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CHUMS



THE GREYFRIARS HOLIDAY ANNUAL 1933



SAVED BY A SCAPEGRACE!



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Thomas Causes Trouble !

By FRANK RICHARDS.

MIA-OW-OW !
"Mon Dieu !" ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier. There was a giggle in the French class.

Mossoo stared round suspiciously.

Mia-ow-ow-ow !

It was the melodious voice of a cat; but there was no cat to be seen in the class-room.

Monsieur Charpentier looked this way, and he looked that way; but he saw no cat. All he saw was the grinning faces of the Remove fellows.

The French master at Greyfriars never liked taking the Remove.

With their own Form master, Mr. Quelch, the Remove could be as good as gold. Quelch was the man to handle them. They needed the strong hand; and, indeed, rather prided themselves on the fact.

Mossoo's hand was anything but strong. He was one of those masters who are destined to be ragged. And the Greyfriars Remove were not the fellows to help him escape his destiny.

Mia-ow-ow-ow !

Monsieur Charpentier had just entered the class-room. He was a few minutes late, as he often was. He found his class all in their places, ready for him. They were all grinning. Mossoo scented a "rag," the moment he stepped in. The Remove had had two lessons with Quelch that morning. Third lesson was French, with Henri Charpentier; which was a relief after Quelch; indeed, a boon and a blessing. Under Quelch's gimlet-eye, the Remove had had to work. Now they were prepared to enjoy themselves.

"C'est un chat !" said Monsieur Charpentier. "It is a cat! Zere is vun cat somewhere! Where is zat cat?"

"O where and O where can it be?" sang Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha !"
"Taisez-vous !" rapped Monsieur Charpentier. "It is not to laff! Quelque mauvais garçon—some bad boy, he have bring vun cat in ze class-room. I demand where is zat cat?"

Mia-ow-ow-ow !

"The wherefulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Shall we look for it, sir?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Steer clear of Wharton—he's a rotter and an outsider!" is Frank Nugent's repeated warning to his young brother Dick. But Frank is making the biggest mistake of his life, as it is Wharton, the "rotter and outsider," who saves Nugent minor from expulsion and disgrace !

"Non, non, non !" ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier.

He knew what would happen if the juniors started looking for the cat! He did not want a riot—if he could help it.

"We'll look for it with pleasure, sir!" offered Bob Cherry.

"Non! Je dis non! Keep you ze place!" snapped Monsieur Charpentier. "Zat cat is somewhere, and I will find him."

Mia-ow-ow-ow !

It was a prolonged and mournful

mew. The cat, wherever it was, did not seem to be happy. Monsieur Charpentier came over to the class and peered among the forms. He had no doubt that one of the grinning juniors was holding the cat under a desk. Mrs. Kebble's cat had a way of wandering all over the school, and apparently it had wandered now into the French class-room, and been captured there.

"Wharton!" snapped Mossoo. Harry Wharton looked at him.

"Have you zat cat, you bad boy?" demanded Monsieur Charpentier.

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

Suspicion fell upon him, as a matter of course. This term he was, according to his Form master, at least, the worst boy at Greyfriars. Masters and prefects were down on him, with a very heavy down. So far, however, he had had no trouble with the French master. He had rather a kindly feeling for the little foreign gentleman whose life at Greyfriars was anything but a bed of roses. But it was a case of "give a dog a bad name, and hang him!"

"No, sir!" he answered quietly.

"Debout!" rapped Monsieur Charpentier. "Stand up!"

Wharton's eyes glinted.

"I have answered you, sir," he said. And he did not stir.

"Je vous dis, debout!" snapped the French master. "I zink zat you have zat cat, mauvais garçon zat you are! Debout toute de suite."

Wharton rose to his feet slowly.

As soon as he was standing, it was obvious that he was not the possessor of the invisible cat. Monsieur Charpentier's suspicious eye passed from him, to seek further.

"Buntair!"

Billy Bunter gave a jump.

"Oh! Yes, sir! It wasn't me, sir!"

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gaped Bunter. "I haven't seen any cat, sir. I-I haven't got it, sir. I-I'm afraid of that cat, sir. He scratches!"

