

"SHUNNED BY THE FORM!"

This week's extra-long school story of the Chums of Greyfriars.

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The Magnet 2^d

EVERY SATURDAY

LIBRA



HARRY WHARTON RUNS THE GAUNTLET!

(A dramatic incident from the grand school story of the boys of Greyfriars inside.)

HARRY WHARTON'S DOWNFALL! If anyone had accused Harry Wharton in the past of being a sneak, a bully or a rotter, he would have received pretty short shrift from the Remove. But Wharton earns all these names now, for an astounding change has come over him—a change that transforms him from the most popular to the most despised fellow in the Form!

SHUNNED BY THE FORM!



A
Rollicking, Fine, Long
Complete School Story
of Harry Wharton &
Co., the World-Famous
Chums of Greyfriars.

By
**FRANK
RICHARDS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In Honour of the Occasion!

"TWOPENCE!"
"A penny!"
"A threepenny-bit—with a hole in it!"
"A French ha'penny!"

Four doleful-faced members of the Greyfriars Remove uttered those ejaculations in tones of utter dejection.

Harry Wharton grimaced.

"Sum total of our wealth is threepence in negotiable cash, a threepenny-bit, with a hole in it, and a French ha'penny. Not exactly a fortune!"

"Well, hardly!" said Bob Cherry, with a wry grin.

"Certainly not enough to buy the wherewithal to kill the fatted calf in honour of Johnny Bull's birthday!" said Frank Nugent.

"Poor old Johnny!"

Four members of the Famous Five looked at each other in dismay. The Fifth member of the celebrated Co. was not present. In fact, it was in honour of Johnny Bull's birthday that his chums had just pooled their entire wealth. Really, it was too bad of Johnny to have a birthday on an occasion when all his chums were in that not uncommon state known as "stony." Yet such was the case. Birthdays are as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, and it just so happened that Johnny Bull's birthday fell on a day of stoniness.

"We must do something," said Harry Wharton slowly. "We simply must give Johnny a feed 'this afternoon. After all, birthdays only come once a year."

"That's so," agreed Bob Cherry.

"Can't we raise the wind?" suggested Frank Nugent.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I've been up and down the Remove

trying to borrow," he said. "Everyone seems to be in the same boat—broke."

"Have you tried Mauly?"

The captain of the Remove nodded.

"The chump had just sent off a tenner to his tailor," he replied, "and that left him on the rocks."

"Silly ass!" snorted Bob Cherry, rather unreasonably. "Why on earth did he want to pay his tailor when other pressing matters, of far greater importance, had to be seen to?"

Harry Wharton grinned. Lord Mauleverer, the schoolboy millionaire, would have helped them out of their present predicament like a shot, he knew. Really, it was unfortunate that Mauly had not known of the Co.'s needs before he had dispatched the munificent sum of a tenner to a long-suffering tailor. Still, for all that, Mauly could hardly be blamed.

"Well, standing here like a lot of blessed moulting owls won't help us any!" grunted Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton's face grew thoughtful.

"I've got it!" he said at length.

"Good egg!"

"Cough it up!"

Wharton coloured.

"You chaps know that Temple of the Fourth has always hankered after my camera," he said. "I—I think I'll sell it to him!"

"Don't be an ass, Harry!" said Nugent. "You wouldn't like to part with that camera, I know. Why, only the other day you told Temple that you wouldn't sell for double the amount he offered."

"D-did I?" stammered the captain of the Remove in some confusion. "I didn't mean that, really, Franky."

"Yes, you did, old scout!" exclaimed Nugent. "And you're not going to be a silly, generous ass to part with that camera now."

"Rather not!" chimed in Bob Cherry.

"The notfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in his weird and wonderful English.

Wharton grinned.

"That's the way out!" he said, with conviction. "We simply can't let the day go through without showing old Johnny that we know it's his birthday."

"Still——" began Bob Cherry.

"Hallo! Who's taking my name in vain?"

Johnny Bull's voice broke in, and the Co. were silent. Johnny looked at them in turn quizzically.

"Well, if you don't look like a set of moulting owls I don't know what does!" he said boisterously. "What's the trouble? Cough it up to your uncle."

Still the Co. were silent. They could hardly tell Johnny what the trouble was, in the circumstances.

Johnny grunted.

"I suppose you chaps haven't forgotten that it's my birthday?" he remarked. "You look as if you were celebrating my funeral!"

"Do we?"

"You do!" said Johnny. "Come and punt a footer about before after noon classes."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, glad of the opportunity of dismissing a troublesome question.

And the chums of the Remove followed Johnny Bull down the passage to the School House steps. On the way Wharton paused, and then, without a word to his chums, turned and retraced his steps. Johnny Bull was the first to note his absence.

"Hallo! Where's Wharton gone?"

"Echo answers where?" said Bob Cherry.

Johnny Bull frowned.

"He might have told a chap," he said. "Has he got the rats, or something?"

"Nunno," said Bob Cherry hastily. "I—I believe he's got some lines to do for Wingate, you know."

And Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, taking their cue from Bob, nodded.

In the meantime, the captain of the Remove had hastened to the Upper Fourth Form passage.

It was dangerous ground for a Remove to trespass on alone, but, luckily for Harry Wharton, it was deserted at the moment.

He made his way quickly to Temple's study, tapped on the door, and opened it.

The captain of the Upper Fourth was alone in the study, and he rose to his feet with a worried look at sight of his visitor.

"It's pax this time, old bean!" said Wharton, with a smile.

"Lucky for you!" drawled Temple.

"It's about my camera," said the captain of the Remove.

Temple's drawl dropped from him like a cloak. The captain of the Fourth was an enthusiastic amateur photographer, and for a long time now he had cast envious eyes on Wharton's camera.

"You're willing to sell?" he asked eagerly, and then, remembering that great gulf which was supposed to exist between the Remove and Upper Fourth Forms, he assumed a casual air, and added: "Not that I'm very keen to buy, you know."

Wharton suppressed a grin. He knew how keen Temple was.

"Just as you like, of course," said the captain of the Remove, turning away.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Temple. "If you've come to talk business—"

"I have," said Wharton. "What will you offer?"

Temple appeared to consider a moment.

"My Kodak and three quid," he said.

It was a wrench for Wharton to part with his camera; for, apart from the fact that his uncle had made him a present of it only a few months ago, he was just as enthusiastic a photographer as Temple of the Fourth. Still, it was Johnny Bull's birthday, and Wharton thought that some sort of sacrifice was necessary in the circumstances.

"Is it a go?" asked Temple.

And Wharton, making up his mind, nodded firmly.

"Good egg!" chortled Temple; and he began to count out the necessary notes from his well-stocked wallet. "While you've gone to get the camera I'll cut back to the dorm and get my old—I mean, my Kodak."

"Right-ho!"

Wharton turned on his heel, and made tracks for Study No. 1 in the Remove passage. The die was cast now; the wherewithal to provide Johnny with a first-class birthday tea was to hand.

Wharton took his camera from the desk, gazed at it somewhat regretfully, and then, shrugging his shoulders, he retraced his steps to the Upper Fourth Form passage. Temple was already there, camera in hand.

In a moment the cameras and three Treasury notes had changed hands, Temple not lingering over the deal for fear that the captain of the Remove would change his mind.

He strolled away to his study whistling cheerfully, what time

Wharton, with Temple's rather dog-eared Kodak under his arm and three crisp Treasury notes in his pocket, walked slowly back to Study No. 1.

"It's worth it," he muttered, as he locked the camera away in his desk. "After all, Johnny would be one of the first to do the same thing for a pal."

And with that comforting thought Wharton stifled any lingering regret for the "deal" he had made and hastened to Mrs. Mumble's tuckshop.

There, much to the tuckshop dame's surprise and delight, the captain of the Remove "blued" the proceeds of his trade with Temple.

"I say, Wharton, old chap—"

A fat voice echoed at Wharton's elbow. It belonged to Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove.

"Buzz off, old fat man," said Wharton, "I'm busy!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Billy Bunter's eyes fairly bulged out of their sockets when he saw the formidable array of tuck Wharton had ordered, and his mouth watered.

"I say, old chap, is it a Form spread?"

Wharton grinned.

"Not quite, old fat man."

Bunter's eyes glistened greedily.

"I say, I'll come, old chap—"

The captain of the Remove shook his head.

"Not this time. This little lot's for an extra-special occasion. Keep your fingers away from those tarts, old fat man!"

"Oh, really, Wharton," said Bunter peevishly, "you might let a chap sample a measly tart."

"If you try to sample those tarts you'll get a sample of my boot!" growled the captain of the Remove.

And William George Bunter, much as he was tempted to sample the tarts, wisely refrained. All the same, he watched Harry Wharton gather up the various parcels Mrs. Mumble had made, in the fashion of a hungry dog casting covetous eyes at a bone, and rolled out of the tuckshop almost at Harry Wharton's heels.

If there was a feed, and it certainly seemed as if there was, William George Bunter meant to be amongst those present, so to speak, quite regardless of the fact that he had not been invited, or that his room generally was preferred to his company. Little matters like that did not worry the Owl of the Remove. He stood at the doorway of Study No. 1 and blinked in as Harry Wharton unwrapped the parcels and deposited that special birthday feed in the cupboard.

There was a happy smile on the handsome face of the captain of the Remove as he locked the cupboard and vacated the study, almost bowling over Billy Bunter in the process.

"Hallo, you still here, Bunt?"

"Groooooogh!"

Bunter blinked and rubbed the back of his head where it had come in contact with the passage wall.

"Didn't see you there, old fat barrel," said Wharton cheerily. "Sorry!"

"Wow! Beast!"

And Bunter glared after the receding figure of the captain of the Remove until it was out of sight, after which he transferred his attentions to the study cupboard wherein reposed that birthday spread.

"Suspicious rotter!" muttered Bunter. "What did he want to lock the blessed door for?"

Really the question was superfluous—

it being the custom of most members of the Remove to lock their study cupboards, where possible, in the hope that their contents would escape falling into the clutches of William George Bunter. Even those precautions, however, did not always avail. The poet has said that iron bars do not a prison make; and William George Bunter had proved that a locked door was not always unnegotiable.

He was still eyeing that cupboard and visualising its contents when the bell for lessons rang, and reluctantly, very reluctantly, the Owl of the Remove tore himself away and rolled towards the Form-room, turning over in his podgy brain ways and means of participating in that glorious spread.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter's Bluff!

"GROOOOOUGH!" Mr. Quelch jumped as that unmelodious sound disturbed the quietness of the Form-room.

"Groooooogh! Mummmmmmm!"

"Bless my soul!"

Mr. Quelch turned from the blackboard and surveyed his class with gimlet eyes. Interruptions of that nature did not meet with his approval although they received the full approval of his class.

"Groooooogh!"

All eyes were turned in the direction of William George Bunter. That fat and fatuous youth was doubled up like a penknife at the edge of the Form, and it was from him that those unmelodious interruptions emanated.

"Groooooogh! Wow! Oh dear!"

To all appearances William George Bunter was in agony. His fat face had assumed an expression of mortal anguish; and if a plenitude of groans indicated suffering, then the Owl of the Remove was almost on the point of expiring.

"Groooooogh!"

He blinked painfully at his Form master as that august gentleman, grim of brow, strode towards him.

"Bunter, how dare you?"

Bunter clasped his podgy hands over his podgy waistcoat and emitted another heartrending groan.

"Groooooogh!"

Even Mr. Quelch's somewhat severe features underwent a change as that deep groan fell upon his ears.

"Bunter! Are you ill?"

"Wow! Yow! Groooooogh!"

Bunter nodded his head feebly as he groaned, and again clasped his expanse of waistcoat caressingly.

"Bless my soul!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"The boy is suffering from the effects of overeating, that is very apparent."

"Oh, really, sir—" began Bunter; and then, remembering his deep suffering, groaned with more goodwill than ever.

"Wretched boy! Foolish boy!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "How many times have I warned you of the folly of gluttony?"

"Wow!"

"How many times have I cautioned you not to stuff your inside with indigestible foodstuffs?"

"Groooooogh!"

Mr. Quelch was silent for a few moments, his keen eyes scanning Bunter's face intently. It suddenly came home to the master of the Remove that on more than one occasion

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Bunter had shammed illness, with the idea of escaping lessons. But that could hardly be the case this time, for it only wanted ten minutes to the end of afternoon lessons. Even Bunter, Mr. Quelch told himself, would not have the audacity to trick his Form master into the belief that he was ill merely to escape ten minutes of class. Really it looked as if Bunter were genuinely ill. Mr. Quelch, although a hard man, was a just one. True, he did not approve of schoolboys overloading their stomachs with what he was sometimes pleased to call, "indigestible compounds." But he knew Billy Bunter's weakness in that direction, and really felt sorry for him.

"Bunter, you foolish boy," he said at length.

"Grooooooh! Y-yes, sir!"

"You had better go and lie down for an hour," he said, not unkindly. "If you are no better at the end of that period you would be well advised to visit the matron."

"Y-yes, sir. Thank you, sir!"

William George Bunter rolled from his place, clasping his waistcoat and emitting occasional groans. The Remove watched him closely, most of them having their own opinion as to just how ill Billy Bunter was.

The door of the Remove Form-room closed upon him, and he rolled away up the passage, a fat grin on his podgy features.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled softly. "Fancy the beast swallowing that!"

It would have gone hard with the Owl of the Remove had Mr. Quelch seen him then. Fortunately for Bunter, Mr. Quelch was deep in the task of drumming the importance of English geography into the heads of pupils whose one desire was to see the hands of the Form-room clock point to the half-hour.

And while the Remove listened, with as much interest as they could muster, to the pearls of wisdom that fell from the lips of their learned Form master, William George Bunter rolled softly into Study No. 1.

"He, he, he!" he cachinnated. "I'll see if that beast Wharton is going to leave me out of the feed!"

Bunter tried the handle of the cupboard door; but, as he knew, the door was locked. Next, Bunter's grubby hand groped in his trousers-pocket. It fastened on a bunch of keys, of all sizes and shapes.

Those keys belonged to Fisher Tarleton Fish, the keen business man from

the United States of America. In the hours not taken up by Form work and school routine Fisher Tarleton Fish devoted his entire attention to the accumulation of wealth. Fishy's schemes and wheezes for raising the almighty dollar were weird and varied; but, alas, for a born business man, most of them ended in disaster.

Despite that, however, Fisher Tarleton Fish did not despair. One side-line of his was decidedly profitable. It took the form of lending his Form-fellows a bunch of keys—for a consideration.

Really it was surprising how many members of the Remove lost the key to their desks, or their study cupboard at some time or another. Some fellows, like Skinner & Co., whispered it abroad that Fisher Tarleton Fish could have told where those missing keys disappeared to, and how they disappeared, for that matter. But be that as it may, Fisher T. Fish was always ready to help a schoolfellow out of trouble—at a price.

In an astute moment the Transatlantic junior had purchased a quantity of mixed keys from Mr. Lazarus, at Courtfield, for the modest price of sixpence. And that sixpence invested had shown a very appreciable profit. For the loan of Fishy's bunch of keys members of the Remove were charged twopence a time—not a very considerable sum to a fellow who wanted to open his desk, or his cupboard door, but considerable enough to make the business man of the Remove rub his hands with satisfaction.

Now, William George Bunter had "borrowed" these keys. True, he hadn't paid Fishy the full price of twopence; but, so keen was the Transatlantic junior to make profit where he could that he had accepted the sum of three-halfpence. It had taken only a few moments to effect that "deal" in the Form-room, whilst Mr. Quelch's gimlet-eyes were turned in another direction. And the rest had been easy for William George Bunter.

Key after key he inserted in the lock of the cupboard door without result. And then, just when he was beginning to think that all his plans had gone astray, there was a click and—hey presto!—the cupboard and all it contained was at the mercy of the Owl of the Remove.

"My hat!" Billy Bunter's eyes fairly glistened as he surveyed the well-stocked cupboard, and he licked his lips in anticipation. "What a ripping spread!"

By force of habit his hand went out and closed upon a tart. That tart disappeared into his capacious stomach at an alarming rate. Three more suffered a similar fate; and then Bunter gave a start. In his greed to attack that appetising array of tuck he had lost count of time. In another few moments the Remove would be swarming out of their Form-room. The idea of being caught in the act of rifling Harry Wharton's cupboard sent a cold shiver down the spine of William George Bunter.

"Oh crumbs!" he muttered. "The beast would think I was pinching his blessed grub!"

What else Wharton was likely to think was perhaps known only to the peculiar mental machinery of the Owl of the Remove.

For the space of a few seconds Bunter stood deep in thought, one podgy fist grasping a piece of Madeira cake. Then the fat junior acted. In the corner of Study No. 1 was a cricket bag. Next moment that cricket bag was dragged in front of the cupboard, and the special birthday feed Wharton had laid in at great sacrifice to himself was being loaded into it.

It did not take Bunter long. He had a clear two minutes to spare before Mr. Quelch dismissed his class. Again Fisher T. Fish's keys came into play. The cupboard door was relocked; the cricket bag was picked up from the floor; and with great caution Billy Bunter stole out of Study No. 1, and made tracks for the upper box-room.

Depositing the cricket bag on the floor, Bunter turned the key of the lock on the inside, and then rolled towards an empty trunk belonging to Lord Mauleverer. Seated upon it, he commenced a rapid and intense onslaught on the bag of tuck. In a few moments his fat face was happy and shiny.

"This is prime!" he muttered, between large mouthfuls of cake.

And for the next half-hour all that could be heard in the vicinity of the box-room was the steady clamping of Billy Bunter's jaws and his slightly laboured breathing. And with the passing of the minutes that special birthday feed grew beautifully less, until such quantity as did remain would scarcely have satisfied the appetite of the smallest fag in the Second Form, let alone five healthy, sturdy juniors like Harry Wharton & Co.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Feed that Vanished!

"I'VE got the feed!"

Harry Wharton plucked Frank Nugent by the arm and whispered the words in his ear.

"Oh, good!" said Frank. "But you ought not to have sold your camera, you ass!"

The captain of the Remove laughed.

"It was worth it!" he said.

The chums of the Remove were in the dormitory changing into their footer clothes. There was a practice match on that afternoon, and after the match it was Wharton's intention to spring the surprise feed on Johnny Bull.

Johnny as yet knew nothing of the preparations that had been made in his honour; his mind was fully taken up with censuring certain of his relatives abroad who had promised him handsome tips on his birthday and who had failed to remember that the Australian mail would not reach England until two days after Johnny's birthday.

"You chaps ready?" sang out Bob Cherry.

"The readiness of my esteemed self is terrific," purred Inky.

"Then come on!"

The Famous Five strolled out of the Remove dormitory and made tracks for Little Side. On the way Wharton dropped in at Study No. 1. He knew of old that it was not safe to leave quantities of tuck lying about with such a person as William George Bunter being in full possession of its whereabouts. Still, he had locked the cupboard door; that should be sufficient guard against the raiding activities of the Owl of the Remove.

Wharton tried the door of the cupboard, and, finding it locked, was satisfied. A few moments later the captain of the Remove had rejoined his chums; and for the next ninety minutes gave all his time and attention to footer.

The Famous Five were looking healthy and hungry when they came off the field. Footer in the sharp November air had given an edge to their appetites.

Johnny Bull looked a little downcast. He was conscious of the state of stoniness that reigned amongst his chums on the important occasion of his birthday.

"Tea in Hall, I suppose!" he said. "Sorry, you chaps! This is about the

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Billy Bunter watched Harry Wharton gather up the various parcels Mrs. Mimble had made, in the fashion of a hungry dog casting covetous eyes at a bone, and rolled out of the tuckshop almost on the junior captain's heels. (See Chapter 1.)

last day in the year that I should like to tea in Hall!"

"Oh, it can't be helped!" said Bob Cherry, with an expressive wink at Harry Wharton. "These little things happen in the best regulated families."

Johnny nodded.

"Come on, then! Let's get changed."

"Good egg!"

Looking strangely bright and cheery for fellows who were to tea in Hall, the Famous Five were soon changing into their Etons.

A few moments later they were descending the Remove staircase.

"This way for Hall!" said Johnny Bull, as his chums started to walk towards Study No. 1. "We shan't be in time for that if we don't get a move on."

"Keep your wool on, old scout!" said Wharton.

"Eh?"

"Harry's got a surprise for you, old bean!" grinned Frank Nugent.

"Oh!" said Johnny Bull. "What's the game?"

"You'll soon see," said Wharton, with a cheery grin. "Kim on, my son!"

He linked his arm in that of Johnny Bull's and marched him along to Study No. 1.

"Put a match to the fire, Bob!"

"You bet!"

"Get the kettle filled, Inky."

"The filfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous kettle is already of the fullful order," grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Good!" said Wharton. "Then lay the cloth, old bean!"

Johnny Bull looked surprised.

"What's the giddy game?" he asked.

"What's the good of these preparations if we haven't any grub?"

"Just you wait," said Wharton.

"Who said we haven't any grub?"

He felt for the key of the cupboard, and then jammed it in the lock.

Click!

The lock turned, the door flew open, and then Harry Wharton jumped.

The cupboard, like that of the celebrated Mother Hubbard, was bare!

"Oh, my hat!"

Wharton stared at that empty cupboard like one in a dream. Nugent and Bob Cherry and Inky looked equally amazed.

"Gone!" gasped Wharton faintly.

"Not a blessed crumb left!"

"Oh, great Scott!" murmured Frank Nugent.

"Is this a joke?" demanded Johnny Bull bluntly, eyeing the captain of the Remove somewhat grimly. "Because if it is I fail to see the point of it!"

