enemy country.

But sometime there came a lull. Perhaps both sides were tired of the one game, perhaps they wanted to play another. Anyway, play another they did, and, to judge by reports, found it even more exhilarating than the raids. A party of Northern warriors near Kildear Castle took it into their heads to challenge a garrison of Scots ditto in Liddesdale to a footer match. The Scots promptly accepted, and the game was played.

But, oh, what a game! The English side won, but their casualties in the end were greater than those of the "visitors." So hard, so keen, and so terrific was that encounter that only half the players survived it. At the finish both sides simply flopped out on the field, incapable of rising, while several others just died of sheer exhaustion. The ball used, I believe, was a large round stone, and the "field" was some square miles in area!

Still, here again you will notice, is an absence of authentic proof, and in that absence we cannot give this as official. Until A.D. 217, indeed, when the citizens of Derby kicked the Romans out of their town and played footer to celebrate the victory, we have no definite dates to support anything. I don't suppose the early stages of the game will ever be authentically arrived at—unless, of course, some noted archaeologist arises to support my theory found in the Egyptian papyrus!



Well saved goalie!



"Charlie" gets his head to it.