"Stand up viz you, Buntair! You hold something on ze knees—"

"Oh, no! Nothing at all, sir!" gaped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Taisez-vous! Buntair, you stand up on ze feet zis instant, you bad garcon! You have zat cat undair ze desk."

"I-I-I haven't!" gaped Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove did not rise to his feet. His fat hands were under his desk, on his fat knees, and remained there. Undoubtedly it looked suspicious. Billy Bunter goggled at the French master through his big spectacles, in great alarm, but he did not rise.

Mossoo had no doubt now. He grabbed a pointer and came along the desks towards the fat Owl.

"Buntair! Je vous dis—I tell you, zat you get up at vunce—debout—on ze feet!"

"Oh lor!" gaped Bunter. "I—I say, sir—Yaroooooh!"

Whack!

The pointer came down across the fattest shoulders at Greyfriars.

Billy Bunter roared, and jumped up.

"Ob crikey! Yaroooo! Whooop!"

"Mon Dieu!" gaped Monsieur Charpentier, as he beheld what Bunter had been holding out of sight under his desk.

It was not a cat! It was a cake!

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Removites.

Bunter, evidently, had feared that he might be hungry in class, and had taken precautions. Certainly he would never have ventured to smuggle a cake into the Remove-room. But a fellow could take chances with Mossoo!

"Mon Dieu! It is a gâteau—a cake!" ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier. "It is vun cake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Taisez-vous! Buntair, place zat cake on my desk! Place him zere at vunce! It is not to eat in class!"

"Oh lor!" it groaned Bunter.

The fat Owl dismally carried the cake to the master's high desk, and landed it there. Really, it was hard luck on Bunter. But for the mewing of the hidden cat he might have nibbled his cake unnoticed all through the French lesson. Now that cake was confiscated—gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream!

"Sherry! You have zat cat?"

"Oh! No, sir!" gaped Bob.

"Nugent—"

"No, sir!"

"Bull—"

"No, sir!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Ma foi! Somewhere here he have zat cat!" roared Monsieur Charpentier.

"Where is zat cat? Debout—upright—zat is to say, stand up! Tous! All of you stand up on ze feet!"

The Remove rose as one man. Nobody had a cat! Monsieur Charpentier stared at them. Where was the cat? Like the Cheshire Cat in Wonderland, who vanished leaving only a grin, Thomas seemed to have vanished, leaving only a mew! The mew was still there! For as Monsieur Charpentier stared blankly at the grinning class, it was heard again; more angry and excited and piercing than before. Miaow-ow-owwww!

The cat, wherever it was, was shut up somewhere and was getting wildly excited. Mossoo spun round. It was rather difficult to trace that mournful howl, but it seemed to him that it came from behind him.

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"Ah! Je comprends!" ejaculated Mossoo.

He had "placed" the cat at last! The howl came from his own desk—the high desk! Evidently some young rascal had dropped the cat into that desk, and shut the lid down on it!

Monsieur Charpentier turned his back on the chucking class, and rushed across to the high desk.

"C'est ici!" he gaped. "Mon Dieu! Zat cat he is in my desk—zat pauvre animal! Some bad boy he put zat cat in my desk!"

Monsieur Charpentier grasped the lid of the desk and threw it up. He was right—the cat was there! But it did not remain there. Imprisonment in the dark interior of the desk had worried and scared Thomas. He was angry and excited. The instant the desk-lid rose, Thomas bounded out. He bounded straight at Mossoo. Perhaps in the excitement of the moment, Thomas took Mossoo for the fellow who had shut him up in the desk, and was after vengeance. Or perhaps it merely happened because Mossoo's face was in his way as he bounded. Anyhow, he landed on Mossoo's face.

"Oh, my hat!" gaped Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Remove.

"Mon Dieu! Ciel! Yaroooooh!" shrieked Monsieur Charpentier, as he staggered back, with Thomas' sharp claws clawing at his locks.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mossoo clutched at the cat. The cat, spitting with frantic excitement, clutched at Mossoo. The juniors yelled and howled and roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The sight of Mossoo, dancing wildly with the tomcat on his head, was too much for them. They shrieked.