And, without waiting for any further explanation, Johnny stamped out of the study in high dudgeon.

"Johnny!"

Four voices called after him, but Johnny Bull did not come back.

"The silly chump thinks we've been pulling his leg," said Wharton crossly.

"As if we'd do a thing like that on such a day!"

Again the captain of the Remove

stared into the cupboard, as if expecting some miracle to happen, and the three pounds' worth of grub he had purchased from Mrs. Mimble before afternoon classes to materialise just as mysteriously as it had disappeared.

But no such miracle happened.

Wharton's face was grim and dark when he turned to his chums. They were watching him curiously.

"I suppose you chaps don't think I was pulling Johnny's leg—pulling your legs as well, do you?" he demanded crossly.

"Of course not," said Frank Nugent, in some confusion, whilst Bob Cherry and Inky merely shook their heads.

Wharton glared at them savagely.

"I know you had no proof that I'd bought the grub," he said. "But you needn't be afraid to speak your minds."

"Don't be an ass, Harry——" began Frank Nugent.

But Wharton's face was dark and thunderous. His temper, never a very certain quantity, blazed up. He was sensitive to a degree, and, rightly or wrongly, he thought he read condemnation in the faces of his chums. He could have given proof to Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Inky that he had indeed gone to the trouble of trading his camera, and had spent the proceeds at Mrs. Mimble's shop—if such proof were needed. But all the obstinacy in his nature had been brought to the surface by the thought that his chums could not take his word.

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"Harry—" said Bob; and, meeting Wharton's blazing eyes, dropped his own and said nothing more.

"My esteemed chum," began Inky pacifically; but the words were still on his lips when Wharton turned on his heel and swung out of the study.

"Here's a go!" said Bob Cherry, after a moment's silence. "The silly chump's got his back up!"

"I suppose Wharton wasn't pulling our legs?" said Nugent slowly.

"Of course he wasn't," said Bob. "But—"

"Where's the grub?" added Nugent. And Inky contributed the remark that the whereabouts of the esteemed and ludicrous grub was of the mysterious order.

"The door was locked, all right," went on Nugent. "Perhaps somebody boned the tuck."

"Must have done," agreed Bob, looking worried. "Wharton isn't the chap to tell whoppers to his pals, and he told me distinctly that he had got the grub."

"Same here," said Nugent.

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh nodded.

"We weren't diplomatic just now," said Nugent. "We all know how touchy Harry is at times. He thought we disbelieved him."

"Oh, we'll soon put that right!" said Bob. "Let's go and hunt for him."

But that was easier said than done. Wharton had taken himself off to the Cloisters in moody silence, and there he remained until close on time for prep. Angry thoughts were welling in his breast. He felt that his chums had failed him, that they had let him down. And in view of the sacrifice the captain of the Remove had made to purchase that special birthday feed, the more he thought about the whole affair the more bitter and unreasonable he became.

How someone could have raided that tuck when the cupboard door was locked

was beyond his comprehension, but enlightenment came his way as he entered the Remove passage.

Fisher T. Fish was holding a heated altercation with William George Bunter.

"You fat clam!" snapped Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you owe me another ha'penny—"

"Oh, really, Fishy—"

"Pay up!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish, brandishing a bony set of knuckles under Billy Bunter's little fat nose.

Billy Bunter blinked up the passage, and he started as he saw the captain of the Remove approaching.

"Shurrup!" he hissed.

But Fisher T. Fish declined to "shurrup." Business was business. His price for the loan of his keys was two-pence. In a moment of weakness he had accepted three-halfpence. The deficit of a halfpenny had worried him all the afternoon.

"I guess I want what you owe me, you fat clam!" he rasped. "You had the keys; what you wanted 'em for I guess I don't know. But you had 'em, and I calculate that you owe me another ha'penny. See?"

"I'll settle up with you, Fishy—when my p-postal-order arrives," said Bunter.

Harry Wharton stopped. Mention of the word "keys" opened up a train of thought in his mind. He recollected on the instant that William George Bunter had left the Remove Form-room before the end of afternoon classes. That the fat junior had spoofed Mr. Quelch into the belief that he was unwell had been very apparent—to everyone except that learned gentleman himself. For what reason had Bunter wanted to leave the Form-room? And what was he doing with Fisher T. Fish's bunch of keys?

Wharton's eyes gleamed as what at first had been a faint suspicion now took on the shape of a certainty in his mind. Bunter was the one responsible for the

disappearance of the missing feed, without a doubt.

"I want a word with you, Bunter," said the captain of the Remove grimly; and his hand fastened on the fat junior's collar in a firm grip.

"Oh, really, Wharton!" gasped Bunter, wriggling like a fat eel. "I don't know anything about it—"

Wharton's harsh laugh was not pleasant to hear.

"So you know nothing about it, eh?" he said thickly. "You didn't bag my feed, you fat rotter?"

"Certainly not!" protested Bunter indignantly. "I haven't touched your mouldy grub! Besides, the tarts weren't up to standard, anyway. I—I—I mean—"

Wharton's face blazed. Many a time and oft had William George Bunter purloined tuck from Study No. 1, and had "got away with it," so to speak—it being generally accepted by the decent fellows in the Remove that Bunter was more of a fool than a rogue. But on this occasion some demon of temper seemed to take control of Harry Wharton. He fairly shook the terrified Bunter like a dog shakes a rat.

"Wow! Stop it, you rotter!" howled Bunter, squirming in Wharton's strong grip. "I d-didn't touch your rotten feed. If you think I—I borrowed Fishy's keys to open your blessed cupboard you're wrong! See?"

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets!" muttered Fisher T. Fish, who had been an interested spectator up to now. "So that's what the fat clam wanted 'em for!"

"You burgling rotter!" hissed Wharton, his face dark with anger. "If you had the pluck of a bunny rabbit, I'd make you stand up and take the licking of your life!"

"Oh, really, Wharton!" gasped Bunter, struggling afresh. "I've told you that I know nothing about your mouldy feed. And I didn't leave the Form-room to go to your study. So there!"

Wharton ground his teeth with rage at the thought that he had had all the trouble of laying in that special feed for nothing. Again he shook Bunter, and in the process Bunter's spectacles toppled off his nose and slid to the ground.

"Yaroooh!" yelled the fat junior. "Leggo! My spec-spectacles have fallen off! If they're broken you'll jolly well have to pay for 'em! Groooough!"

But Harry Wharton took no heed of Bunter's expostulations. He continued to shake that unhappy junior—the shaking providing an outlet to his pent-up wrath.

Crash!

It was quite by accident that one of Bunter's podgy fists swung round and caught the captain of the Remove full on the nose. He staggered back, crimson spurting from it.

"Oh dear!"

Blinking like a terrified rabbit, Bunter found himself free from that vice-like grip. Without his glasses the Owl of the Remove was practically helpless. He was conscious in some way that his fist had connected with something, and the sight of Wharton holding his nose seemed to suggest what that "something" had been.

"Oh crumbs!"

Not for worlds would William George Bunter have struck the captain of the Remove intentionally, for Wharton was one of the Remove's champion fighting-men, and Billy Bunter was the Remove's champion funk.



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"You fat rotter!" hissed the captain of the Remove, his eyes blazing with anger. "I'll smash you!"

All Wharton's control was flung to the winds. All his pent-up rage and resentment rushed to the surface. He made a savage jump at the fat junior.

Crash!

Wharton's fist took Billy Bunter full between the eyes. It was a blow that would have knocked out a better fighting man than Billy Bunter. It was a blow that Wharton, in his right senses, would never have delivered, and he regretted on the instant.

Thud!

Without a sound Billy Bunter dropped to the floor of the passage like a sack of potatoes.

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets!" gasped Fisher T. Fish, and as he saw the blaze of wrath in Wharton's face the Transatlantic junior backed away and disappeared in the direction of the Common-room.

Wharton stood looking down at the inanimate figure of Billy Bunter, like one in a dream. He would have given anything in the world to have recalled that blow. Slowly the anger faded out of his face and anxiety took its place.

"I'm sorry, Bunter!" he muttered, dropping on one knee and lifting the fat junior by the shoulders. "I'm sorry! I lost my temper!"

Billy Bunter's eyes blinked open. A spasm of pain racked his face, and, as he caught sight of the captain of the Remove, he shrank away from him.

"I'm sorry, Bunt!" said Wharton earnestly. "I—I didn't mean—"

"Oh!" Bunter passed a hand across his eyes and groaned.

A dark bruise was beginning to show beneath his eyes already, and his head felt as if it were on fire.

Wharton saw that bruise, and his face grew troubled.

"Groooooogh!" moaned Bunter, sitting up on the passage floor. "Wow! You b-bully!"

Wharton winced. A bully! Hitting a fellow like Bunter with such force would bring down on his shoulders the condemnation of the Form. A bully! That was what his Form-fellows would call him, without doubt.

"I'm sorry, Bunt!" he said again. "I—I— didn't mean it! I lost my temper, and—and—and I'm sorry!"

It cost Wharton something to make that confession, for his was a proud nature. It was wasted on Billy Bunter.

The fat junior scrambled to his feet and backed away, one podgy hand held to his face.

"You rotter!" he exclaimed. "You bullying rotter! I'll make you sorry for this! Groooooogh!"

Biting his lip in vexation, Wharton watched the fat junior roll towards the Common-room. He laughed unnaturally as, a few moments later, there came an uproar from that direction. Already—he needed no telling—the Remove were condemning him for his savage attack on Billy Bunter. Fisher T. Fish's story that the captain of the Remove had rushed at Bunter like a fury and knocked him out had received very little credence in the Common-room, but the arrival of Bunter himself gave full support to the American junior's story.

In a moment Bunter was surrounded by a crowd of Removites whose faces grew grim and indignant as they listened to the fat junior's exaggerated account of what had happened. But despite the exaggeration there was no mistaking the bruises under each of Bunter's eyes, or the swelling that threatened to close them up.

Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and

Bob Cherry listened in horrified amazement to what Bunter had to say. They could hardly believe that their chum would so lose control of himself as to attack Bunter as that fat junior alleged he had done. Yet the marks on Bunter's face told their own story. Bunter could not have invented them.

In a few moments the Common-room was in an uproar. Bunter was not exactly a popular fellow, but every Removite waxed indignant as he heard the story of what had taken place. Bunter carefully refrained from telling his audience what had started the trouble. His version was, in fact, that Wharton had suddenly squared up to him, rushed at him like a tiger and felled him, without any provocation at all.

"The rotter!"

"The bully!"

"Where is the rotter?"

There was a sudden stir in the doorway of the Common-room. Wharton stood framed there, his head held high, his face set grimly, his eyes steady.

"He's here," he said quietly.

The hubbub died down. Scornful looks were cast at the captain of the Remove. Even fellows like Bolsover and Bulstrode, who were given to bullying themselves, felt indignant. Certainly neither of them had ever attacked Bunter like Wharton had.

Wharton's own particular friends dropped their eyes. They had no wish publicly to denounce their chum for his action, although in their hearts they condemned him.

A rush of crimson came to Wharton's cheeks as he stood there, and his face grew bitter. He knew that he had overstepped the bounds in attacking Bunter as he had. He knew that his Form-fellows would despise him for it. But that his own intimate chums should condemn him without a hearing brought out all that was worst in his nature.

He laughed sardonically.

"I see you have formed your opinions," he said, with a sneer. "Well, I don't care a snap of the fingers for you and your opinions! You can go and eat coke!"

With that, he turned on his heel and strode out of the Common-room, leaving a buzz behind him.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Split in the Co!

"HARRY, old chap——"

Wharton did not move as Frank Nugent called his name.

"Harry, old fellow——" began Bob Cherry.

Still Wharton did not move. He stood at the window of Study No. 1, staring out into the darkened quad, his brow clouded.

It was exactly an hour since the episode in the Common-room, and it wanted five minutes to bed-time.

Frank Nugent touched his chum on the arm.

Wharton turned then, and flung off Frank's arm. Then he stood facing his chum, a sneer on his handsome face.

"I say, old scout," said Johnny Bull uncomfortably, "no need to be huffy with your friends, is there?"

"My friends?" asked Wharton mockingly.

"Well, we are your friends," said Nugent pacifically.

"The friendliness of our esteemed and ludicrous selves is terrific," added Inky, with a dusky smile.

"My friends!" sneered Wharton. "And yet you condemn me without a hearing!"

"We haven't condemned you!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Not in so many words," said Wharton bitterly. "But I'm not a fool. You think, like all the rest of the Remove, that I was a bully for hitting that fat rotter, Bunter, like I did!"

There was a moment's uncomfortable silence in the study.

"Well, you must have hit him dashed hard," said Johnny Bull in his blunt way.

"You ought not to have done it, Harry," said Nugent quietly.

Wharton sneered.

"Am I to be subjected to a sermon by my friends?"

There was a sting in his last words that angered his chums.

Nugent shifted uncomfortably.

"We're not sermonising you, old chap," he said, "but——"

"But you think that I was a rotter to biff Bunter, what?" sneered Wharton. "Well, you can think what you jolly well like."

Johnny Bull, Inky, and Bob Cherry made a move towards the door. They could see that Wharton was in one of his unreasonable moods. Far better to leave him alone, in the circumstances, until his anger and bitterness had subsided.

Nugent made as if to follow them, and then thought better of it.

"Harry," he said quietly, "I think you might explain."

"Explain?" scoffed Wharton. "Why should I explain? You've heard what Bunter had to say. You formed your own conclusions. Why ask me to explain?"

Nugent controlled his own rapidly rising wrath. He knew Wharton, perhaps, better than any other member of the Co. Knew to what lengths his temper, stubbornness, and resentfulness could go.

"Bunter must have provoked you pretty badly," he said diplomatically.

"Go hon!" sneered the captain of the Remove.

"The fellows think——" began Nugent, when Wharton, with a blaze of temper, interrupted him.

"The fellows can think what they like!" he snapped. "I've told 'em so! I've told you so! Now leave me alone!"

Nugent's face grew angry.

"I'll leave you fast enough," he said, his voice rising a little. "I can see you're in one of your beastly tempers. I'll leave you to cool off!"

"Come on, Franky!" called out Bob Cherry softly.

Frank joined his chums.

Wharton, biting his lip, watched them go, his handsome face troubled. He wanted to call them back and explain exactly what had happened. He knew in his heart of hearts that they would understand; that they would stand by him. Yet that demon of unreasonableness took full possession of him. Why should he explain? If his chums condemned him unheard, why should he lower himself to explain?

He sat down heavily in a chair and thought it out, and as he brooded over it he lost all perspective of the affair, with the result that he considered himself a fellow very hardly done by. It was his pride, his vanity, that had been hurt, and his sensitive nature rose in revolt. No one seeing the captain of the Remove sitting there in his study, a prey to bitter reflections, would have believed that until a short time ago he was one of the most good-natured, good-tempered, and most popular members of the Greyfriars Remove. All the worst in his nature rose to the surface.

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Wingate, looking in at the study to announce that it was bed-time, started as he saw the black look on Wharton's face.

"What's up, kid?" he asked kindly.

"Nothing!" snapped Wharton.

The kindness faded out of Wingate's face. For a Sixth-Former, and captain of the school at that, to take an interest in a Remove fag was generally considered something of an honour. But for a Remove fag to rebuff such an interest in a surly manner was not to be tolerated.

"That's not the way to speak to me!" said Wingate grimly.

"Isn't it?" sneered Wharton; and he could have bitten off his tongue the next moment, for he entertained a deep admiration and affection for good old George Wingate.

"It is not!" snapped the captain of the school. "Off to bed—sharp!"

Slowly, and with deliberate "dumb insolence," Wharton rose to his feet. By rights he should have been in the Remove dormitory already.

He fumbled about the study for no reason other than to annoy George Wingate. Why he was doing it Wharton himself could not exactly tell. That he was annoying the captain of the school was very apparent, for, after a few moments, Wingate came into the study, grabbed the captain of the Remove by the collar, and spun him to the doorway.

"That's enough!" he said grimly. "I don't know what's the matter with you, but you should know by now that the captain of the school isn't the fellow to try your airs and graces on! Take a hundred lines, and get to bed at once!"

With a shrug of the shoulders Wharton turned towards the Remove staircase and slowly mounted it. Wingate stood staring after him, with a frown, until he was out of sight. Then the captain of the school continued his round.

There was a buzz of conversation going on in the Remove dormitory when Wharton entered.

It died down a little as he went to his bed and began to undress. That his Form-fellows were discussing him, he knew, and it riled him.

"What price bullies!" chuckled Harold Skinner.

The cad of the Remove, always glad of a chance to score off the captain of the Remove, was making the most of the present opportunity. More so as he knew that for once he had practically the whole of the Form behind him.

"Bully!"

Several other juniors joined in Skinner's denunciation.

"Rotten bully!"

And Billy Bunter's voice was loudest of all.

"The rotten bully!" he exclaimed. "I'll make him sit up for it! Yah!"

Wharton's brow darkened as he listened to the remarks of his Form-fellows, and he ground his teeth. But for the fact that Wingate came along at that moment to put out the lights, it was quite possible that other juniors besides Bunter would have had bruises to show on the morrow.

Wingate gave Wharton a curious look as he turned out the lights, and received an insolent stare in return.

Really, it seemed that the captain of the Remove was going out of his way to make himself as unpopular as he could. Wingate said nothing, but he thought a lot. He could see at a glance that the captain of the Remove was in trouble with his Form.

After lights-out a desultory conversa-

tion broke out amongst Skinner & Co. for the especial benefit of Harry Wharton.

Wharton did his utmost to ignore it, but he had to bear it. His heart was bitter and heavy, and he was a changed fellow.

"Good-night, Harry!"

It was Frank Nugent's voice, but Wharton did not answer. Neither did he answer Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, or Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Long after the rest of the dormitory was asleep Harry Wharton lay tossing in his bed a victim of sleeplessness—a victim of conscience. He fell asleep at last, an hour after midnight, but his slumber was fitful and troubled.

When he arose at rising-bell there were dark rings under his eyes and a certain pallor in his cheeks which had seldom been seen there before.

He ignored the greetings of his chums, and went down into the quad for a "breather" alone.

At breakfast Wharton kept his eyes on his plate. Several times his chums tried to break the ice, but all to no avail. Wharton was silent even when his chums, still trying to break down the barrier, asked him to pass the salt, or the mustard, or the sugar.

Mr. Quelch, at the head of the table, was quick to notice that something was wrong. His eyes dwelt on Wharton's pallid face and the dark rings under his eyes.

"Are you not well this morning, Wharton?" he asked kindly.

"Yes!" retorted Wharton shortly.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"That is not the way to speak to your Form master, my boy," he said.

He waited, evidently expecting the captain of the Remove to make some apology, but no apology came from Wharton. He sat in his place, apparently oblivious of what was going on around him; oblivious even of the presence of such an august and important personage as his Form master.

The master of the Remove pursed his lips. He was inclined to take Wharton to task for his impertinence, but a glance at the junior's tired face softened him. Usually the captain of the Remove was Mr. Quelch's best behaved pupil.

If he were unwell that was something in extenuation of his behaviour. That he had escaped an imposition and a biting dissertation on the subject of impertinence did not seem to worry Wharton. He rose from his place when the Form was dismissed, and made his way out of Hall alone.

In the Remove Form-room that morning Wharton was just the same. There was a set expression on his face of animosity and bitterness, and a touch of reckless defiance.

Bunter, whose blackened eyes had not escaped Mr. Quelch's attention, was feeling in a vindictive mood. His petty nature demanded that he should avenge the blow Wharton had given him.

The Owl of the Remove was waiting for his chance.

It came in an unexpected fashion.

It was often the custom of the Remove juniors to make the most of those occasions when Mr. Quelch's attention was diverted to the blackboard. Ink pellets would suddenly appear as if from nowhere and go whizzing across the Form-room to their various billets.

Harold Skinner, seeing his opportunity, deftly dipped a pellet in the ink-well and, taking aim, threw it, as he thought, at Harry Wharton. The shot went a couple of feet wide, and landed, with a faint plop, on Johnny Bull's face.

"You rotter!" breathed Johnny fiercely.

He had seen who was responsible for that ink pellet, and he was tempted to return the compliment, so to speak. In a few seconds a return pellet, generously soaked in ink, was wending its way across the Form-room.

It would have been a "bullseye," so to speak, had not Harold Skinner ducked. But every bullet has its billet, and the billet in this case proved to be Mr. Quelch!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Sneak!

PLOP!

The ink pellet landed on the back of Mr. Quelch's neck, just above his collar.

The Remove master jumped.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed.

"What was that?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of laughter, in which the only person who did not join was Harry Wharton, rang through the Form-room. The sight of Mr. Quelch pawing his ink-stained neck was rather unusual.

The laughter died a sudden death, however, as Mr. Quelch, discovering the nature of the missile that had struck him and seeing smudges of ink on his hand, faced his class with thunder in his brow.

"Boys!" he rumbled. "I am surprised that you should find anything laughable in this disgraceful assault! You will each take a hundred lines!"

"Oh!"

Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes roved over the Form.

"I call upon the boy who threw the ink pellet at me to stand up at once!" he said icily. "I will endeavour to impress upon him that the Form-room is not the place to indulge such childish actions, nor is the selection of his Form master as a victim an ideal one!"

Really, it was not surprising that Johnny Bull did not jump to his feet at once. In all honesty he had not thrown the pellet at Mr. Quelch. That the pellet had hit him was a pure accident; certainly not the intention or design of the thrower. In the circumstances Johnny Bull felt entitled to keep silent.

"I am waiting!" snapped Mr. Quelch, after a few moments. "Will the boy who threw that ink pellet at me stand up at once?"

There was silence following the Form master's words, save a slight cough which came from William George Bunter. There was a crafty gleam in the Owl of the Remove's eyes as they dwelt on Harry Wharton.

The captain of the Remove was staring at his books, apparently unaware of what was going on around him, but he jumped up as he heard what appeared to be his own voice:

"Own up, Bull! You know you did it!"

It was Harry Wharton's voice to the life. Billy Bunter possessed very few gifts, but he was a born ventriloquist. That preliminary cough, before any ventriloquial effort, was the only evidence that the Remove ventriloquist was at work.

His latest effort produced astonishing results.

All eyes turned on the captain of the Remove.

Looking up, Wharton saw Johnny Bull glaring at him. Scorn was written in every line of Johnny's face. His chum, Wharton, had committed the schoolboy's unpardonable sin—he had sneaked!



Crash! Quite by accident one of Bunter's podgy fists swung round and caught Harry Wharton full on the nose. "Oh crumbs!" gasped the Owl of the Remove. Not for worlds would he have struck the captain of the Remove intentionally, for Wharton was the champion fighting man of the Remove, and Bunter was the champion funk. (See Chapter 3.)

"You rotten sneak!" hissed Johnny.
"I—I—I didn't say anything!" gasped Wharton, his face crimson. "It wasn't—"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Quelch, giving the captain of the Remove a peculiar glance, which had a tincture of scorn in it. "Bull!"

"Yes, sir?" said Bull quietly.

"Did you throw that ink pellet at me?"

Johnny Bull shifted uncomfortably on his feet.

"I didn't throw the pellet at you, sir," he said.

Mr. Quelch's brow grew dark.

"Don't equivocate, boy!" he snapped. "Did you or did you not throw that pellet?"

"Yes, sir!" said Johnny quietly. "It was an accident that it—ahem—hit you, sir!"

A little of the thunder faded from the face of the Remove master.

"I am inclined to take your word on that score, Bull," he said. "I presume that pellet was meant for somebody else?"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"Very well, Bull. You will take two hundred lines. You will write out 'I must not indulge in foolish pranks in the Form-room,'" snapped Mr. Quelch. "You will also be detained to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh, sir!"

"You may sit down!"

And Johnny Bull, richer by an imposition and an afternoon's detention, sat down with crimson cheeks and a seething rage in his breast against the fellow who had sneaked on him.

Harry Wharton sat in his place like a being stunned. He had heard the incriminating words: "Own up, Bull!"

You know you did it!" They had been said in his voice, but he was not conscious of having said them. Not a suspicion as yet dawned upon him that the Remove ventriloquist had been at work. Neither had the possibility entered the mind of any other member of the Form.

It was amazing; it was unparalleled—but Harry Wharton, captain of the Form, had sneaked on his chum!

Scornful glances were cast at Wharton throughout the remainder of morning lessons. He bore them all with set face, although his heart was beating rapidly. Anger was welling up within him. The Form thought he had sneaked. Johnny Bull thought he had sneaked—even Mr. Quelch was cold to him.

Had he sneaked?

Wharton asked himself that question time and time again. At the precise moment the disclosure had been made, Wharton's mind had been far away. Certainly it was not with events that were happening in the Form-room. He recalled with a start, too, that he had not even seen the pellet thrown. Then how could he have sneaked?

But that voice—his voice. It had sounded like his voice. All the Remove, including Mr. Quelch, had taken it that he had spoken.

Wharton gave it up.

During morning break, Wharton remained in the Form-room. Outside Removites on every hand were condemning him. Johnny Bull was furious.

"The sneaking rotter!" he exclaimed. "Wharton, of all people!"

Wharton's chums were dumbfounded. "I can hardly believe it," said Nugent.

"Neither can I," said Bob Cherry. "Wharton must be out of his senses."

And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook his dusky head sorrowfully, and said nothing.

"I'll smash the rotter for that!" roared Johnny Bull.

Frank Nugent tried the role of peace-maker.

"Don't get heated about it, old scout," he said. "There's some mistake somewhere."

Johnny Bull snorted.

"Mistake?" he hooted. "There's no mistake. All the Form heard him! You heard him yourself."

And Frank Nugent, in the face of that, had nothing further to say, for he had indeed heard it.

When the Remove took their places for last lesson, Mr. Quelch found them particularly inattentive. Thoughts were on Wharton's astonishing behaviour; attention was directed at him whenever Mr. Quelch's back was turned.

As a direct result, lines and lickings fell as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa for the remainder of the morning and, reasonably or unreasonably, those who received the lines or lickings attributed them to Harry Wharton.

Even the captain of the Remove did not escape Mr. Quelch's wrath.

"You are not paying attention to the lesson, Wharton!" thundered the master of the Remove, catching the captain of the Remove looking out of the window.

"Aren't I, sir?" There was a world of impertinence in Wharton's reply, and there was a mocking smile on his face that irritated Mr. Quelch.

"You were not!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders. He was in a reckless mood now.

"Boy!" thundered Mr. Quelch, picking up a book. "The MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,083."

ing up his cane. "Stand out before the class!"

With deliberate slowness, the captain of the Remove rose to his feet and lounged out before the class. He faced Mr. Quelch with an insolent smile.

"Touch your toes!"

For a moment Harry Wharton did not obey, and a thrill went through the class.

"Touch your toes, you insolent boy!" commanded Mr. Quelch.

"Just as you like!" drawled Wharton, and he obeyed leisurely.

Swish, swish, swish!

Mr. Quelch laid on those strokes with all the power at his command. Wharton's face was pale when he straightened himself, and his lips were set in a tight line, but not a sound had escaped him.

"Go to your place!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Wharton lounged back to his place. Mr. Quelch was almost tempted to forget his dignity and rush after him, grab him by the collar, and bring the cane into play once again. Fortunately for Wharton, the master of the Remove suppressed the impulse.

"You are still insolent, Wharton," he snapped. "Take a hundred lines!"

"Thank you, sir!"

"Take three hundred lines!" said Mr. Quelch, breathing hard.

"Thank you, sir!" said Wharton coolly.

"Take a thousand lines!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Harry Wharton nodded.

The master of the Remove was tempted to add another thousand lines to that imposition, but he realized that he was making himself appear ridiculous before the Form. Breathing hard, he returned to his desk, and the lesson continued.

Both master and pupils were glad when the morning lessons came to an end. In a noisy stream the Removites poured out into the passage, all discussing the amazing events of the morning. There was a hiss as Harry Wharton appeared and then—

"Sneak!"

"Here comes the sneak!"

Wharton's hands clenched as he heard those remarks; his face flushed, and then went strangely pale as hisses and groans went up on all sides.

For a moment, it looked as if he would hurl himself at the nearest juniors, but he got a grip of himself and passed on down the passage to his study with his head high in the air.

Hisses and groans followed him.

He laughed bitterly as he swung into Study No. 1, slammed the door, and seated himself in the armchair. It had come to this, then. He was a sneak—the object of scorn and contempt—the most despised member of the Form.

He laughed again. His whole world seemed to be slipping beneath his feet. Then, as he brooded over his grievances, real and unreal, a thought flashed into his brain that made him start convulsively.

"Bunter!" he hissed. "That fat cad! I'll—"

He laughed again. Of course, it had been Bunter's ventriloquism. There was no other explanation. It was not Harry Wharton who had sneaked on Bull. In view of the facts, that was impossible, for Wharton, at the time, had been unaware who had thrown the ink pellet that had landed so disastrously.

Bunter! Bunter, the ventriloquist. This, apparently, was the Owl of the Remove's method of revenging himself on the fellow who had blacked both his eyes.

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A few words of explanation to the Remove, or, at least, to the fellows who counted most in Wharton's eyes, would have put the whole matter right. Just a few words— But those words were never likely to be given. Wharton was in a black mood now—reckless, defiant, ready to give trouble—ready to take all the trouble that was coming to him.

A little pride is a good thing; too much pride is dangerous. Wharton was finding it dangerous; he was going to find it more dangerous still. Pride in the right quantity will take a person up the hill; pride in the wrong quantity will drag him down to the depths.

And it was to the depths that Wharton's pride was taking him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Johnny on the Warpath!

"I'M going to challenge the rotter to a fight!"

Johnny Bull's face set grimly. Frank Nugent's face was troubled; so were the faces of Bob Cherry, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

It was after dinner, and Johnny Bull's wrath had not died down. Much as his chums were trying to dissuade him, Johnny was determined to "have it out" with Harry Wharton.

"I'll see him before afternoon classes," he announced. "You don't think I'm going to let a caddish trick like that pass by without saying or doing anything, do you?"

The Co. were silent. Had any of them been in Johnny's position they would have felt the same. Still, Frank Nugent made a last effort on Wharton's behalf.

"Think it over, Johnny," he advised. "Wharton's our—our friend, you know."

Johnny Bull snorted.

"Friend? Do you call it a friendly action to sneak? Do you call it friendly to mooch about in the sulks without saying a word? Friend? Pah!"

And Johnny, with warlike countenance, tramped along the Remove passage en route for Study No. 1.

He tried the door, and found it locked.

"Are you there Wharton?" he bellowed.

"I am!"

"Then open this door!" said Johnny Bull.

There was a light laugh, without mirth in it, from within the study.

"I don't choose to open this door," said Wharton.

"I want to talk to you," continued Johnny Bull, his temper rising.

"The pleasure's all on your side," came Wharton's sneering tones.

Johnny Bull snorted.

"Are you going to be a funk as well as a sneak?" he asked.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Harry Wharton, and there was anger in his voice now.

"I challenge you to a fight," said Johnny Bull. "It was a dirty trick you played on me this morning—a cad's trick—and I'm going to hammer you for it!"

"Oh, are you?"

"Unless you're too funky?" This time it was Johnny Bull who sneered.

"I'm not fighting you" said Wharton coolly.

"You are!"

"I've said that I'm not," returned Wharton coldly.

"Then you'll be branded a funk!" said Johnny Bull, with withering scorn.

"Oh, run away! You make me tired."

"I'll make you sorry for yourself as well before I'm finished!" snapped Johnny Bull. "Open this door!"

"Johnny—" began Frank Nugent, but a gesture from Johnny Bull silenced him.

"If he doesn't open this door I'll bust it in!" hooted Johnny Bull. "For the last time, Wharton, are you going to open this door?"

Silence!

"You hear me?" said Johnny Bull, his voice rising.

No answer!

"The rotter!"

Johnny Bull backed away from the door and squared his shoulders. Then he ran at it, using his shoulder as a battering-ram.

Crash!

The noise of the impact echoed along the passage, but the lock still held.

"Don't be an ass, Johnny," urged Bob Cherry. "You'll have the beaks here in a minute!"

"Blow the beaks!" grunted Johnny Bull. "I'm going to get that rotter out of his funk-hole!"

Crash!

Again Johnny's shoulder smote the door with a mighty smite. The door shivered a little, but that was all.

"Bless my soul! What is the meaning of this?"

Mr. Quelch had arrived on the scene to inquire into the din that was going on. He looked at the Co. in amazement.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Why are you charging that door, Bull?" demanded Mr. Quelch.

"Because I want to get in," explained Johnny Bull awkwardly.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"That is not the proper way to enter a study!" he said severely. "Unless I'm mistaken this is not your study, either, is it?"

"No, sir!"

"The door's locked, sir," volunteered Frank Nugent.

Mr. Quelch's brow cleared.

"Upon my word! Why did you not say so before!" he exclaimed. "If you have mislaid the key, Gosling will open the door with his pass-key."

"You see, sir—" began Nugent, and then he paused.

Mr. Quelch looked closely at the Co., and then he frowned.

"Am I to understand that someone is in the study; that someone is keeping you locked out?" he asked.

"Ahem!" coughed Nugent.

"You see—" stammered Bob Cherry.

"I think I understand!" said Mr. Quelch grimly. He knocked sharply on the panels. "Is anyone there?"

"Yes," came Wharton's voice.

"Ah! Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch. "Open this door at once!"

"I prefer to keep it locked," said Wharton coolly.

"What, what! Bless my soul!" Mr. Quelch could hardly credit his own ears.

"What did you say, boy?"

"I said I prefer to keep it locked!"

The master of the Remove looked thunderous.

"Open this door at once!" he exclaimed. "I command you, Wharton!"

There was no response.

"Open this door at once, Wharton!" repeated Mr. Quelch ominously. "Unless you obey me this instant I shall report your disgraceful conduct to Dr. Locke!"

"Oh, very well," said Wharton. He had no mind to receive a flogging at the hands of Dr. Locke, much as he desired to keep the study door locked, and he knew that a flogging would be his

reward if he persisted in defying his Form master.

There was the sound of a key being turned in the lock.

Next moment the door was opened and Wharton stood framed in the aperture. There was still that mocking smile on his face as he surveyed the little party outside.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

"Really, Wharton, I don't know what has come over you the last two days. You seem incorrigible."

Wharton more inclined his head.

"Why did you keep your door locked?" snapped the master of the Remove. "You know it is against the rules."

"I wanted to be alone," replied Wharton, giving Johnny Bull a meaningful glance.

"Indeed!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "And who are you, pray, to be alone? Who are you to alter the rules of the school to suit your convenience?"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders, an action that infuriated Mr. Quelch.

"You are an insolent, incorrigible boy!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Bull—"

"Yes, sir!"

"Kindly fetch my cane from my study."

"Oh—I mean, yes, sir!"

Johnny Bull, crimson of face, gave Wharton a look of dismay. In return he received a bitter stare, full of enmity. The chums of the Remove were now growing accustomed to that look of enmity. In reality, it was a mask that hid the Wharton they had always liked and respected; it was the mask which Wharton's overbearing pride urged him to wear. To do him justice, Wharton's reason for keeping behind the locked door of Study No. 1 was to avoid a conflict with Johnny Bull. He really had no quarrel with Bull. He just wanted to be alone with his bitter thoughts.

Everything seemed to be working out the wrong way. As a result of Johnny Bull's rather high-handed action in charging the door, Wharton was going to receive a caning. That much was evident.

Wharton had been caned before, and he had survived it, but it went against the grain to think that the fellow who had already wronged him should be the indirect means of getting him a caning—of perhaps being a witness of it.

Johnny Bull returned with the cane. A lot of Johnny's belligerence had evaporated now. He realised that, although it was Wharton's insolence that had roused Mr. Quelch's wrath, it was his—Johnny's—action in the first place that had started the present trouble.

Mr. Quelch took the cane and wished it through the air.

"Touch your toes, Wharton!"

The captain of the Remove gave Johnny Bull a meaningful look, which seemed to say, "this is what you've done for me," and obeyed. The four strokes he received were of the hardest. But the pain was nothing to the sense of humiliation he felt that Johnny Bull should have witnessed them.

The master of the Remove was breathing hard when he had finished.

"I trust that will be a lesson to you, Wharton," he said. "And unless you change your ways, I shall deem it my duty seriously to consider whether the captaincy of the junior school should not be given to someone more capable and respectful to those in authority."

With that Mr. Quelch tucked his cane under his arm and whisked away.

There was an uncomfortable silence in Study No. 1.

Wharton was the first to break it.

His face was pale and set, and his eyes glittered.

"Are you satisfied now, you rotter?" he exclaimed, giving Johnny Bull a deadly glare.

Johnny Bull controlled his rising anger.

"I'm sorry I should have been the means of getting you a swishing," he said.

"Keep your sorrow!" snapped Wharton.

"I will," retorted Johnny. "And I challenge you to a fight—you hear?"

Wharton laughed.

"I'm not fighting you," he said. "I've told you that before."

"Then perhaps this will alter your mind!" roared Johnny Bull; and before anyone could prevent him his open palm struck across Wharton's cheek.

The captain of the Remove staggered back. His hands clenched, his eyes glittered with fury. Despite his statement to the contrary, it was very apparent that he would have been at grips with Johnny Bull but for Nugent's action. For Frank sprang forward and seized the excited Johnny by the arm. Bob Cherry took his other arm, and between them the two juniors dragged him back.

"Let me go!" hissed Johnny. "I'll smash the cad!"

"Keep cool," urged Nugent. "You don't want to scrap with Wharton."

"Don't I?" roared Bull. "Let me get at the rotter!"

"Not here, at any rate," said Nugent. "If you must scrap, have it out with the gloves on."

"I'm not fighting Bull," said Wharton coldly. "Take him away and cool him off. Now clear out, all of you!"

At a glance from Nugent, the Co. retired from the study, Johnny Bull expostulating excitedly.

Wharton slammed the door, and then looked at his reflection in the mirror. His face darkened as he noted the crimson mark that was rising on his cheek where Bull's hand had struck it.

"Johnny was as near getting the hiding of his life as he'll ever be," he muttered. "How I kept my hands off him I don't know."

Again that bitter, savage look overspread his face. It was the old war returning with redoubled vigour. Johnny Bull thought he was a bully and a sneak. Now Johnny Bull would think him a funk.

(Continued on next page.)

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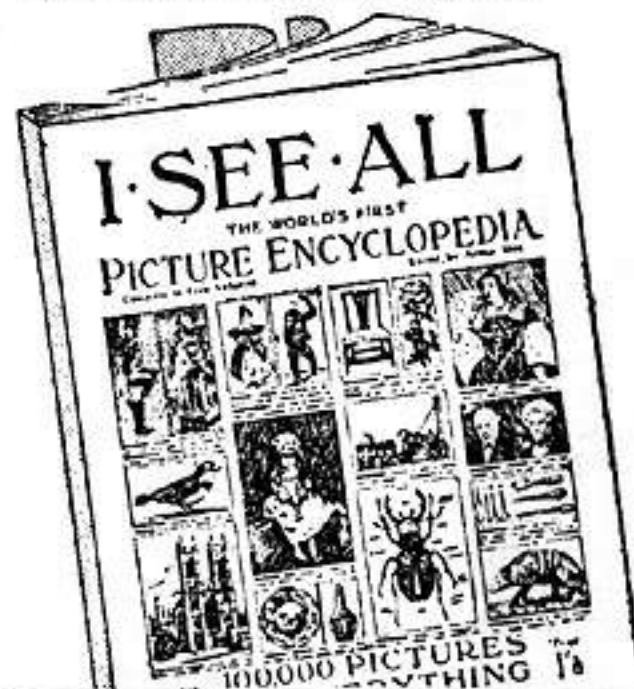
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It would have been easy for Wharton to have licked Johnny Bull, for the captain of the Remove was one of the finest fighting-men in the Form. Yet, somehow, bitter as he was, Wharton could not entertain the idea of scrapping with a fellow who had once been his staunch chum.

The feeling which prompted that attitude did not suggest that he should open his heart to his chums and set himself right. Some perverse spirit compelled him to wallow in his unhappy state—to keep sealed mouth—to imagine that he was a deeply-wronged fellow. He had now reached that stage in morbid depression where he imagined that his one-time chums were deliberately trying to get "shot" of him. If such were the case, then no advances would come from him.

He chuckled mirthlessly as he watched the crimson patch in his cheeks. A moment more and the sardonic expression had left his face—left a face strangely hurt and troubled. Only for a moment was the transformation. The next, and the bitterness had returned with redoubled force.

He was an Ishmael, or, rather, thought he was, with his hand against every man and every man's hand against him.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. Skinner's Scheme!

FOUR members of the once-famous Co. kept out of Wharton's way during the remainder of that day. Four members of the Famous Five were feeling the rift in the lute as much as the fifth member. Frank Nugent's affection for Wharton urged him to side with his old chum; whilst Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh plainly showed that their sympathies were with Johnny Bull.

It looked for all the world as if the end had been written to the once happy band of chums known as the "Famous Five."

Nugent tried to be impartial in the matter, but he felt in his heart of hearts that Wharton was entirely to blame for the split—that his stubborn pride and passionate temper were responsible in every way. Feeling that, Frank did not occupy Study No. 1 more than was absolutely necessary. When he walked in Wharton strolled out, and vice versa.

No one was more glad to see this state of affairs than Harold Skinner, the cad of the Remove.

And Billy Bunter, who was the direct cause of all the trouble, felt that he had tasted the sweets of vengeance, although the sweets were beginning to taste bitter. But the Owl of the Remove had gone too far now to retract. He shivered when he thought of what would happen should the facts leak out, and consoled himself with the thought that Harry Wharton & Co. were beasts, and that Harry Wharton, who had refused on innumerable occasions to cash a postal-order for him in advance, was a worse beast than the others!

It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars that day, and, as was now customary between them, Frank Nugent retired from the study the moment Harry Wharton came in. The captain of the Remove was looking decidedly down on his luck. One bright glance from Frank, one kind word, would have saved the situation.

But Nugent averted his face, picked up his books, and walked out.

The sullen, bitter look returned to Wharton's face. In his blind anger, he blamed Nugent for not making the approach, forgetting that Frank had

made many attempts to heal the breach and had been surlily repulsed on each occasion. That he himself should have climbed down from his stubborn perch, and offered the hand of friendship again, never entered into Wharton's calculation of things.

He sat down at the table in miserable solitude. From the direction of Big Side came the shouts of the spectators who were watching the First Eleven footer match against Abbotsford. Wharton would have liked to join in, for there was no keener footballer than the captain of the Remove. But he shrank from showing himself abroad now. Cold looks, pointed remarks, or the cut direct were his lot in life now. He had made his bed, and was compelled to lie on it; but he found it irksome and irritating.