"Mon Dieu! Help! Take away zat cat!" screamed Monsieur Charpentier.

"Zat you take him away! Name of a name of a name! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crikey! Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton ran forward and grabbed the excited cat. He detached it from Mossoo, getting a couple of scratches as he did so. Thomas made a jump for the open door, and fled. Monsieur Charpentier stood breathless, panting, dizzy and dazed, while the howls of laughter from his class could be heard over almost all Greyfriars.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Chance for Loder!

"L ODER!"

Dr. Locke, the headmaster of Greyfriars, laid down Thucydides, and frowned.

The Sixth Form of Greyfriars were at Greek with the Head. From a distance, came sounds which indicated that one Form, at least, found class quite an enjoyable and exuberant affair. A little noise from the French master's class-room was by no means uncommon. Now there was not a little. There was a lot!

Howls of laughter, even from a distance, had a perturbing effect on the Head when he was handing out Thucydides to an attentive Sixth. Some of the seniors, perhaps, rather envied those exuberant juniors in the distance. The juniors were evidently enjoying French. The Sixth were not exactly enjoying Greek.

"Ex-Loder—" said the Head. "Will you kindly step to Monsieur Charpentier's class-room and request

him to—er—endeavour to proceed with a little less—er—noise."

"Certainly, sir!" said Loder.

Loder of the Sixth was not an obliging fellow by nature. But he was very glad to oblige the Head in that little matter. Any man in the Sixth would have been glad to get away from Thucydides for ten minutes or so. Thucydides was a great Greek, and a great historian; but most fellows felt that a little of him went a long way. Envious glances followed Loder as he departed.

There was no doubt, of course, that the uproar proceeded from Mossoo's class-room. That could be taken for granted. No other master at Greyfriars School was ever ragged like Mossoo. Such a din could have proceeded from nobody else's quarters.

Loder strolled down the passage. The door of Mossoo's class-room was open; and Loder, to his astonishment, saw a cat whisk out as he came up. It was the Housedame's cat, Thomas. Thomas was fleeing at top speed, and yells of laughter followed its flight. Amid the merriment came the shrill voice of Monsieur Charpentier.

"Hélas! I am scratch viz zat cat! I demand who shall put zat cat in my desk? Zat you cease to laff! It is not for to laff! Zis is no mattair for to laff! Mon Dieu! Zis class is vun garden of ze bear!"

Loder of the Sixth grinned.

"Vharton! Did you briz zat cat in zis room?"

"I've already said no!" came Wharton's voice, snapping in answer.

"Isn't once enough?"

"Zat you be not impertinent, Vharton! Some boy in zis class he put zat cat in my desk! I demand to know."

Loder's eyes gleamed as he arrived at the class-room doorway and looked in.

It was the Sixth Form bully's scheming enmity, more than anything else, that had brought so much trouble on Harry Wharton that term. And Loder's old grudge was far from satisfied yet.

This was another chance for Loder—and he was not likely to miss it.

Every fellow in the room was roaring with laughter—except Harry Wharton. Wharton, having been scratched by Thomas, was not quite so amused as the rest.

Also, he was exasperated by the French master's suspicion. He had seldom or never joined in ragging Mossoo; and he would never have taken part in a jape involving discomfort to an animal. But perhaps it was natural for Mossoo, with a whole crowd of merry young rascals to choose from, to pick on the "worst boy at Greyfriars." And Wharton's angry answer was not calculated to allay either wrath or suspicion.

"Je demande—I ask to know!" booted Monsieur Charpentier. "You are vun bad boy, Vharton—ze most bad boy in ze school. If it vas you—"

"How many times do you want me to tell you that it was not?" snapped Wharton.

"Mon Dieu! Zat is no vay to speak to a master, you mauvais garcon—"

"Wharton!" rapped out Loder.

He stepped into the class-room.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "The Head must have heard the—"

There was sudden silence. If the Head had heard the uproar, and sent a prefect to put a stop to it, it was time



"Mon Dieu..." gasped Monsieur Charpentier. "Zat cat he is in my desk—zat pauvre animal! Some bad boy he put zat cat in my desk!" The French master grasped the lid of his desk and threw it up. The next instant Thomas bounded out, landing full on Mossoo's face. "Mon Dieu! Ciel! Yaroooooh!" shrieked the Frenchman.

for the Removites to moderate their transports, so to speak.