Abstractedly he pulled some note-paper towards him and began to indite a letter to his uncle. It was a letter full of bitterness—a letter that Wharton in his right senses would never have written. He had no intention of dispatching it; the effort was just a morbid desire to see his grievances in writing. It was weak, but then the strongest are weak at times. The letter ran:

"My Dear Uncle,—I cannot stay in this school a day longer than is absolutely necessary. I am very unhappy. I have been wronged—wronged by those whom I accounted my friends. I feel that if I don't leave here I shall go mad. Mr. Quelch is—"

Wharton threw down the pen when he had got as far as that. He laughed sardonically at what he had written, and then, rising, began to pace up and down the study like a caged animal.

"I must get out into the open," he muttered. "I'm feeling rotten!"

He looked rotten. The strain of the last two days was beginning to tell on him. Snatching up his cap, he strode out of the study and along the passage.

From a seat in the School House doorway Billy Bunter watched him go. The Owl of the Remove grinned at the miserable expression on the face of the captain of the Remove, and then resumed his occupation of demolishing large quantities of toffee—some of the toffee, incidentally, that Wharton had purchased on the occasion of the special birthday feed.

Passing the Form-room, Wharton glanced in. He coloured a trifle as he saw Johnny Bull sitting there in detention. Bull looked as miserable as his erstwhile chum, for Bull's thoughts were of the football going on on Big Side, certainly not on the detention task Mr. Quelch had set him.

It was on the tip of Wharton's tongue to say something to Johnny Bull—to say he was sorry—to explain matters right from the time the birthday feed had disappeared. But Bull, looking up from his task, caught sight of Wharton and scowled.

That did it. Wharton's pride rebounded to that black scowl, and he passed on his way. Once again a chance of patching up the trouble had slipped him by.

He lounged out of the House and took the road over the cliffs. The breeze from the sea would clear his head, would revive him.

Billy Bunter watched him until he was out of sight, then he rolled to his feet and made tracks for Study No. 1. It wasn't often that William George Bunter improved the shining hour by reading, but his taste in such matters was good when the mood to read was

upon him. In Harry Wharton's book-case was the current edition of the "Greyfriars' Holiday Annual," and Bunter for some weeks now had cast covetous eyes at that popular volume. Here was a chance to borrow it whilst Wharton was out of gates.

With the idea of borrowing it for the afternoon, therefore, Bunter rolled into Study No. 1. In a very few moments the "Holiday Annual" was in his fat paws. Then Bunter paused. On the table was a sheet of letter paper with writing on it. Bunter's besetting sin was curiosity. That letter lured him as a magnet lures a needle. That it was decidedly low-down to read another fellow's correspondence did not occur to William George Bunter, the fat junior possessing a most elastic and accommodating conscience. And as Bunter read that letter of Wharton's his eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"He, he, he!" he cackled. "The rotter's got his tail down. Wouldn't the fellows like to see this letter! He, he, he!"

"Hallo, old alarm clock!"

It was Harold Skinner's voice. The cad of the Remove looked in at the open door of Study No. 1.

Billy Bunter jumped, and the letter he had been reading fluttered to the floor.

"Caught you, what?" sneered Skinner. "Spying into someone's letter, eh?"

"Oh, really, Skinner—" began Bunter.

"What's it all about, anyway?" asked the cad of the Remove, whose conscience was about as accommodating as Bunter's on occasion.

William George Bunter recovered himself.

"He, he, he!" he cackled. "It's a real scream! Just you have a look at it!"

He stooped, picked up the letter, and handed it to Skinner.

The cad of the Remove had no scruples about reading it. His eyes glittered craftily when he had finished.

"This is a peach!" he exclaimed. "I think I'll keep this."

"Nunno! I shouldn't do that if I were you. Wharton would be in an awful wax if he found out," protested Bunter.

Skinner laughed.

"He'll be sorry he wrote this by the time I've finished with him," he chuckled. "Here's a glorious chance to put paid to the account of His Magnificence, and the rest of the rotters, too!"

"What do you mean?" asked Bunter, blinking curiously at Harold Skinner.

The cad of the Remove winked.

"Never you mind! Just you keep a still tongue in your head, that's all."

"Look here, Skinner," said Bunter. "You can't—"

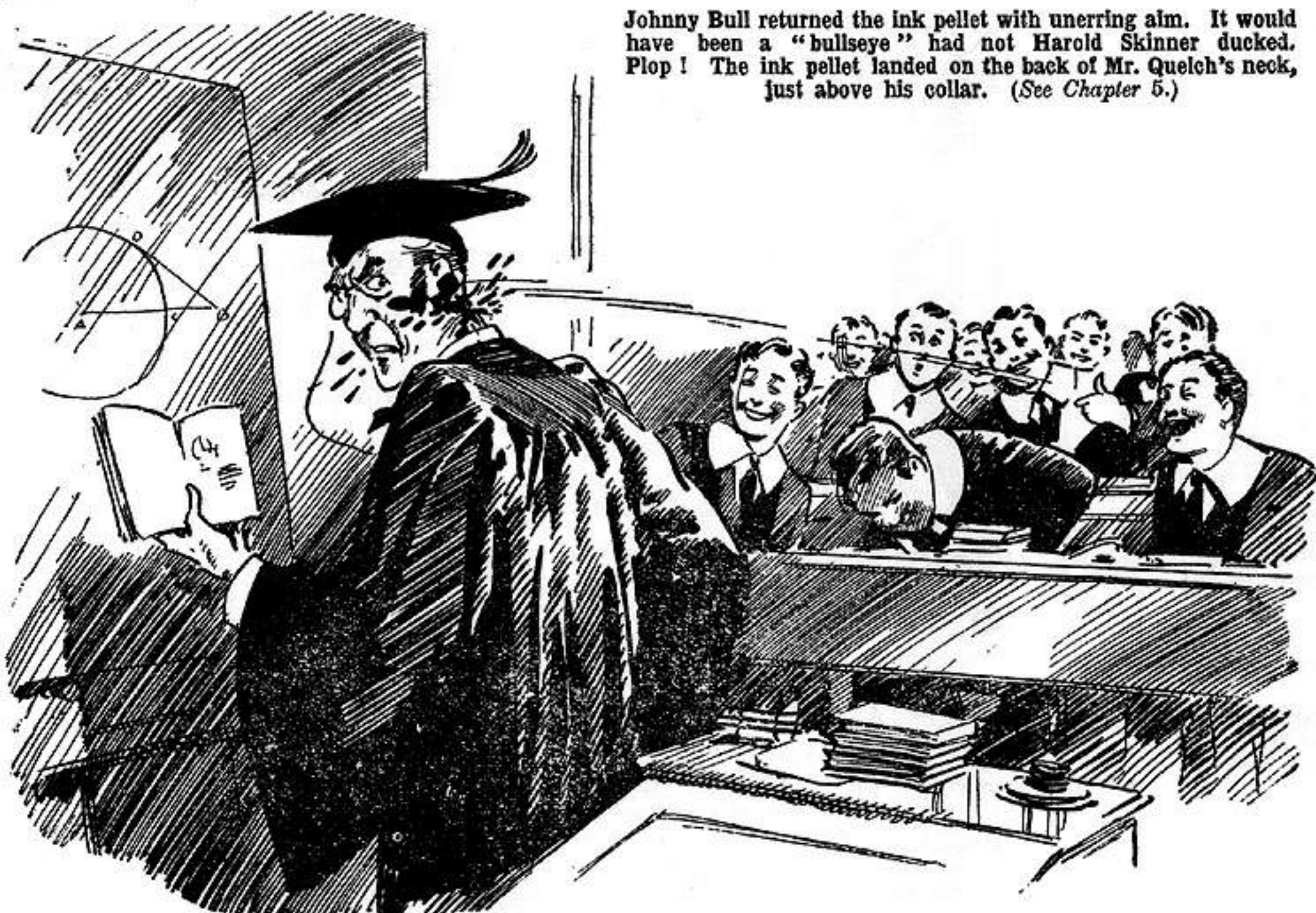
But Harold Skinner, pocketing the letter, was strolling back to Study No. 11. An idea had formed in his cunning brain—an idea that was destined to lead to startling results.

For a few moments he occupied himself with pencil and paper. Then, apparently satisfied with what he had written, Skinner withdrew from the study and retraced his steps to Study No. 1.

With a casual inquiry on his lips Skinner knocked at the door and opened it.

The study was deserted.

Two minutes later Harold Skinner was back in his own quarters, with Wharton's exercise-book in his possession. There he drew pen and ink before him and several clean sheets of paper. But before he commenced the task he



Johnny Bull returned the ink pellet with unerring aim. It would have been a "bullseye" had not Harold Skinner ducked. Plop! The ink pellet landed on the back of Mr. Quelch's neck, just above his collar. (See Chapter 5.)

had in mind the cad of the Remove looked his study door on the inside.

For the next two hours all that could be heard in Study No. 11 was the scratching of a pen as it travelled over various sheets of paper.

That unfinished letter of Harry Wharton's was destined to add to the discord that now reigned in the circle once known as the Famous Five!

"Cherry!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Who wants me?"

Bob Cherry, who was just struggling through the finishing stages of his prep. that evening, looked up as his name was called, but the cheery expression on his face faded somewhat when he saw that his visitor was Harold Skinner. Bob had as little to do with the cad of the Remove as he possibly could.

"Cherry!"

Skinner's voice contained a note of excitement.

"Well?"

"Have you seen the notice-board?" said Skinner.

Bob shook his head.

"Is the Saturday footer list up, then?" he asked.

This time Skinner shook his head.

"Nothing to do with the footer," he replied. "But something to do with you—and Inky, and Johnny Bull, and Nugent!"

Bob looked perplexed.

"Something to do with us?" he ejaculated. "What on earth are you burbling about?"

Skinner chuckled.

"Go and see for yourselves," he said mysteriously, and departed from the study before Bob could question him further.

Bob looked at his prep. and then threw down his pen. Skinner's words had intrigued him. What possibly

could be on the notice-board that affected him and his chums? He rose to his feet and went down the passage, collecting on route as it were Inky, Johnny Bull, and Frank Nugent, just as Harold Skinner had anticipated.

"What's the giddy idea?" asked Nugent. "What's on the notice-board about us?"

"Blessed if I know," returned Bob Cherry. "But we'll soon see."

In silence the chums tramped down to the notice-board. Quite a small crowd had gathered there.

"Here's a go!" Vernon-Smith was saying. "So this is what Wharton thinks of his dear pals, is it?"

"What's that?" demanded Bob.

Vernon-Smith chuckled.

"Make way, you chaps, and let these fellows see for themselves."

The crowd made a passage for Bob and his companions. Together they stood in front of the notice-board.

On it were several school notices. But that which captured Bob's and his chum's attention was a letter in the unmistakable handwriting of Harry Wharton. Above the letter, in capitals, was another piece of paper bearing the following:

"FOUND IN THE REMOVE PASSAGE."

"This is a letter," said Bob angrily. "It's Wharton's letter—nothing to do with us."

"Hear, hear!" agreed Nugent; whilst Inky added that the "hear-hearfulness" was terrific.

"Read it, you chaps!" called out Ogilvy. "It'll interest you!"

Bob glared round indignantly at the assembled juniors.

"I'm not in the habit of reading other chap's correspondence!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't the chap who found the letter return it to the proper quarter?"

"Well, one can't be certain whom it belongs to," said Vernon-Smith. "The dashed thing isn't signed."

"Well, most of the fellows know Wharton's handwriting," grunted Johnny Bull. "Come on, you chaps, let's get off!"

"Here, hold on!" called out Snoop. "You haven't seen it yet! It'll interest you, believe me. Wharton opens his mind about you."

But Bob and his chums were pushing their way out of the crowd. They had no desire to pry into Wharton's letter, and but for the fact that they were not on speaking terms, that letter would have been taken down from the notice-board and returned to its owner.

But they were not destined to get clear of that crowd until they had heard the tit-bits in that letter concerning themselves. Snoop was reading aloud, and his words came clearly to Bob and his chums. They found themselves listening in spite of all. The letter ran:

"My Dear Uncle,—I cannot stay in this school a day longer than is absolutely necessary. I am very unhappy. I have been wronged—wronged by those whom I accounted my friends. I feel that if I don't leave here I shall go mad. Mr. Quelch is a tyrant; he has his knife into me. My own friends—those whom I trusted—are base to the core. I have found them out in their true colours. Of the lot, Johnny Bull is the worst. He's cunning and deceitful; he has poisoned the minds of Cherry, Nugent and Singh against me. These three have lied about me behind my back; they have blackened me—and I was their friend. You must take me away, uncle, as quickly as possible, and—"

Snoop stopped reading there; he had to, for that was how the letter finished. (Continued on page 16.)

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(Continued from page 13.)

All eyes were on Bob Cherry & Co. as Snoop stopped. The Co. were looking furious, as well they might. With a roar of rage Bob Cherry pushed his way through the crowd and secured the letter. Then, accompanied by his chums and a whole stream of Removites, he started for Study No. 1.

"We'll make the sneaking rotter eat his words, even if we have to push the letter down his dashed throat," growled Johnny Bull. "Come on!"

And with grim faces the Co. unknowingly hastened to further the despicable plot Harold Skinner had engineered. From a safe distance Skinner watched the party tramp off.

"That'll be another spoke in the wheel of Mister High and Mighty Wharton, or my name's not what it is," he muttered.

And highly satisfied with the way things had gone, and were still going, for that matter, the cad of the Remove repaired to his study for a surreptitious smoke and a perusal of a pink sporting paper.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Lord Mauleverer Butts In!

TAP! Harry Wharton looked up from the book he was reading, with a frown of annoyance, as that knock sounded on the door of Study No. 1.

Tap!

Wharton returned to his book.

Tap!

Still he gave no sign that he had heard.

The door opened and the elegant figure of Lord Mauleverer came into view. It was unusual to see the schoolboy earl on his feet at such an hour, for Lord Mauleverer was born tired, and most of his leisure moments were spent curled up on the study sofa.

"Hallo, old bean!" drawled his lordship, giving the captain of the Remove a cheery grin.

But Wharton's face did not relax. The sullen frown seemed as if it had come to stay.

"I've just dropped in, you know," began Lord Mauleverer.

"Hem!"

Wharton's tone was not promising, but Mauly was evidently determined not to see offence in anything, for he beamed good-naturedly at the captain of the Remove.

"D'you mind if I take a pew, old bean? I'm feelin' frightfully fagged, you know."

And without waiting for any reply the schoolboy earl seated himself on the nearest chair. Wharton closed his book and looked inquiringly at his visitor.

"What do you want?"

"I've just dropped in, you know," said his lordship, with a genial smile. "Thought I'd pass the time of day."

"Oh!"

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Wharton's tone implied that now Lord Mauleverer had "dropped in" he could drop out again. But if Mauly read that he paid no heed.

"I hate buttin' in on other chappies' affairs, old bean," he said. "But I've just heard of the trouble."

Wharton could hardly suppress a smile. Considering that the "trouble" had been talked about all over the Remove for two days, at least, it was surprising that his lazy lordship had only "just" heard of it.

"Well, what is the trouble?" asked Wharton.

"You see," began his lordship, "when the happy harmony of five decent fellows is suddenly upset it worries a chap who's sort of interested in all five, what?"

"Does it?"

"Yaas. I'm not a chap for noticin' things, as a rule," continued Lord Mauleverer. "An' I'm the last merchant in the world to butt in on other people's affairs. But if you'll excuse me bein' so frank, old bean, I really must say that I'm deuced surprised and upset to see that there's trouble between you an' the rest."

"Are you?"

"Yaas. Life's jolly short, you know," said Lord Mauleverer vaguely. "An' there's no time for chappies to fall out with each other over a misunderstandin' and—"

"Oh, you think there's a misunderstanding, do you?" asked Wharton, and some of his sullen moodiness dropped from him. Mauly—good old lazy Mauly—was like a tonic to him.

"Yaas," drawled the slacker of the Remove. "I'm convinced that there's a misunderstandin' somewhere—somehow," he added. "I don't profess to know why. But if a fellow, meanin' well, can offer a little advice, why not shake and call it all square again?"

Wharton smiled grimly. He could see himself doing that.

"Misunderstandin's are always crop-pin' up," went on his lordship. "They're awfully tirin' and they leave a nasty taste in the mouth, what?"

Wharton nodded.

"Look here, old bean," drawled Mauly, "I know you, an' I know the rest of the Co. All good sorts. A bit too energetic for my likin' you know, but still, all of the best. Look at the way old Bob Cherry plays footer—"

Wharton found himself interested.

"Oh, Bob's a rare good footballer," he agreed.

"A rare good chappie altogether," drawled his lordship. "An' Johnny Bull's a wonderful back."

"He is!" exclaimed Wharton, forgetting for the nonce his tiff with that individual.

Lord Mauleverer stifled a yawn with great difficulty and continued. To hear him talk "footer" was a novelty, for Mauly, the born-tired slacker, had little love for the energetic winter game.

"Do you remember how Inky played in the match with St. Jim's?" was his next question. "Scored the only goal an'—"

"It was a peach of a shot, too," chimed in Wharton. And then, with a sudden start: "But you weren't at the match!"

Lord Mauleverer was taken aback for the moment, but he quickly recovered himself.

"Nunno, old bean. But Vivian was full of it after the match. I was tryin' to get forty winks, an' he would persist in tellin' me all about it."

Wharton eyed the dandy of the Remove shrewdly.

"Look here, Mauly, I can see your game," he said.

"Oh, gad!"

"And I know enough of you to understand that your intentions are good," continued the captain of the Remove. "You've come here to patch up our trouble and—"

"By gad!" said his lordship. "An' I thought I was so diplomatic that you wouldn't notice it, dear boy."

Wharton had to smile, despite himself, and Mauly, again stifling a yawn, smiled in return.

"You know, old bean, I've been givin' quite a lot of my time to you," he said. "Instead of takin' forty winks on the sofa this afternoon I did a bit of thinkin'. Horrid job, thinkin'. Makes a fellow sleepy. But I restrained the impulse an' kept awake."

"I wasn't worth it," said Wharton.

"That's where you're wrong, dear boy," said his lordship. "I'd give up my afternoon nap for—for a week if I could see you crowd all smilin' again. You must think of the footer, too—"

"Footer doesn't interest you."

"Yaas it does," drawled Lord Mauleverer, "if I can get a good seat. But, really, the fellows are already sayin' that the footer will go to pot now that you an' the rest are not on good terms. That won't do," added his lordship seriously.

"Oh!"

"No. You're a whale for footer, an'—an' all that sort of thing. It's up to you to keep things runnin' smoothly. But you can't do that if you're not on good terms with four of the best men, what?"

"You're suggesting that the present state of affairs is all my fault?" asked Wharton curtly.

His lordship made a hasty gesture.

"Nothin' of the kind, dear man."

"But the fellows think so," said Wharton bitterly. "They think I'm a sneak."

"Oh!"

Wharton's face grew grim.

"Do you think I'm a sneak?"

Mauly shook his head.

"Of course not, dear man!"

"Well, you heard all that passed in the Form-room the other day," said the captain of the Remove.

Mauly shook his head.

"No, I didn't; old bean."

Wharton looked puzzled.

"But you were there," he said.

"Yaas," grinned his lordship, "but I was improvin' the shinin' hour with a nap. Fellow can't be expected to keep awake all day, you know. An' English History's an awful bore, any-way."

Wharton smiled.

"Well, you're the only chap in the Remove who doesn't think that I sneaked on Bull," he said.

"Not a bit of it," replied Mauly.

"Why, your own friends didn't believe it—not really. It's my belief that you could have explained matters if you had liked."

"Oh!"

"I'm not sermonisin'," went on Mauleverer, "but I know how sensitive you are, an' know how proud you are. If a fellow thought a wrong thing about you, an' that fellow happened to be someone you liked very much, you wouldn't take the trouble of explainin' things, would you?"

Wharton's face crimsoned, for Mauly's words were very near the truth.

"You see—" he began, and then fell silent.

"If I can be presumptuous enough to give you advice," said the slacker of the Remove, "I'd suggest that you have it out with your friends, an' done with it,

Explain matters. After all, if you have a friend he's worth keepin', isn't he?"

Wharton nodded.

"An' if he's worth keepin'," went on his lordship, "he's worth talkin' to an' confidin' in when matters go wrong."

"There's a lot in what you say," conceded the captain of the Remove. "You're a good chap, Mauly, although you're a slacker, and I've half a mind to do what you suggest. Perhaps I have been a bit of a beast—a bit hasty and—and bad-tempered."

Mauly's face brightened.

"I thought you'd see reason," he said. "Some of the fellows reckon you're headstrong and obstinate an'—an'—"

"Do they?"

"Yaas," said his lordship innocently. "But they're wrong. Do you know, old bean, I'd do anythin' to see you five together again."

"You're very good."

"Not a bit of it. I'd even—even play footer every day for a week," went on his lordship earnestly, "if you'd get together and chin matters over."

Wharton was moved. The idea of Lord Mauleverer, who loathed anything in the shape of exertion, turning out for footer every day for a whole week was amazing, and it went to show in what regard Lord Mauleverer held Harry Wharton.

There was a silence in the study for a few moments. Wharton was thinking. Should he follow Mauly's advice and make the first move towards a reconciliation? He asked himself several times whether, after all, it was up to him, for his was a proud and sensitive nature, with a good mixture of stubbornness. It was a fight, and Mauly, watching anxiously the changing expressions in Wharton's face, began to think his mission had been in vain. But he brightened up considerably when Wharton spoke.

"I think you're right, Mauly," he said at length. "Perhaps it is up to me to explain things. After all, I could have done so right from the very start. But I was hurt about something."

Mauly's eyes were shining. He rose from the armchair, and placed a friendly arm round the shoulders of the captain of the Remove.

"Good man!" exclaimed his lordship. "You'll excuse me if I buzz, won't you? I feel frightfully fagged to-day, an' I thought I'd have a nap while Vivian's doin' my beastly prep. So-long, old bean!"

And his lazy lordship lounged out of the study.

For three or more minutes Wharton paced up and down the study, thinking things over. It had cost him something to say to Lord Mauleverer that he would make the first effort towards effecting a reconciliation, and already he was beginning to waver. But at length his better nature won. He would do as he had said.

Wharton moved towards the door, his intention being to seek his chums.

Crash!

The door flew open suddenly, and Johnny Bull, closely followed by Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and a crowd of Removites, poured into the study.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. Chums at Blows!

HARRY WHARTON stepped back, his face a picture of astonishment.

"You rotter!" exclaimed Johnny Bull, shaking his fist almost under Wharton's nose.

"You cad!" said Bob Cherry, with a curl of the lip; whilst Inky and Frank Nugent eyed their one-time chum with scorn.

"What does this mean?" said the captain of the Remove coldly.

"Mean?" snorted Bob Cherry, brandishing the letter before Wharton's face. "Mean? You awful worm! You cad!"

Wharton's eyes blazed.

"Better language, please!" he snapped, keeping his temper in check.

"There's no language bad enough for you, you sneaking, lying cad!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Hear, hear!"

The chorus came from the crowd of Removites who had followed the Co. into Study No. 1.

Wharton faced the mob of excited juniors, strangely calm, his temper well in hand.

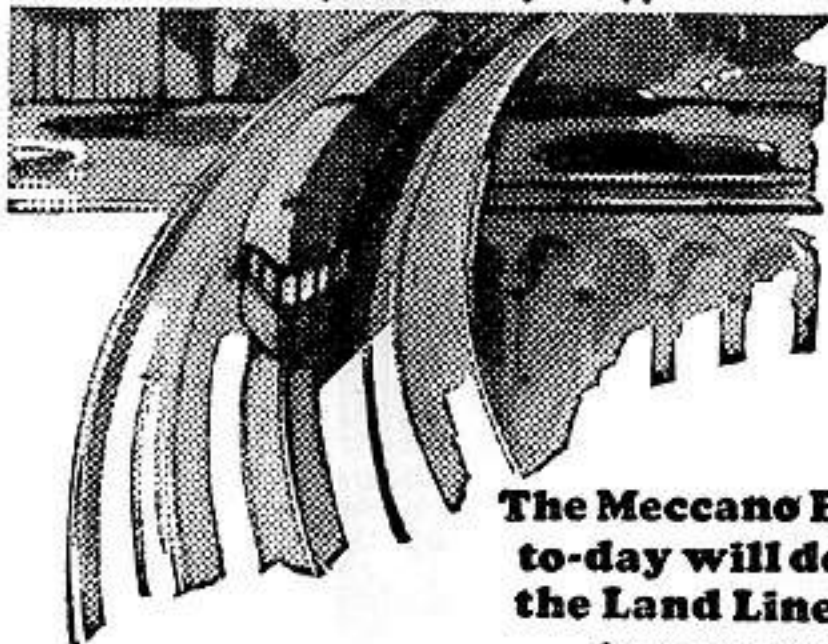
"If that's what you all think of me," he said coldly, "there's no need to barge into a chap's study like a lot of silly fags to tell me is there?"

(Continued on next page.)



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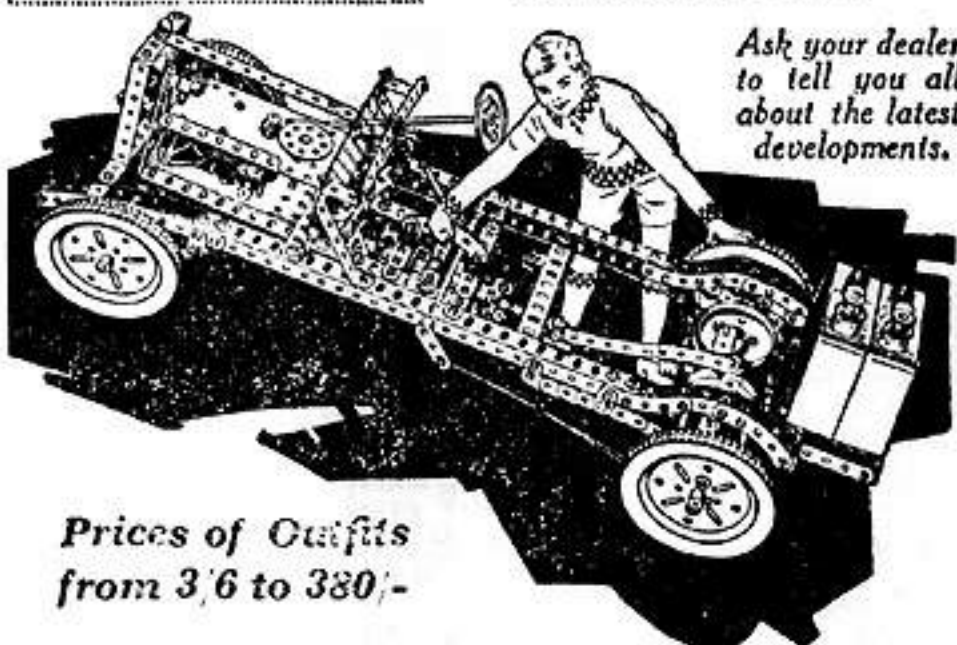
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There was a lash in his words, and his lip curved scornfully as he looked from one junior to the other.

Johnny Bull snorted.

"You're not going to get out of it like that, you worm!" he said hotly, snatching the letter from Bob Cherry.

Wharton started as he caught sight of the letter, and that anger which up to now he had kept well under control rapidly began to swell to ungovernable limits.

"That's my letter," he said harshly.

"And well we know it!" said Johnny Bull heatedly.

Wharton's lip curled.

"So those who were once my friends have taken to prying into my letters, have they?"

"Nothing of the sort," answered Nugent. "That letter was posted up on the notice board. It was found apparently by somebody or other who knows more about you than we've ever known."

Wharton eyed Nugent steadily.

"What do you mean?" he asked tensely. "Who found that letter?"

"I don't know who found it," said Nugent heatedly. "But I'm jolly glad it was found. We know the sort of cad we've been chumming with now!"

"Hear, hear!"

Wharton's eyes blazed.

"I left that letter, like an idiot, on this table a few hours ago. I wondered what had happened to it when I came in. But I didn't expect to find that one of you had taken it."

"None of us took it!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "And you know it."

Wharton snatched the letter roughly out of Johnny Bull's hand. That sturdy junior sneered.

"Yes, you'd better have it!" he said scornfully. "I expect you're wishing you hadn't been so frank in that letter. I'm cunning and deceitful, am I?" he added, shaking a knuckled fist in Wharton's face. "I'll make you eat those words!"

Wharton looked perplexed. Some instinct told him to read the letter. All eyes were on him as he did so; all eyes saw him start; saw the veins swelling in his face as overwhelming rage consumed him.

"And you chaps think I wrote this?" he asked mockingly, when he had finished.

"Isn't it your writing?" snapped Bob Cherry. "Of course, you've only got to say that it isn't, if you want to back out of it!"

Wharton gave Bob a peculiar look, and then his handsome face hardened. He had been willing to explain—willing to tell them that the letter he had started to write in a moment of weakness had evidently fallen into the hands of an enemy who had forged his handwriting, and added passages to that letter, for which he, Wharton, had certainly never been responsible, even in his worst moments of bitterness. He had been about to explain, and doubtless his explanation would have cooled the hotheads there. But once again his arrogant pride took full possession of him. Why should he explain, he asked himself? If these fellows, once his closest chums, thought that he was capable of such baseness, let them go on thinking.

He was icy cool now. That sudden welling of rage which had surged through him upon reading that tampered letter was gone now, leaving just bitterness.

"Well," demanded Johnny Bull, "what have you got to say?"

Wharton's lip curled.

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"Nothing!" he said.

"What?"

"Nothing!" repeated the captain of the Remove mockingly. "Now, I'll trouble you all to clear out!"

"Oh, will you!" hooted Johnny Bull. "If you think you're going to crawl out of it as easily as that you're jolly well mistaken!"

"Indeed!" sneered Wharton; and he half turned his back on the irate Johnny.

That was more than the pent up feelings of Johnny Bull would suffer. He sprang at Wharton, gripped him fiercely by the shoulder, and swung him round.

"Hands off!" said Wharton, with glittering eyes.

Smack!

Bull's open palm cracked across Wharton's cheek like the crack of a whip.

"Now, you cad!" hissed Johnny Bull.

A livid mark showed on Wharton's cheek where Bull's hand had landed.

"That's the second time you've done that," said the captain of the Remove; "and this time you won't get away with it!"

"Come on, you cad!"

In a moment the two were at it hammer-and-tongs.

Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent made an ineffectual effort to separate them.

"Stop it, Johnny!"

"Not here, Harry!" pleaded Nugent.

But Bull and the captain of the Remove were deaf to their entreaties. They were fighting like wild-cats.

The crowd of juniors pressed back to the walls of the study to give the combatants as much room as they could.

Tramp, tramp!

Up and down in that limited space the two of them fought, neither asking for quarter or receiving any. Bull's eyes were already beginning to close; whilst a stream of crimson was flowing from Wharton's nose.

But it was apparent to the onlookers that the fight would leave the captain of the Remove the victor. Johnny Bull had heaps of pluck, but he was not in the same street as his opponent.

Wharton drove Bull round the study under a furious onslaught.

Biff! Thud! Smack!

Three blows Wharton got in on the face of his erstwhile chum in as many seconds, and the third lifted Johnny Bull off his feet.

Crash!

He collapsed to the carpet with a loud thud.

"Man down!"

Wharton, breathing a trifle hard, stood back. His face was pale, his lips were set, and his eyes were glittering. All his pent up feelings of the last few days were finding an outlet in this encounter.

"Up you get, Johnny!" urged Bob Cherry.

Johnny Bull scrambled to his feet. He was a bit unsteady on his legs, but his dogged courage did not falter. He sailed in to the captain of the Remove like a battering-ram. His right fist caught Wharton a full blow on the side of the head, and this time it was the turn of the captain of the Remove to measure his length on the floor.

"Good man, Johnny!" yelled a number of Removites. "You're whacking him!"

Wharton was on his feet in a moment. That blow had caught him off his balance, and he blamed himself for not being more careful. They thought

Johnny Bull was winning. He would show them their mistake!

For the next five minutes Wharton hammered Bull right and left, and those who had been acclaiming him the victor earlier were now silent. What few cries there were came from Bob Cherry, Inky, and Frank Nugent. They were doing their best to advise Johnny how to fight his opponent.

Not one word was raised for Wharton—a circumstance that seemed to embitter him the more.

Biff, biff!

A "one-two" punch landed flush to Johnny Bull's jaw and his left eye. It succeeded in closing that left eye very effectively.

Johnny's head was reeling; he could see only out of one eye, and he realised that his strength was giving out. But surrender to Wharton—the deceiver, the sneak—was not to be thought of. With dogged pluck that enlisted the sympathy of all the juniors present, he fought Wharton toe to toe.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The noise in the study was considerable. Fellows were rushing to the spot to inquire what the row was about. The news soon spread that there was a fight on between the captain of the Remove and Johnny Bull, and in a few minutes the passage outside Study No. 1 was packed with Removites. On the fringe of the crowd stood Harold Skinner. The cad of the Remove was looking highly pleased with himself; his scheming was bearing fruit.

"Man down!"

Again Johnny Bull dropped to the floor under a terrific straight left.

Wharton stood back, his chest heaving. The ferocity was beginning to die out of him now. He regretted that he had succumbed to the temptation to fight Johnny Bull. But as he looked round on the hostile faces in the study his heart hardened.

"Get up, Johnny!" said Bob Cherry anxiously.

Johnny Bull raised himself on one elbow.

"I'm not done yet!" he said doggedly.

And he wasn't. He scrambled to his feet, and once again the two were fighting fiercely. But it was apparent that Johnny Bull was a defeated man. Few of his blows landed, and those that did carried very little power in them. His face was badly marked; whilst Wharton, but for a darkening eye and a slightly swollen nose, was practically as fit as when he had started the fight.

"I've had enough if you have," said Wharton quietly.

"Come on, you rotter!" muttered Bull thickly, and he made a rush at Wharton.

The captain of the Remove side-stepped, and an opening was presented of giving Bull the knock-out. But Wharton did not accept the chance. He just guarded himself from Bull's sailing fists.

"You're playing with me!" said Bull thickly. "Oh, you rotter!"

Wharton's face hardened again. He was not playing with his old chum—but he was trying to spare him further punishment.

"Stop the fight!" said Nugent. "Johnny can hardly stand!"

"I'm all right!" panted Johnny Bull. "This is a fight to a finish!"

He pushed Bob Cherry aside and made a last and desperate effort to beat his opponent. Wharton reeled under a number of heavy blows, and he was compelled to retaliate.



Frank Nugent sprang forward and seized Johnny Bull by the arm. Bob Cherry took his other arm and between them the two juniors dragged him back. "Let me go!" hissed Johnny Bull. "I'll smash the cad!" "Keep cool!" urged Nugent. "You don't want to scrap with Wharton." "Don't I?" roared Bull. "Just you let me get at the rotter!" (See Chapter 6.)

Smack!

A right hook shook Johnny Bull to his knees. He groped for his balance and righted himself.

Thud!

A straight left took him full on the jaw, and that proved to be the last blow of the fight. Johnny Bull dropped like a sack and lay still.

No cheers acclaimed the victor. Hostile glances met Harry Wharton on every side. His old chums, beyond giving him reproachful glances, ignored him.

Wharton, with one last look at Johnny Bull, who showed signs of coming to, strode towards the door. The juniors made way for him as he passed. Lord Mauleverer, on the very outskirts of the crowd, plucked Wharton by the arm.

"What's happened, old bean? I've only just got here."

Wharton shook off Mauleverer's detaining arm without replying and went on his way to the bath-room. The schoolboy earl looked after him, dismay written in every line of his face.

"Oh gad!" he murmured. "He's been scrappin'!"

And Lord Mauleverer's dismay increased when he learned with whom Wharton had been fighting and for what reason. Despite all the slacker's well intentioned efforts, nothing good had come of them. Far from being reconciled to his chums, the captain of the Remove was now on worse terms than ever, which was very upsetting to Lord Mauleverer, but a matter of great satisfaction to Harold Skinner.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Detained

HARRY WHARTON'S victory over Johnny Bull brought him very little kudos. His Form-fellows avoided him from that moment onwards, and it was left to Mr. Quelch to make any comment on it.

It was in the Form-room the following morning that the Remove master's eagle eye spotted the battered countenance of Johnny Bull. That hapless junior had two beautiful specimens of black eyes, in addition to which his lips were puffed, and his nose had a list to port, as it were.

Mr. Quelch frowned strong disapproval.

"You have been fighting, Bull?"

"Y-yes, sir," said Johnny uncomfortably.

"With whom?" rapped out the master of the Remove.

Johnny Bull looked helplessly at Wharton, and received a mocking grin in return.

"With whom have you been fighting, Bull?"

"Wharton, sir," said Johnny Bull, crimsoning.

Mr. Quelch looked surprised. He had imagined that the captain of the Remove and Johnny Bull were on the best of terms. This outward and visible sign of the contrary, so to speak, came as a shock to him.

He turned a disapproving glance in Wharton's direction and perceived what had at first escaped him—that one of

Wharton's eyes was encircled with a faint purple hue.

"Disgusting!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "How dare you boys present yourselves in class in such a condition!"

Really there was no answer to such a remark. Neither of the juniors concerned was a collector of black eyes, so to speak. They were visitations that had to be endured when they came.

"Revolting!" said Mr. Quelch. "You boys have been fighting without gloves?"

He looked at Wharton, and received a sardonic grin in return. He looked at Johnny Bull, and Johnny blinked.

"That much is obvious!" snapped the master of the Remove bitingly. "Both of you know that it is strictly against the rules of the school to settle differences without the gloves. I am shocked and disgusted with you both. You will both take a hundred lines!"

With that the lesson proceeded. Wharton several times came in for his Form master's displeasure, but he seemed to care little about that. In fact, it seemed that he went out of his way to court trouble.

When the Form was dismissed that morning Mr. Quelch beckoned to Harry Wharton to remain.

Wharton did so sulkily.

"Am I right in assuming that you and your friend have fallen out, Wharton?" he said.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"There is no harm in your assuming anything, sir," he replied impertinently.

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Mr. Quelch's face hardened.

"That is not the way to speak to your Form master, Wharton," he said sternly. "But perhaps you are not yourself; this—this quarrel has upset you."

Wharton shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

"I don't wish to pry into your private affairs, my boy," said the master of the Remove at length, "but, as your Form master, it is my duty to warn you that you are treading on dangerous ground. Your behaviour during the last few days has been anything but exemplary. I warn you to proceed carefully."

Still Wharton was silent. But there was a slight smile on his face, which angered his Form master.

"I gave you some lines the other day, Wharton—" began Mr. Quelch.

"A thousand, sir," said Wharton, with a curl of the lip, "and a hundred this morning; that makes eleven hundred."

"You have not done them?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Quelch's stern features grew more stern.

"Very well. You have until two o'clock to-morrow to do them. If they are not handed in to me by that time you will be detained for the half-holiday. You understand?"

Wharton nodded.

"You may go!" said Mr. Quelch coldly.

And the captain of the Remove lounged out of the Form-room. He smiled to himself as he walked along. Eleven hundred lines. Mr. Quelch was an optimist if he expected Wharton to write eleven hundred lines by the morrow.

"I'm hanged if I'll do the rotten lines," muttered Wharton, as he entered his study. "Quelch or no Quelch."

He sat in the armchair and for the twentieth time read the letter which had led to his fight with Johnny Bull. Whose hand was responsible for this stab in the back he did not know, for he could think of no one despicable enough to do such a thing. Yet obviously someone—someone inside the school had done it. And his friends had accused him. He told himself that they ought to have known him better, and yet when he looked at the writing he almost deceived himself into believing that he had written those defamatory words, so clever was the imitation of his handwriting.

With a bitter laugh Wharton tore the letter into fragments and pitched them into the fire. He watched them burn, and was still staring moodily at the charred ash when the study door opened and Vernon-Smith looked in.

"Oh, here you are," he said diffidently.

Wharton looked round, but said nothing.

The Bouncer coughed.

"The fellows are wondering about to-morrow's match with St. Jim's," he said.

"Well, what about it?" asked Wharton sullenly.

"Some of the chaps think that you'll let 'em down," said the Bouncer. "Mind you, I don't believe that," he hastened to add, "but as vice-captain I thought it was up to me to come and see you about it."

"Well, you've seen me," snapped Wharton, implying that Vernon-Smith could now take his leave.

The Bouncer crimsoned.

"Oh, you needn't snap my head off," he retorted. "Keep that for your friends."

And he made as if to depart.

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"Hold on, Smithy," said Wharton, relenting a little.

The Bouncer stopped.

"I shan't let the fellows down to-morrow—that is if they want me to turn out," said Wharton.

"Well, you're captain of the Remove!"

"So I am," said Wharton, with a peculiar smile. "I'll post the list up in an hour's time."

He was as good as his word. When the Removites went along to the board they found the usual list of names down on the programme for the match with Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's. Wharton had included himself, likewise the names of his one-time friends—a proceeding that amazed no one more than Skinner & Co., who doubtless expected that Wharton would make capital out of his split with the rest of the Co. by leaving them out of the footer match.

Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Inky, and Frank Nugent looked at the list and then looked at each other.

"We're down as usual," said Bob.

"I—I—I suppose we shall have to play."

"The supposefulness is terrific, my esteemed chums," purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "We cannot letfully let the esteemed and ludicrous team down by absenting our worthy selves."

His chums nodded. Whatever their differences with Harry Wharton, it was up to them to stand in with the rest of the junior eleven. In such matters personal feelings had to be sunk. That it would be just as difficult for Wharton, perhaps more difficult, they were the first to realise.

Yet, despite that list on the board, there were some juniors who held the idea that it was all a blind; that in some fashion Harry Wharton would let the eleven down. Wharton, as a matter of fact, overheard Skinner remarking as much to Snoop and Stott, and it made him all the more determined that, Mr. Quelch or no Mr. Quelch, he would be with the team when they arrived at St. Jim's.

Yet it was not to be.

On the following morning, after lunch, Mr. Quelch stopped Harry Wharton.

"Have you finished your lines, Wharton?" asked the master of the Remove.

"Not yet, sir," replied Wharton, quite truthfully. He hardly saw fit to add that he hadn't even made a start upon them.

All the same for that, Mr. Quelch was suspicious.

"You understand, Wharton, that unless those lines are delivered to me before two o'clock you will be detained for the afternoon?"

"I remember what you've said, sir," replied the captain of the Remove coolly.

Mr. Quelch rustled majestically on his way, leaving Wharton gazing after him with a mocking smile on his face.

Just before two o'clock the footballers gathered in the Hall. Wharton was changing in the Remove dormitory.

"Shall we wait for Wharton?" asked Bull.

"Let's go on alone," suggested Peter Todd. "I expect he'd much sooner we did that."

The members of the junior eleven nodded. Not one of them was particularly desirous of taking the journey to St. Jim's in the company of such a disagreeable fellow as Harry Wharton was these days.

"I'll just trot up to the dorm to tell him," said Vernon-Smith. "You fellows go on."

"Right-ho!"

The footballers moved off, Vernon-Smith taking the Remove staircase to

the dormitory three steps at a time.

Wharton was just packing his football boots in a small bag when the Bouncer came upon the scene.

"The fellows have gone on," said Vernon-Smith.

"Good!" said Wharton. "I didn't expect them to wait for me. I'll travel down on my own."

And he went on with his packing. The Bouncer lingered a moment or two and then left the dormitory. He joined the rest of the team at the gates.

"He's coming along on his own," he said. "Step it out, you men, it's a bit nippy."

Meantime, Harry Wharton was descending the Remove staircase. The clock in the passage told him that it was five minutes past two. He grimaced as he recollected Mr. Quelch's words. Eleven hundred lines by two o'clock or he would be gated for the afternoon.

That he was simply asking for trouble in thus defying his Form-master did not worry Harry Wharton. He had reached that state of mind where he cared little about anything. One thing he was looking forward to, however, was the match with St. Jim's.

Moving with caution, Harry Wharton passed Mr. Quelch's door and congratulated himself that he had "got away with it." But his congratulations came too early, for as the Removite neared the School House door a figure stepped out from the window-seat.

It was Mr. Quelch!

Wharton started.

There was thunder in Mr. Quelch's brow as he eyed the captain of the Remove.

"Where are your lines, boy?"

"I haven't done them, sir," said Wharton, with a sinking at the heart.

"In spite of all I said," remarked Mr. Quelch icily. "Very well, Wharton, you will go into the Form-room at once."

"But I'm wanted at St. Jim's, sir," said Wharton. "There's a footer match on to-day; we're playing the junior eleven!"

"Indeed!" snapped the master of the Remove coldly. "You should have thought of that before. Go to the Form-room!"

"But, sir—" began Wharton defiantly.

"Go to the Form-room!"

Still Wharton did not move. He was contemplating whether it was worth making a bolt for it, but he realised that if he succeeded in doing that Mr. Quelch had only to telephone Dr. Holmes at St. Jim's, state the circumstances, and request him to stop Mr. Quelch's recalcitrant pupil from participating in the match.

The master of the Remove seemed to read something of what was passing in Wharton's mind for he waited a second or two and then, seeing that Wharton showed no signs of going to the Form-room, promptly seized him by the shoulder and propelled him there.

"You will stay here until four o'clock, wretched boy," thundered the master of the Remove. "I will set you a task, and if it is not completed by four o'clock you will be detained every half-holiday until it is."

"Thank you, sir!"

"You are an incorrigible and rebellious boy these days," went on Mr. Quelch sternly. "You are taxing my patience severely. Be careful you do not go too far!"

And Mr. Quelch rustled out of the Form-room. At the door he stopped and glanced back. The insolent smile on Wharton's face seemed to decide something which was passing in the Form

master's mind, for he pulled out a pass key and turned it in the lock.

Harry Wharton was a prisoner in the Form-room until four o'clock at least. Having locked the rebellious junior in, it was likely that Mr. Quelch would order one of the prefects to keep an eye on the Form-room windows in case the captain of the Remove should have the temerity to try and effect an escape that way.

Looking through the windows a few moments later, Wharton saw Gwynne of the Sixth in close proximity to them. Evidently he was the prefect detailed by the master of the Remove to keep watch on the detained junior.

With a sinking heart, Wharton realised that his escape was cut off that way. And all this time the Greyfriars junior eleven, minus their captain, were nearing St. Jim's. What would happen when the Removites discovered that Wharton was not on the ground?

Wharton ground his teeth in helpless rage. He recalled then Skinner's words to Snoop and Stott that it was all a "blind"—that Wharton's intention was to let the team down.

Really, it seemed that the very Fates were scheming for Harry Wharton's downfall.

For half an hour the rebellious Removite sat gnawing the handle of his pen, and then, for sheer distraction, he fell to working at the task Mr. Quelch had given him.

He had finished it long before four o'clock—not so much from fear of the consequences as from a desire to be doing something. True, Mr. Quelch, when he came in punctual to the minute, was not highly pleased with Wharton's handwriting, but he said nothing about that, being, apparently, well satisfied and somewhat pleased, to think that Wharton had at last seen the folly of defying one who held the authority of a Form master.

"You may go now, Wharton," he said, not unkindly. "And, although I have been the indirect cause of your disappointment this afternoon, I hope it will be a lesson to you."

Harry Wharton said nothing. He lounged out of the Form-room in a black mood, his hands plunged deep into his trousers-pockets. Trouble was brewing, none knew that better than Wharton himself as he took a little exercise in the Cloisters. And that trouble was destined to burst in a cloud upon his youthful shoulders before very long had passed.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sentenced by the Form!

"HERE comes the rotter!"

All eyes were turned towards the door of the Remove dormitory as Harry Wharton came in.

"The traitor!"

"The cad!"

"Who let the team down?"

"Rag him!"

Wharton's face crimsoned as he met the angry swarm of Removites, and then, with a careless shrug of the shoulders, he turned to his bed and began to undress.

It was hours after the Remove footer team had returned from St. Jim's with their "tails between their legs," as Harold Skinner had expressed it.

Tom Merry & Co. had experienced no difficulty in beating their opponents, as the score of six goals to two went to show.

But it was not the defeat at the hands of the St. Jim's juniors that rankled in the minds of the Greyfriars eleven so much. It was the fact that their captain had deliberately let them down.

Enraged beyond measure, the "ten men" had returned to Greyfriars thirsting for Wharton's blood. The news of Wharton's action in absenting himself from the match quickly spread throughout the Remove and not a voice was raised on his behalf.

No reserves had accompanied the Greyfriars team to St. Jim's, and although Tom Merry had offered to "lend" his opponents a player, Vernon-Smith had declined, believing that something must have delayed his skipper and that he would turn up after the game had started.

But Wharton had not turned up—a fact that irritated the ten Greyfriars footballers and undoubtedly served to put them off their game.

Removites had searched for Wharton in vain all the evening. It seemed as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. And, like wine, their wrath had improved with keeping.

In an angry swarm the juniors surged round Harry Wharton's bed.

"You rotter!" roared Tom Brown excitedly.

(Continued on next page.)

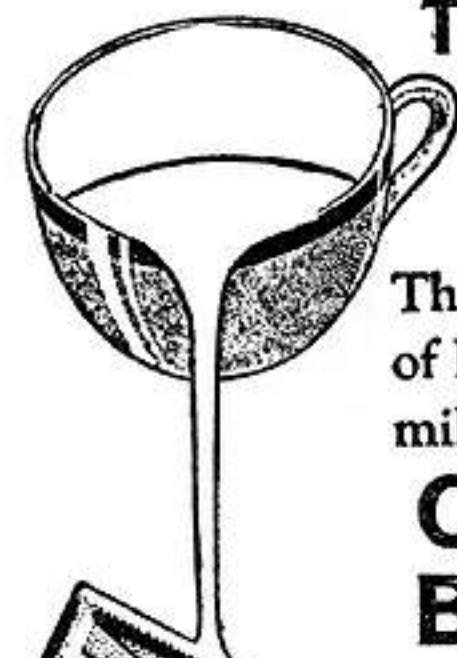
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ATHLETES TRAIN ON IT



There is half a cup of English full cream milk in every

**CADBURY
BIG MILK
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"Traitor!"

"Rag him!" hooted Bulstrode.

Wharton's lip curled. Once again it seemed that he was already condemned without a hearing.

He faced his angry Form-fellows with a scornful smile, which, naturally, only increased their wrath.

"You'll have to answer for this after lights-out," said Vernon-Smith.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"No ragging now," advised Peter Todd. "Wait until old Wingate has put out the lights."

The juniors, still discussing in strong terms the captain of the Remove's despicable action in letting his team down, continued with their undressing.

The noise died down when George Wingate put his head in at the door of the Remove dormitory to turn out the lights.

The captain of the school gave the juniors a shrewd glance. Something was in the wind—he could tell at a glance.

"No larks here to-night, mind, you kids!" he cautioned. "Good-night!"

"Good-night, Wingate!"

The captain of the school turned out the lights and retired. As soon as the tramp of his footsteps had died away down the staircase Herbert Vernon-Smith jumped out of bed.

"Fish out the candles!" he whispered. "Not too much noise, mind!"

In a moment the Remove dormitory presented a scene of great activity. Candles appeared as if by magic, and they were quickly lighted. Blankets were spread across the windows to screen the light from anyone passing in the quad below.

Wharton—with the exception of William George Bunter the only junior still in bed—regarded the scene with a disdainful glance.

"Out you get, Wharton!" growled Bulstrode truculently.

"What for?" asked the captain of the Remove. "I'm quite comfy here, thanks!"

"Out of bed, you traitor!" growled Johnny Bull. "You're going to be tried by the Form!"

"Am I?"

"Yes!" It was a regular chorus.

Wharton turned over on his side and drew the bedclothes about him—an action that infuriated his long-suffering Form-fellows. In a moment a dozen hands were plucking at those bedclothes, whilst others found a grip on Wharton and literally dragged him from the bed.

"What's this fool's game?" demanded the captain of the Remove angrily.

Peter Todd stepped in front of him.

"By order of the Form you are to be tried!" he said curtly.

Wharton grimaced and shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose I must give you silly asses your heads!" he sneered. "Get on with it!"

"We'll get on with it fast enough, you cad!" snapped Bolsover.

"Shut up, Bolsover!" said Peter Todd, who was evidently in charge of ceremonies, so to speak. "Gentlemen of the Remove," he added softly, "it is by your wish that Wharton should stand a Form trial?"

"Yes!"

"Rather!"

"Sentence the cad!"

Peter Todd, from his bed, gazed severely at the angry Removites.

"Gentlemen of the Remove, it is not customary to pass sentence until the accused has been found guilty!"

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"Well, we know he's guilty!" said Ogilvy impatiently.

"Hear, hear!"

Peter Todd waited for silence. Peter was considered the lawyer of the Remove by reason of the fact that he read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested as much of the intricate machinery of the law that his leisure time permitted—Peter being keen to follow in the footsteps of his father, who was a solicitor, when he left Greyfriars.

"Who will defend the prisoner?" he asked.

There was a silence.

Wharton broke it.

"I want no one to defend me!" he snapped.

Peter Todd wagged a finger at him severely.

"Silence in this court!" he said sternly, it being Peter's habit to take very seriously his "legal" duties. "I appoint you to defend the accused, Mauleverer!"

"Oh gad!" gasped his lordship.

"I will take over the job of prosecuting counsel," said Peter Todd modestly. "And I suggest that you should elect one of yourselves as the judge," he concluded.

There was a buzz amongst the Removites. And then George Bulstrode, a former captain of the Remove, was pushed forward as the favoured "judge."

Wharton surveyed the proceedings with a cynical smile, which intensified as Peter Todd got up to open the case for the "prosecution."

"Gentlemen of the jury—I mean, the Remove," he began, in a burst of eloquence, "the accused is here to answer the serious charge of deliberately deserting the Remove eleven—"

"Ten!" chimed in Harold Skinner, at which there was a burst of muffled laughter.

"Eleven," persisted Peter Todd, "on the occasion of their match with a representative team chosen from that well-known scholastic establishment St. Jim's."

"Oh, get on with the washing!" growled Hazeldene. "This isn't the House of Commons!"

Peter Todd gave his interrupter a severe glance.

"Those are the main facts of the case," he said impressively—"facts which it is my unpleasant duty to prove."

"Cut the cackle."

"What is your name?" asked Peter, wagging a bony finger at the captain of the Remove.

"Don't be a silly ass!" growled Wharton.

"That is not the way to answer in this court," returned Peter Todd. "I appeal to the judge."

Bulstrode, perched at the end of the bed, waved a hand irritably.

"We know the accused's name is Wharton," he said. "Get on with the facts."

Peter Todd glared at the judge, and then gave his further attention to the accused.

"Your name is Wharton; you hold the responsible position of captain of the Remove," he said severely. "Do you think that your behaviour this afternoon is in keeping with such an honourable and exalted position?"

"What behaviour?" asked Wharton sourly.

"You deliberately deserted the team," said Peter. "I put it to you—you deliberately and with malice aforethought deserted the team in—in—in their hour of need."

"Don't be a silly ass!"

"That is no answer," said Peter Todd crossly.

"Go and eat coke!"

"You refuse to answer my questions?" asked Todd, appealing to the "court" with a professional gesture.

Silence!

"Very well," said Peter. "I think the case for the prosecution is complete. It now remains to—"

"Sentence the rotter!" howled Bolsover major.

"Hear, hear!"

Peter Todd jumped up again.

"You can't do that," he protested. "Counsel for defence hasn't said a word yet."

"Oh crumbs!"

"Mauly!"

"Wake up, Mauly!"

"Oh gad!" Lord Mauleverer, who had been dozing, jumped as Ogilvy jammed a bony elbow in his ribs. "What is it?"

"Your turn to chin-wag," said Ogilvy. "You're Counsel for defence."

"Oh gad!" mumbled his lordship.

"An' I was just takin' forty winks!" The slacker of the Remove pulled himself together and rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen of the Remove," he drawled, hard put to it to stifle a yawn, "I—I—I—"

"Very lucid," grinned Skinner.

Lord Mauleverer gave Wharton an appealing glance.

"Did you or did you not desert the dashed—I mean, the cricket—that is to say, the footer team, this afternoon, old bean? I mean—"

Wharton said nothing.

"Is there any reason, old scout, why you didn't get to St. Jim's?" asked Mauly. "If there is—an' I fancy, somehow, there is—I ask you to tell these silly asses—I mean, the court."

Wharton's eyes gleamed. Lord Mauleverer, unlike most of the other juniors in the Remove, was of the opinion that there was a reason for his not being present at the footer match with St. Jim's. From Mauly's face Wharton's glance travelled to the faces of his former chums. He fancied he read condemnation there, and his heart hardened. Why should he tell these fellows that he had been detained—that he had tried his utmost to get to St. Jim's?

The court waited some moments, and still Wharton did not speak. Bulstrode rose from his seat.

"The case has been heard," he said. "Counsel for prosecution and counsel for defence have wagged their chins. Now it's up to the Form—ahem!—the jury to pass sentence—ahem!—I mean, to give their verdict. Gentlemen of the Remove—of the jury, do you find the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!"

There was only one dissentient voice, and that was Lord Mauleverer's. With a sympathetic blink in Wharton's direction, his lordship crept quietly back to his bed and slid between the sheets. Whatever transpired in that court, Mauly would no longer be a participator in it. In a few seconds his gentle snore was rumbling through the dormitory.

Bulstrode, grim of countenance, faced Harry Wharton.

"This court has found you guilty of wilfully deserting the footer team. Have you anything to say before I pass sentence on you?"

Wharton's lip curled.

"Go and eat coke!"

Bulstrode crimsoned.

"I sentence the prisoner to run the gauntlet," he said in a ringing voice, "and to be sent to Coventry!"

"Hear, hear!"

Wharton faced his Form-fellows with

clenched fists. The injustice of it all rankled. Yet it did not seem to occur to him that he could have appeased the wrath of the Remove by the simple explanation of what exactly had happened to him that afternoon.

"Get your pillows, you men!" commanded Bulstrode.

In a moment the Removites were snatching pillows from their beds. Others hastily stuffed stockings with towels; some, like Skinner & Co., selected slippers as their weapons of punishment, whilst the remainder knotted towels.

"Line up!"

While five or six juniors laid hands on Wharton and dragged him to the end of the dormitory, the remainder of the Remove lined up in two ranks. Wharton struggled furiously, but weight of numbers told. Gasping for breath, and white with rage, he was held firmly at the beginning of the avenue through which he was to run.

"Get going!" snapped Bolsover, swishing his pillow through the air.

Wharton set his teeth defiantly.

Swish, swish, swish!

Three swipes descended on his back, but he did not move.

Then, unseen by anyone, Harold Skinner pricked a pin into one of Wharton's calves. Involuntarily the captain of the Remove broke into a run.

"Give the rotter socks!"

"Lay it on!"

Whack! Swish! Smack!

A regular fusillade of blows rattled down on the back and shoulders of the captain of the Remove. Some of the juniors, fellows like Skinner & Co., were not so particular as to where their blows fell.

Whack, whack, whack!

Despite himself, Wharton found himself running—or, rather, stumbling—along the double line, a bitter rage consuming him and a sense of complete humiliation in his heart. Blows fell on him from all sides, and he was quite dizzy by the time he had staggered half-way down the avenue. Livid marks showed up on his face, positive proof that some of the "loaded" stockings that had welted him had contained articles heavier than they should have done.

"Cave!"

Hazeldene hissed the warning suddenly, but it came too late. There was the sound of an exclamation from the region of the doorway. Next moment the lights were switched on.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, stood framed in the doorway, amazement and horror in his face.

Harry Wharton, a yard from the end

Moving with caution, Harry Wharton was nearing the School House door, when Mr. Quelch stepped out. "Where are your lines, boy?" thundered the Remove master. "I haven't done them, sir," said Wharton. "There's a footer match on at St. Jim's to-day, and I'm wanted there." "Indeed!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Go to the Form-room!"

(See Chapter 10.)



of the double line, was still receiving punishment from those juniors who had not yet got in their "whack" when Mr. Quelch's rumbling voice echoed through the dormitory.

"Boys!" he thundered. "Bless my soul! Boys!"

The Removites stood stock-still, seemingly paralysed. Some hastily threw away their bolsters and pillows. Others sheepishly hid their loaded stockings and their knotted towels behind them.

"Boys, what does this mean?"

Silence!

Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes fell upon Wharton. The captain of the Remove was reeling.

"Wharton!"

The captain of the Remove pulled himself together.

"Wharton, what does this mean?" asked Mr. Quelch in scandalised accents.

Harry Wharton, biting his lip, was silent. The Removites eyed each other uncomfortably. Peter Todd coughed and stepped forward.

"I—that is, we—the Form—" he began. "You see, sir—"

"Very lucid, I'm sure!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Speak up, Todd. What does this extraordinary scene mean?"

"Wharton, sir," began Peter again—"Wharton, sir, has been tried and sentenced by the—the Form!"

"Indeed!" Mr. Quelch's eyes opened wide with amazement. "For what reason?"

Peter Todd was silent. Wharton, after all, had undergone his trial and his punishment. It wasn't quite playing the game to give Mr. Quelch the reason for it.

"I am waiting!" rumbled Mr. Quelch. "You see, sir," stammered Peter helplessly, "I—that is, we—we—we—"

Mr. Quelch's eyes seemed to pierce the hapless Peter like gimlets.

"Am I to understand, that Wharton has committed some act which has brought down on his head the condemnation of the entire Form?"

"Ye-yes, sir!"

"Then I demand to know, as his Form master—as your Form master—the exact nature of his—his offence!" said Mr. Quelch sternly.

The Removites looked at each other in helpless confusion, but no one ventured to explain.

A curious glitter came into Wharton's eyes.

He stepped forward, conscious of an ache in every limb.

"I think I can save the Form the trouble of explaining, sir," he said slowly. "I was sentenced by the Form for deserting the football team this afternoon."

Mr. Quelch started.

"You were what?" he exclaimed.

Wharton repeated his statement. Mr. Quelch looked astonished.

"Do you mean to tell me that boys

of my Form would be so unreasonable as to sentence a boy whom I had detained for the afternoon to such a brutal and humiliating punishment as—

But the rest of the master's words were drowned in a roar of surprise from the Remove.

"Detained!"

Wharton faced the astonished crowd of juniors with a mocking gaze.

Mr. Quelch looked thunderous.

"I detained Wharton this afternoon," he said grimly, "despite the fact that he informed me of his football appointment. Surely he must have made that clear to you?"

All eyes were on Wharton now.

Peter Todd gulped back something in his throat, and Bulstrode, the late "judge," discreetly withdrew to the back of the crowd.

"Wharton never told us that, sir," said Peter haltingly. "Of course, if we had known, we should never have—"

"Boys!" interrupted Mr. Quelch. "I am amazed and pained to think that members of my Form should be so unjust. You had apparently made up your minds beforehand that Wharton had deliberately deserted the team this afternoon. Why you should have cause to jump to that conclusion I don't know. But it is obvious that you did, otherwise you would have heard Wharton's explanation."

A grin began to turn the corners of Wharton's mouth. He was enjoying the situation now.

It was on the tip of Peter Todd's tongue to say that Wharton had refused to offer any explanation, but he did not say so. In the circumstances, Wharton had been treated badly enough already.

"I am sorry, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, "that this should have happened, and that I, in an indirect way, should have been the cause of it." Then to the Form: "With the exception of Wharton, every boy in the Form will take a hundred lines for this disgusting exhibition of horseplay! Return to your beds!"

Very sheepishly the Removites turned in. Mr. Quelch saw lights out once more, gave Wharton a compassionate look, and then whisked out of the dormitory. When his footsteps had died away there was a buzz in the dormitory. All the juniors were discussing the affair.

"Why didn't you explain, Wharton?" asked Peter Todd.

Silence!

"You were a silly ass not to speak up, Harry!" said Nugent softly.

Wharton did not answer that or any of the score of remarks addressed to him. His body ached from the castigation he had received, yet the culmination of that dormitory trial seemed like balm to his proud nature.

He fell asleep long before the Remove had ceased to discuss the sensation of the night.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Peter to the Rescue!

BIFF!
"Wow!"

Peter Todd jumped as he made that sudden ejaculation and caressed his left ear.

Peter was strolling in the quad the following afternoon, his thoughts centred on a certain abstruse point of law which had baffled him for many days, when something struck him.

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"Yow!" he muttered crossly. "My ear!"

He gazed about him angrily, endeavouring to see what had struck him that sudden and painful blow on the ear. Then he jumped as, a few feet away from him, he saw a fairly bulky cardboard blotting-pad. There was nothing else in the nature of a missile in sight, so it was obvious that it was the blotting-pad, doubtless the sharp corner of it, which had struck him on the ear.

If there was any doubt about it it was settled the next moment, for the head of Harold Skinner appeared at the window of his study.

"Chuck that blotter back, Todd!" he sang out.

Peter Todd glared.

"Did you shy the blessed thing out of the window, you dangerous idiot?" he demanded crossly.

"I was swiping Bunter with it, and it slipped out of my hand," said the cad of the Remove.

"Well, the dashed thing hit me on the ear!" growled Peter Todd.

Harold Skinner suppressed a grin and looked very contrite.

"Sorry!" he said.

Peter Todd, still caressing his ear, picked up the blotting-pad, and, taking aim, hurled it back to Skinner's window. As the blotting-pad sailed aloft, the top sheet of it became detached.

That single sheet fluttered to the ground, coming to rest almost at Peter's feet.

Todd was about to pass on, when something about that sheet of blotting-paper commanded his attention. Stooping, he picked it up and examined it curiously. Then he whistled. Glancing up at the window to see if he had been observed, Peter, apparently satisfied that he had not been, put the piece of paper in his pocket and went up to his study.

"I'll swear that's Wharton's writing," he muttered, taking out the piece of blotting-paper from his pocket and examining it. "I—"

He held the paper in front of the study mirror, so that the blotted writing on it would be reflected in its original formation. Then he jumped.

"Phew!"

Reflected in the mirror he saw the following words several times repeated, just as if someone had been given a single line to write out a number of times:

"Johnny Bull is the worst"

The characters were not consistently perfect, of course, but that single phrase almost made Peter Todd tremble with excitement. He recalled the letter Wharton had been taxed with writing—the letter in which Johnny Bull and Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Inky had been libelled so grossly. Then some measure of enlightenment began to dawn on Peter's brain.

The piece of blotting-paper he held had come from Skinner's study. What was that writing doing on it? Obviously it would not be Wharton's writing, for he would not write the same sentence several times—not unless he were mad. And strange as Wharton was acting these days, Todd knew that the captain of the Remove was certainly not mad.

"Forgery!" muttered Peter Todd. "I remember now, Wharton didn't actually deny writing that letter. He merely asked Bull and the others if they thought he had written it. Just like Wharton, silly ass. He could have

explained about last night's affair, but he didn't. My hat!"

Full of the excitement of his discovery, Peter Todd rushed off to find Johnny Bull, Nugent, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. He explained to them how he had come into possession of that precious piece of blotting-paper, and held it up to the study mirror for them all to see.

"It's a forgery!" said Johnny Bull, quivering with excitement.

"The strokes of the characters are slightly different each time, just as if someone were trying to copy another man's fist."

"You've hit it!" said Peter; and the rest of the Co. looked at each other in blank amazement.

"The rotten cad!" roared Bob Cherry, clenching his big fists. "If that's Skinner's dirty work I'll slaughter the rotter!"

"What about Harry?" said Nugent uncomfortably. "I've—I've a feeling that we've been a bit too ready to jump on him lately!"

There was a silence. Johnny Bull broke it at last.

"I think you're right, Frank," he said. "This matter wants looking into. Come on!"

With grim faces, the juniors followed Johnny Bull down the passage.

"Leave this to me!" whispered Peter Todd, as they neared Study No. 11.

"Right-ho, Toddy!"

Crash!

Peter Todd sent the door of Skinner's study flying open with a heavy kick.

Skinner and Snoop and Stott looked up guiltily. They were playing cards, and it was surprising how swiftly those cards disappeared from sight.

"I'm not aware that I asked you to call!" said Skinner sourly.

"You're not aware of several things," said Peter Todd, coming straight to the point.

"Eh?" said Skinner, not liking the looks of his visitors. "What do you mean?"

Peter Todd staked everything in a long shot.

"I mean that forgery is enough to send you to prison!"

Skinner's face paled, and he started to his feet.

"I mean that your rotten forgery has caused a lot of mischief in the Form," went on Todd. "In short, my forging chicken, you're bowled out!"

Snoop and Stott eyed their white-faced study-mate in amazement and alarm.

"I—I—" began Skinner, and then he stopped. Todd's accusation had swept him completely off his feet. "What do you mean?"

Peter Todd's face grew as grim as that of any judge in a High Court.

"I have in my possession proof positive that you forged the letter the Form was given to understand that Wharton wrote."

"Oh!"

The cad of the Remove backed against the wall, with pallid face and wildly-staring eyes. He tried to pull himself together, as he realised that all his cunning was recoiling on his own head.

"How dare you say such a thing!" he said furiously. "How dare you! I'll—I'll complain to the—the Head!"

Peter Todd laughed mirthlessly. He knew now that he was on the right track.

"That's just what I'm going to suggest you do," he said. "Come along!"

And Peter Todd turned on his heel.

"Where are you going?" almost shrieked Skinner.

"To the Head!" said Peter coolly. "It's my duty, anyone's duty to show up a forger!"

Skinner licked his dry lips.

"Stop!"

Peter Todd stopped.

"Well?" he asked. "Do you confess that it was you who wrote the letter?"

"I—I—wrote part of it," stammered Skinner, white as a sheet.

Snoop and Stott started. Evidently, it was news to them that their study-mate had had a hand in the writing of that sensational letter.

"You wrote part of it?" said Peter. "What part?"

Skinner almost tearfully explained. It cost him something to do so, but it meant either a confession to the Remove or a confession to Dr. Locke. And the latter, he knew, would mean a flogging and expulsion from Greyfriars. He cringed like a beaten cur as he poured out the whole miserable story; how he had added to the letter the captain of the Remove had started to write.

"You worm!" roared Bob Cherry, clenching his big fists. "You cunning, despicable cad!"

"You forger!" hissed Johnny Bull. "You'll end your days in prison."

"I—I—I only did it for a joke," wailed Skinner, not knowing how his secret had leaked out, for he had told no one. "I didn't mean any harm. I—I—I was only following up Bunter's lead—"

"What's Bunter got to do with it?" hooted Peter Todd.

"It—it was his rotten ventriloquism that made the row in the Form-room," said Skinner, "when it seemed as if Wharton was sneaking on Bull."

"Bunter!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Four members of the Famous Five looked thoroughly dismayed. It had never occurred to them for an instant that Bunter, the ventriloquist, had been responsible for that amazing affair. But now it certainly did seem possible.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Johnny Bull. "Poor old Wharton's been badly treated all along. Oh, great Scott!"

"Poor old Harry!" said Nugent softly.

Skinner eyed the juniors anxiously, fearful lest they should take him before Dr. Locke and explain the whole miserable business.

"What are we going to do with this worm?" said Peter Todd, at length. "He ought to be kicked out of the school!"

"He jolly well would be if the Head knew anything about this business."

"It—it was a joke," wailed Skinner. "I—I—I didn't mean any harm, really."

"Get out of my sight, you cunning rotter," roared Johnny Bull, "or I'll smash you!"

"Let the Form deal with him," said Peter Todd. "I fancy Skinner will be sorry he tried his hand at forgery by the time we've finished with him."

And beckoning to his four companions he tramped out of the study, to look for Billy Bunter.

That fat youth was soon discovered. He was eyeing the good things in Mrs. Mimble's window. Without loss of time Peter Todd came to the point and, in his usual obtuse way, Bunter blurted out his part in the Form-room affair.

"I—I—I only did it to get my own back on the beast for blacking my eye," protested the Owl of the Remove indignantly. "I mean, I never imitated Wharton's voice at all. If you think I could do such a rotten thing as to make Wharton sneak, you're a suspicious rotter, Todd!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

NEXT SATURDAY'S STAR PROGRAMME!

Coker's the boy in the limelight next week, chums, and by jingo he comes out strong! Mr. Prout doesn't think a great deal of Horace Coker, and Horace Coker doesn't think a great deal of Mr. Prout. That's where the fun starts. You'll laugh loud and long over FRANK RICHARDS' latest tale of Greyfriars, so don't miss it!

"WOLVES OF THE SPANISH MAIN!"

By Ernest McKeag

Look out, too, for another trenchant instalment of this old-time romance.

"A CONVICT AT LARGE!"

By Dicky Nugent

That's the title of another "shocker" from our tame author in the Second Form. It's the goods. Finally, there's another interesting and informative article by "Referee." Next week he tells us the secrets of Roy Goodall's success... Roy being, as doubtless you know, the famous English International full-back of Huddersfield.

ORDER YOUR "MAGNET" IN GOOD TIME.

"If Bunter doesn't take the whole blessed biscuit factory!"

"Leave the fat rotter for now," said Johnny Bull. "Our first job is to put ourselves right with poor old Harry. Bunter can stand his trial with that cad Skinner!"

"Wow!" howled Bunter. "I—I—I never said a word in Form. I mean, it was Wharton's fault, anyway. Groough! I won't stand a trial. I'll—"

But Peter Todd and the other juniors did not wait to hear any further expostulations from Billy Bunter.

With a rush, they made their way up to the Remove passage and burst into Wharton's study.

The captain of the Remove gave them a far from pleasant look.

"I say, Harry—"

"I'm awfully sorry, old scout—"

"The sorrowfulness only equals the terrific misunderstandfulness—"

"We never knew—"

Wharton jumped to his feet as those semi-coherent statements fell upon his ears, the dark look still on his face. But, despite that, Johnny Bull and his chums eventually got out the full story and Wharton's old-time chums were loud and sincere in their apologies.

Gradually the bitterness left Wharton's face.

"You fellows are very good!" he said.

"Rats! It was our fault all along the line!"

"I'm afraid I was—I was just as much to blame as you were!" Wharton said that frankly enough, and in a moment more the Famous Five were united, each member of the Co. shaking their old leader warmly by the hand.

"It was my silly pride in the first place," said Wharton, blushing a little. "You know when I got rid of—of my camera in order to give Johnny a birthday feed."

Johnny Bull crimsoned.

"And I thought you were bluffing!" he said. "I wasn't worth a sacrifice like that," he added, with a queer gulp in his throat.

"Oh, yes you were!" smiled Wharton, feeling as if a terrific weight had been lifted from his shoulders. "And I'm sorry I—I hurt you the other day."



"You didn't hurt me enough," said Johnny stoutly.

"It—it was because Bunter had boned our feed that I lost my temper," explained Wharton. "The clumsy ass hit me—and then I saw red. I was—I was—"

"Hurt," said Frank Nugent softly. "I know. You were hurt to think that we didn't believe you'd stood that special spread."

"I was a silly ass," said Wharton smiling. "And I'm sorry. If you chaps are agreed, we'll call it square and forget the whole miserable business. I shall have more faith in my friends next time, and not so much—much pride."

"And we'll have more faith in you, too, old chap," said Johnny Bull, "and not be so ready to jump to silly conclusions!"

"The faithfulness will be terrific!" purred Inky. "Shake, my worthy chum!"

They shook once again.

Five minutes later the Remove were surprised to see the Famous Five walking arm and arm down the passage. Ten minutes later the Remove were in full possession of the facts. Twenty minutes later Skinner and Bunter were undergoing their trial. Twenty-five minutes later they were undergoing their respective punishments.

And thirty minutes later Mr. Quelch, looking out of his window on to the quad, received an agreeable surprise as he saw five juniors arm in arm laughing and chatting cheerily as they wended their way to the tuckshop, for he recognised in them the Famous Five, with their leader, Harry Wharton, looking as cheery and as bright as of yore. Something told Mr. Quelch that the last had been seen of Wharton, the "incorrigible," now that he was reunited to his chums. And Mr. Quelch was right. Over a handsome feed in Study No. 1, to which, needless to say, Billy Bunter was not invited, the Famous Five discussed the future, turning their backs on that shadowy period when Harry Wharton had been shunned by the Form.

THE END.

(Now look out for next week's rattling fine yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., particulars of which appear above.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,083.

**YOUNG ROGER BARTLETT
IS A REAL PLUCKED 'UN!**

**JOIN UP WITH HIM IN HIS THOUSAND-
AND-ONE THRILLING ADVENTURES!**



HOW THE STORY BEGAN.

Spurred on by the call of the sea and tales of treasure on the Spanish Main, young Roger Bartlett runs away from the farm on which he has been reared. He is still ten miles from his destination—the seaport of Fotheringham—when he overhears two ruffians named Abednigo One-Eye and Slim plotting the death of the owner of a near-by house. Roger is just in time to warn the man of his peril before the scoundrels arrive to carry out their murderous design. Mortally wounded in the fight that follows, the stranger hands over to Roger a sealed packet, charging him to take it to a man known as “The Chevalier,” whom he will find at the tavern of Ye Three Jolly Mariners in Fotheringham. Shortly afterwards, the lad is rescued from the hands of One-Eye and Slim by a fashionably dressed gallant who proves to be none other than The Chevalier himself! In the tavern at Fotheringham, Roger’s rescuer makes the discovery that the sealed packet sent to him by the dying man, Sir Richard Greator, contains the chart of an island on which a great treasure lies buried. Under cover of darkness, however, One-Eye steals into the room and snatches the chart away almost under their very noses.

(Now read on.)

How Roger Fell Amongst Enemies!

IT was but for a moment that Roger stood outside the tavern window. The next, as a mocking roar of laughter rang out above the shrieking of the wind and the thunder of the breaking waves, he darted forward.

The laugh was the laugh of One-Eye, and Roger knew full well that, though he could not see the scoundrel, he was near at hand. It was from the darkness to the left that the mocking laugh had come, and in this direction Roger dashed, spurred into action by the thought that if he acted tardily, it would be too late to prevent the escape of the rogue with the chart that meant so much.

He ran wildly onwards, coming at last to a narrow alley that ran between two rows of rickety dwelling-houses. Here the alley was cobbled, and Roger could hear, in the distance, a patter of footsteps.

“So the rogue has his henchman with him!” muttered Roger. “I swear ’twas two sets o’ feet I heard. So much the better, for I vow I will slit the throats o’ both rascals if they give me not the chart!”

Gripping his rapier tighter, he sped along the alley. It was terribly dark, and his feet caught again and again in the cobbles, as though they would trip him up and bring him crashing to the ground. Yet stern determination drove him onward, and ever could he hear the clatter of heels on the cobbles, leading him with their sound.

Into a maze of narrow alleys he plunged. They were deserted, for honest folk had long since been abed, and none were abroad save the rogues of the night. Not a soul did Roger see, yet the clump of the flying footsteps of

One-Eye and Slim lured him on like some will-o’-the-wisp.

With a rush he came out of an alley, and found himself by the water-front of the little harbour. Save for the noise of the storm, he could hear nothing. His eyes went to where the lights of several ships twinkled through the darkness. He halted, for no longer could he hear the footsteps of the rogues he had been pursuing.

“The rats have vanished!” he muttered. “’Tis hereabouts they must have their rat-hole!”

His heart was heavy with disappointment, and, after a vain search, he had, perforce, to give up the hope of finding One-Eye and his rat-like friend. He turned to retrace his steps to Ye Three Jolly Mariners, wondering what had happened to The Chevalier in the meantime. But he had hardly gone a score of paces ere he found himself confronted by the very man he had chased!

Abednigo One-Eye stood in his path chuckling mightily.

“So-ho, little turkey cock, so we meet again! Sink me if ye be not a plucked ’un, but mighty troublesome, my bully!”

Roger’s rapier flashed forward, but One-Eye was too quick for the lad. He leaped nimbly to one side, and his knife flashed from his belt, catching the steel of the rapier and twisting it aside.

“Nab hm, Slim!” he chuckled. “Split me, but he be full of spirit, be our little fire-eater. Nab him, Slim—nab him!”

Roger wheeled about just in time, for the ferrety Slim was creeping up behind him.

He sprang backwards, and brought his back to the wall. Then, with his rapier ready to bite deep, he faced the rogues.

One-Eye sprang at him. The rapier flashed, and had the villain not dodged backward it is certain that his black heart would have been pierced by the flashing blade.

Clang, clang, clang!

The knives of the rogues clashed against the rapier, striving to break down its guard, seeking to turn it aside so that one of them could leap in under it and plunge a blade into the stout heart of the lad who fought them so gallantly. It was wearisome and tiring work for Roger to beat them off, and his wrist ached with the constant tension upon it.

“Yield, my little turkey cock, my fire-eating bully boy!” chaffed One-Eye. “B’m’y troth, ’tis a fighter he is!”

His mocking face was ever in front of Roger, yet, though the lad lunged and parried with a skill that was remarkable for one such as he, he could not pink either of his opponents. Yet he could keep them at their distance,

and this, after a while, began to anger the rogues.

One-Eye dropped his chaffing mood, and his cruel lips twisted into a scowl of fury.

“Yield, ye dog, ere my patience goes an’ I rip ye to the chin!” he cursed; but, though his dagger slashed through the air again and again, Roger managed to turn its point, and lunge in return at One-Eye, driving him back.

A little squeal of pain and rage came from the lips of Slim. He had darted in, seeking to find Roger’s heart with his dagger; but the lad was too quick for him, and had pinked him on the arm.

“Curses on ye!” snarled the man. “Ye shall pay for that, lad! I shall flog the skin from your back.”

Deeming it likely that he could not break down the lad’s guard, Slim craftily drew off and fumbled at his belt, drawing forth a pistol. But, though the barker was primed, Slim did not fire it. So great was his rage that he wished to do more than kill this youth who had matched himself against the rogues.

Roger was unprepared for what followed.

The barker whizzed through the air suddenly. True, Roger saw it coming, but, being hotly engaged with One-Eye at the moment, he could do nothing to avoid it. The weapon struck him on the temple, causing him to stagger and fall, and he dropped his rapier, which fell with a clang upon the cobbled alley. Then did darkness sweep down upon Roger Bartlett, and his last recollection was of the evil-visaged One-Eye bending over him, his fingers aching mightily to clutch the lad by the throat and choke the breath from him.

It was with a head that ached fit to split that Roger opened his eyes again.

He was lying on a bare plank—a plank that heaved and rolled sickeningly. Above him he could see the stars, peering through a haze of clouds—and the stars wheeled and lurched amazingly. There came to his ears the creak of rowlocks, and the steady splash of oars, and he saw the figures of Slim and One-Eye silhouetted against the darkness of the night.

“A boat! ’Tis a boat I am in,” he reflected, and he half-closed his eyes and lay still, fearful of disclosing to the rogues that consciousness had returned to him.

What now could he do? Whither was he being taken? What lay in store for him? He had no mind to submit quietly to the whims of these rogues—yet it seemed that no way of escape was open to him.

Then, as the boat forged its way through the waters, he saw, at no great distance, the dark hulk of a ship looming in the blackness of the night. A solitary riding-light burned upon her. She was a schooner, riding there at anchor, but all aboard her was silent.

Roger’s brain worked quickly. One-Eye and Slim, intent on their rowing, were thinking not of him. Perhaps he might escape. A quick dive over the bulwarks of the boat, a swim into the darkness, and then—could he reach the schooner? Anything was better than to trust to the mercies of these men.

With this in mind, Roger acted. Swift as a young fawn, he leaped to his feet. For the fraction of a moment he stood there, and a howl came to the lips of One-Eye. It was drowned in a mighty surge of waters as Roger sprang from the boat, and dived deep into the turmoil of the waves.

“Curses on the rat!” screamed Slim, dropping his oars and springing to his

feet, while his hand flew to his belt and brought out a pistol. "Now he shall pay for this!"

He crouched by the bulwarks of the boat, his eyes striving to pierce the veil of blackness which shrouded the waters. A splash sent his eyes keenly searching, and as he saw a line of broken water which might have betokened the reappearance of Roger's head, he pressed the trigger.

Bang!

A spurt of flame stabbed the darkness, followed by the whine of a bullet and the splash as a jet of spray leaped from the water an inch or two from Roger's head.

But the darkness was profound, and the lad thanked Providence for that. He swam vigorously in the direction of the great hulk of the schooner. No further shot came from the boat, which tossed unceasingly upon the waters. Doubtless neither One-Eye nor Slim wished to attract too much attention to their nocturnal exploit.

"Sink him, the rat!" The words of One-Eye carried over the waters. "Far better 'twould ha been had ye let me rip him up, Slim!"

Roger heard naught more, for by this time he had swum close to the schooner. The waves were tossing him hither and thither like a cork, and he feared greatly lest he should be dashed against the great timbers of the vessel. His strength, too, was giving out, for he had been in no fit state to swim far, and had it not been for the desperate plight in which he had awakened to find himself, he might have hesitated before embarking upon so dangerous a venture.

Now, as a wave picked him up and dashed him against the schooner's side, Roger felt the strong under-pull of the waters, and he threw out his arms despairingly, for it seemed that he would indeed be dragged to his doom beneath the vessel.

Yet in the very moment, as it seemed, of his despair he found his hands close about a rope, and with his fast-ebbing strength he pulled himself slowly and painfully from the grip of the waters,

pausing not until he was clear of their wild turmoil. There he hung, swaying with the motion of the ship, lacking strength to clamber to the deck above him, yet still grateful that he was able to wind the rope about him and sway dizzily half-way to safety.

He had no means of reckoning the time he hung there suspended; but at last, as his strength slowly returned to him, he endeavoured to drag himself upward. Slow and painful was his progress, but inch by inch he made his way to the gun-port from which dangled the rope that had saved him.

It was hard work to clamber through the open port and gain the gun deck of the schooner, but at last Roger's patience was rewarded and he found himself safe aboard the vessel.

The gun deck was deserted, but by the light of a lantern which glimmered suspended from a great beam above him he could count ten guns on either side. For'ard, a companion-way led to the deck above; and, greatly wondering what manner of craft it was to which chance had brought him, he crept cautiously up the companion.

The deck seemed at first sight to be deserted, and Roger came stealthily out, taking care lest his feet should echo upon the wooden boards and catch the ear of some watcher.

By the for'ard hold he lingered; and then, as the shadow of a figure loomed up against the blackness of the night, he dropped flat on his stomach lest he should be observed.

The dark figure was joined by another. The men crossed to the bulwarks, conversing in hoarse whispers. Straining his ears, Roger listened; for he knew not whether this vessel sheltered friends or foes. It was well he had not revealed himself, for the words which came to his ears sent a thrill through him.

"Watch ye careful, Lop-Ear!" whispered a voice that Roger knew only too well. "Do as ye have been bidden, and sink me if we shall not come back from this cruise rolling in pieces of eight! Gold, Lop-Ear—bright red gold—to be had for the asking! Think ye

o' that, Lop-Ear! But, sink me, an' ye prove not faithful. I'll split ye cross-wise, Lop-Ear, and make shark's meat ye!"

"I'll do it, cap'n! I'll do it! Ne'er fear ye, cap'n!"

There came the noise of feet scraping against the bulwarks, and one of the figures heaved himself over the side and was lost to view. Then, as the figure of Lop-Ear gazed over the bulwarks to watch the other scramble down into the boat that was alongside, Roger crept silently back down the companion-way to the gun deck.

"Abednigo One-Eye!" he muttered hoarsely to himself, and crawled into the shadows.

In the shadows of the gun deck Roger halted to think over his next move. If, as seemed a fact, this vessel was manned by enemies, he would have to be cautious indeed. As he had swum to the vessel he had seen that there were no boats alongside her. Escape by means of a boat, therefore, was out of the question.

Above him, on the main deck, he could hear the occasional tramp of feet, which told him that men were awake and keeping watch through the night. From various parts of the gun deck he could hear the noise of heavy breathing proceeding from hammocks slung high up near the deck-head. He knew not how the time had gone.

"I must find me some hiding-place!" he muttered. "Should I be discovered by some rogue o' One-Eye's—"

He did not complete his sentence; but started off, instead, to explore the ship, treading carefully lest he should start some of the boards creaking and thus betray his presence to some enemy.

Knowing little of ships, he had some difficulty in finding his way about; but at last he chanced upon a ladder which led below, seemingly into the very bowels of the ship.

(What Fate awaits Roger on this strange ship? You will be surprised at the startling developments which take place in next week's thrilling long instalment. Don't miss it, chums, whatever you do!)

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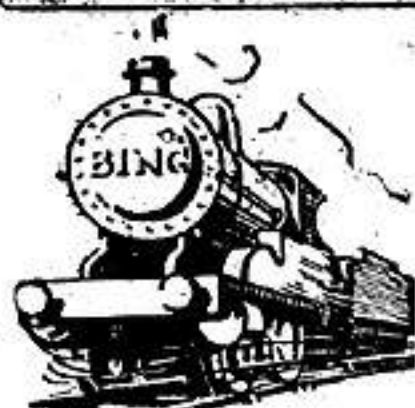
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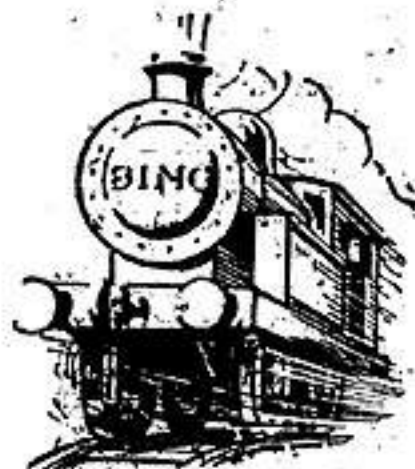
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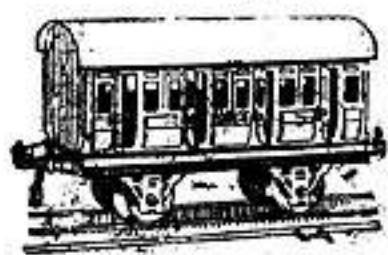
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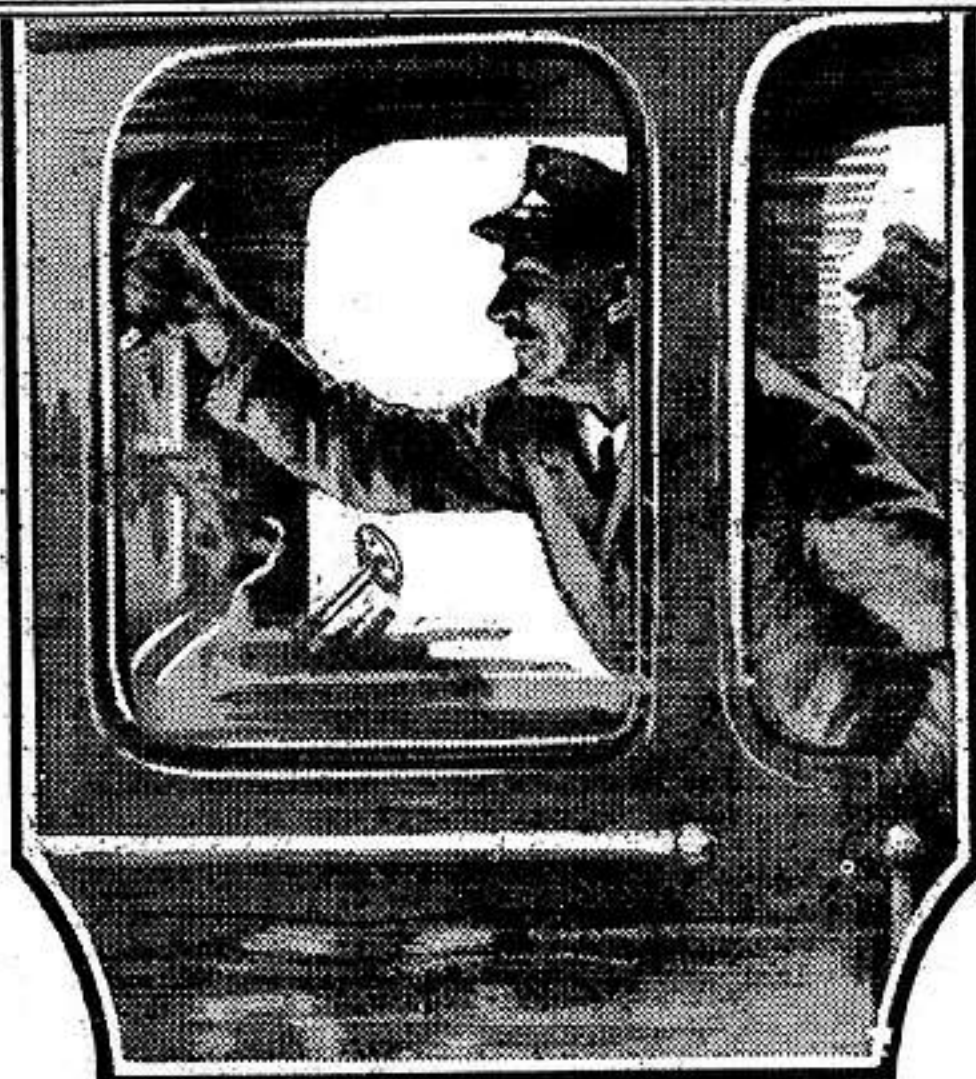
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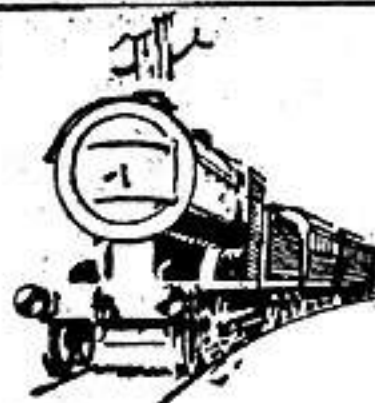
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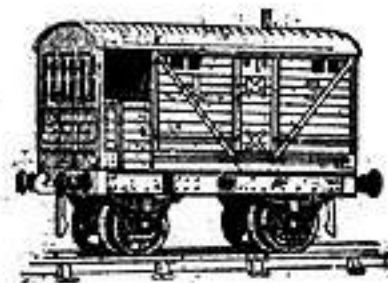
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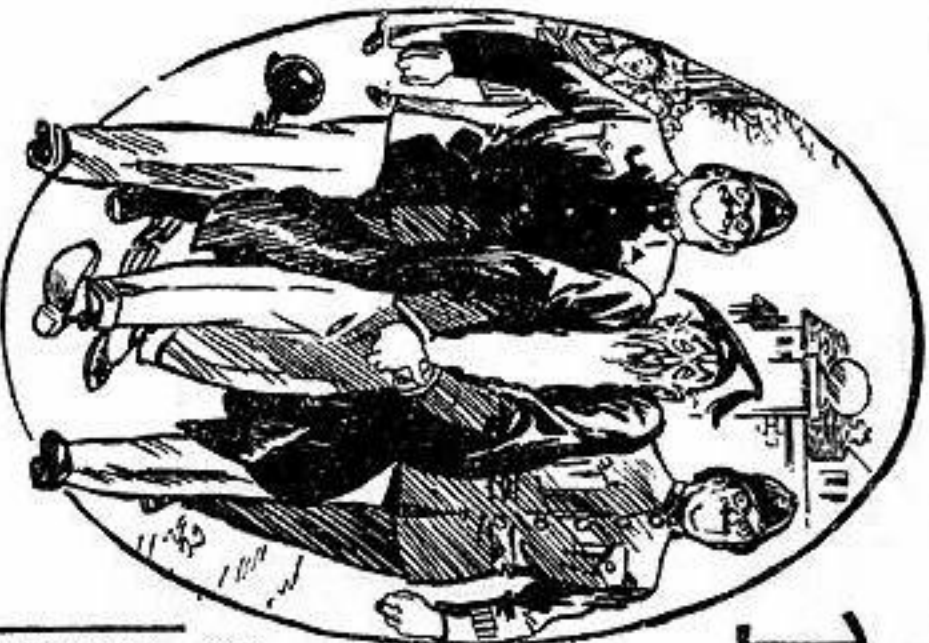
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By Dicky Nugent.

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jumped on to a chair and critically eggshamed the top of the door. Another two minutes without interruption, and the whole thing would have been ready. But, alas! before the juniors could finish their task they heard a noise from outside the study—a noise that froze the blood in their veins.

Bang! Crash! Wallop! Boom! In an instant Jack Jolly & Co. realised what it was. Nobody could mistake the soft, steady tread of the Head's hobnailed boots. It was Dr. Birchmell, back already from his visit to the Skool tuckshop!

There was no time to escape, no time to hide, no time even to throw the pall out of the window. The juniors turned pale as they saw what a dilemma they were in.

It was Dr. Birchmell's boot kicking open the door. A second later the Head was inside the study.

"Oh, crikey!" murmured Jack Jolly. "Now we're for it!"

Merry and Bright nodded gloomily. There was a smear of jam round Dr. Birchmell's mouth, and a splash of custard on his prominent nose. Jack Jolly hopefully wondered whether his smack had put him in a good humour. As a matter of fact, however, the reverse was the case. After spending his last tuppence on a custard-tart and a jam-puff, the Head had casually suggested a few downouts on the birch-purchase system, and, grately to his shagrin, the tuckshop dame had refused to discuss such a thing. The result was that Dr. Birchmell had come away with an aching void inside him and a torturing eggshame of rage on his face.

At the sight of Jack Jolly & Co. the Head's fizz turned quite livid. "What the merry dickens do you think you're doing off?" he roared. "We were just going to give you a pleasant little surprise, sir," answered Jack Jolly, looking innocent. "We thought we'd scrub your study out while you were gone."

"Rats! Tell that to the Maroons!" snorted the Head. "What are you standing on that chair for, Jolly? Come off it at once!"

Jack Jolly obediently leaped off the chair, unfortunately landing right on the Head's corn in the process. "Yarooooo!" yelled Dr. Birchmell, in agony.

"Sorry, sir!" gasped the kaptin of the Fourth. "It wasn't really my fault, tho! You shouldn't have such big feet!"

"Yoooooop! How dare you!" roared the Head. "Just you wait a minute, and I'll birch you black and blue!"

Dr. Birchmell limped over to the cabinet where he kept his instruments of torcher, and selected the largest and crookest-looking birch he could find. "Before you are punished tell me the truth about that pall!" he snarled, pointing to the pall which Merry and Bright were still holding aloft. Jack Jolly, being a manly British boy, couldn't tell a lie, of course, so he slightly altered the truth.

"The fact is, sir," he answered, "some fellows in the Fourth were thinking of fixing up a booby-trap, so we came in, and stopped them. Didn't we, chaps?"

"Yes, rather!" answered Merry and Bright immediately. "Piffle!" snorted the Head contemptuously. "Not to say bunkum and baldpate—or, as the vulgar would put it, nonsense. It is obvious to my experienced eye that you cheeky young brats were actually fixing up a booby-trap for me when I hopped in."

"Oh, sir! As if we could do such a thing!" "But enuff of this idle talk!" cried the Head impatiently. "Gilly or not gilly, I feel just in the mood to flog somebody, and you boys will do as well as anyone else, I suppose. Bond over at once, Jolly!"

The kaptin of the Fourth, with a hopeless shrug, obeyed, and a couple of seconds later the Head was going it for all he was worth.

Swish, swish, swish! The heavy birch descended remorselessly on our hero's anatomy, raising clouds of dust that caused Merry and Bright to sneeze repeatedly. The sound of the birch meeting crowns echoed all over the Skool, and in many a distant corner of St. Sam's fellows nodded meaningfully to each other and thanked their lucky stars they hadn't fallen foul of the Head that morning.

Putting all his strength into each stroke, Dr. Birchmell fairly let himself go, doing his utmost to make his victim squeal for mercy.

But Jack Jolly was made of sterner stuff than that. Tho the tears kept streaming down his face he remained dry-eyed. And tho he yelled and howled in agony, his lips remained sealed, and no sound escaped them.

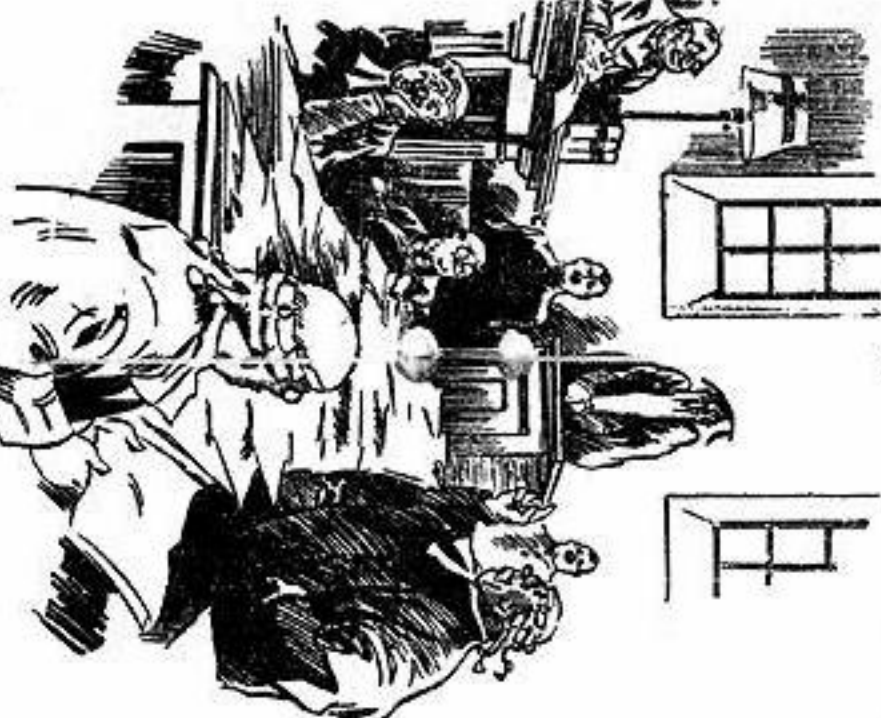
Merry and Bright fairly shivered as they looked on, knowing that it would soon be their turn. Their only hope was that Dr. Birchmell would tire himself out on their leader. But there didn't seem to be much chance of that, for his energy was apparently inexhaustible.

Swish, swish, swish! The flogging continued, and Jack Jolly still bore up with amazing fortitude. Then all at once, tho nobody in the room noticed it, the door of the study opened, and a storn, military-looking newcomer's jaw dropped as he saw what was going on. For a moment he stood in the doorway, paralysed with astonishment.

Then, with a bellow of rage, he leaped into the room and took a flying kick at Dr. Birchmell, lifting him several feet into the air. "Take that, you beastly booby!" he cried sternly.

"Wooooo!" howled Dr. Birchmell, grately surprised and pained. "What the thump! Oh crikey! It's General Jolly!"

"It is—it is!" growled Jack Jolly's pater grimly. "And apparently I haven't come a minute too soon. Put that birch down immediately, or, egad, I'll lay it across your hide!"



"In the name of Jee-ee, your Honour," said Council, pointing a scornful finger at the trembling Dr. Birchmell, "I ask you to give prize a good long term in chokery!"

"What do you mean?" cried Dr. Birchmell hoarsely. "I mean, sir, that I'll ring up the perice and ask them to arrest you immediately for crookery to a skoolboy!"

So saying, the infuriated general picked up the telephone and asked for the Muggleton Perice Station, while Dr. Birchmell collapsed in a dead faint into the nearest armchair.

Grato was the surprise of St. Sam's half an hour later, when two solemn-looking perice men marched up to the Skool. But their surprise then was nothing to the surprise they felt when the constables appeared on the Skool steps with Dr. Birchmell between them.

The Head was handcuffed, and his feet were chained together with heavy chains. His face was drawn and haggard, and his shoulders heaved convulsively as he walked.

Marching between his captors, with a loud rattling of chains, Dr. Birchmell was followed by a surging crowd of St. Sam's fellows. Seniors and juniors alike joined in the procession to the gates, for the spectacle of their Headmaster being taken off to chokery was quite unek.

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"RIZZONER at the bar, are you gilly or not gilly?" asked the Perice Court rang through the crowded Birchmell, still heavily manacled, took his place in the dock.

"Not gilly, your Honour!" answered the Head. "You see, what happened was this—"

"Silence!" roared the magistrate, in such fierce tones that the Head immediately held his piece. "Council for the Persecution, get on with the giddy washing!"

The Council for the Persecution, who was a stern-looking gentleman, attired in wig and gown, rose and outlined the case for the prosecution.

In a voice that trembled with anger, and grew louder and louder until he sounded like the Bull of Bashing, he described the birching that the Head had given Jack Jolly on the previous day.

As the Court listened to his graphic recital, a low murmur of disgust went round at the thought that a respected skoolmaster could sink so low. "Your Honour!" concluded Council at last, pointing a scornful finger at the trembling Head, "before you at the present moment covars a tirant, a booby, and a beastly rotter—a miserable cowerd and poltroon who has worn out hundreds of birches on the anatomies of his unfortunant pupils!"

In the name of justice, I ask you to give him a good long term in chokery. There was a roar of applause from the public gallery, and a deep groan from the prizoner as the alloquent Council sat down.

After that the witnesses for the pericution were called. General Jolly went into the box and described how he had dropped in to the Skool and caught the Head in the act of walloping his son. Jack Jolly himself followed. Jack, who had a heart of gold, was very reluctant to give evidence against his own headmaster, crook tirant tho the latter had been, and he did his best to make the Head's crime seem as light as possible.

The Council for the Defence then stood up and did his best to defend his client. But it wasn't a very good best,

for it was obvious that his hart wasn't in his work.

"Take pity on the prizoner, your Honour!" was all he could say. "We can all see that he is a fearful boobying outsider, but don't let that count too much against him. After all, you mite be the same yourself one day!"

The Court rocked with laughter at the learned Council's witicism, while the magistrate glared fiercely and wrapped on his desk repeatedly for silence.

"And now I'll call upon Mr. Lickham, of St. Sam's, to testify for the prizoner's good character," went on the Council for the Defence, when the latter had died down.

"You jolly well won't!" snapped the magistrate. "I think I've heard quite enuff to judge this case on. Prizoner at the bar, I will announce my verdict. You're gilly!"

"Oh, grate pip!" cried Dr. Birchmell, berrying his face in his hands. "Have mercy, kind sir, I implore you!"

"Certainly!" answered the magistrate obligingly. "As you're a first offender, without any previous stains on your fingers—I mean, your carrierer—I'll let you off lightly. Six months hard labour!"

"Yarooooo!"

"Cart him off to chokery!" ordered the magistrate, heedless of the Head's wild yells. "You'll find the Black Maria waiting outside."

"I, sir!" cried the waiting perlice men, surrounding Dr. Birchmell and seizing him by the scruff of the neck.

"Next case!" said the magistrate curtly.

It was all over. The impossible had happened. Jack Jolly & Co., as they went out into the street, could hardly believe it. Dr. Alfred Birchmell, the revered and majestic Head of St. Sam's, sentenced to six months' hard labour in a state of wild eggshame, the chma of the Fourth returned to St. Sam's to impart the amazing news to the rest of the Skool.

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the next amusing yarn in this series, entitled: "A CONVICT AT LARGE". It's one long scream from beginning to end.)

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