Harry Wharton stared round at Loder. Loder was a Sixth Form prefect, and prefects had to be treated with respect by Lower boys. But the rebel of the Remove was not in a mood to be very respectful to his old enemy.

"Well?" he snapped. "Don't answer me like that, Wharton!" said Loder, with a glitter in his eyes. "The Head has sent me here to stop this uproar—and I'm not surprised to find that you are the ring-leader—as usual. How dare you be impertinent to Monsieur Charpentier?"

Wharton opened his lips—and closed them again. Loder had him there! Loder stepped across to the high desk, and picked up a cane. Monsieur Charpentier kept a cane there, though it was but seldom that he used it. Had he used it a little oftener, there would not have been so many rags in the French class. Mossoo was a tender-hearted little gentleman, and he hated using the cane. Gerald Loder was not in the least tenderhearted, and he liked using the cane—especially on fellows who had incurred his dislike.

He pointed to a desk with the cane. "Bend over that desk, Wharton." "Mais—mon cher Loder—" began Monsieur Charpentier.

"Please leave this insolent junior to me, Monsieur Charpentier," said Loder. "Wharton, bend over that desk at once!"

"Mais—but—" said Mossoo feebly. Loder took no heed of him. His conduct amounted to browbeating the French master in his own class-room. But it was easy for anyone to browbeat the nervous little gentleman.

Wharton gave the bully of the Sixth a dogged look.

"I've said that I had nothing to do with putting the cat in Mossoo's desk, Loder!" he said, between his teeth.

"I know nothing about that," said Loder calmly. "I'm going to cane you for impertinence to Monsieur Charpentier. Bend over."

He flourished the cane. Wharton hesitated a moment longer, and then, setting his teeth, he bent over the desk. A Sixth Form prefect was invested with the power of the cane, and that was that!

"Whack! Whack! Whack!" "C'est assez—" exclaimed Mossoo.

"Zat is enoff—" "Whack! Whack! Whack!" Loder laid on the six, unheeding. Then he tossed the cane on the desk. "Go to your place, Wharton!" he rapped.

Wharton went to his place. Loder strolled out of the class-room with a cheery grin on his face. Handing out "six" to the junior he loathed had been quite a pleasant change from Thucydides.

"Rotten bully!" muttered the Bounder.

"The rottenfulness of the esteemed bully is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Mossoo's a silly little ass, to let Loder throw his weight about here," said Skinner.

"Silence in ze class!" said Monsieur Charpentier. "Zere is enoff time zat have been waste! Nous sommes ici—ve are here for ze French."

"I don't think!" murmured Skinner. Bang!

A desk lid dropped with a terrific concussion.

Monsieur Charpentier jumped almost clear of the floor. He was always an excitable and nervous little gentleman,

and the episode of the cat had not had a calming effect on his nervous system.

"Vat? Who vas zat?" he shrieked.

"Zat vas you, Wharton!"

"My desk lid fell, sir," said Harry calmly.

Bang, bang! Two more desk lids fell.

"Skinnair, zat vas you!"

"Quite an accident, sir," said Skinner blandly.

"Mon Dieu! Zis is vun garden of ze bear! I vill keep ordair in zis class!" hooted Mossoo. "Zat you keep ze ordair!"

Crash!

A volume of the Henriade sailed through the air, and dropped in the middle of the class-room. Mossoo did not see who sent it sailing, but he heard it drop behind him, and he spun round like a startled fowl.

There was a yell of laughter from the class.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mossoo's back was turned to the class for the moment. A French grammar whizzed, and smote the little gentleman on his coat tails.

Mossoo plunged forward, and dropped on his hands and knees.

The class shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mossoo sat up with a bewildered expression that might have made a stone image smile. The Remove roared. But the roar died away suddenly as a sharp voice rapped from the doorway:

"Silence! Wharton, I saw you throw that book! How dare you!"

"Oh crickey, Quelch!" breathed Bob Cherry.

And there was a dead silence as the Remove master walked in.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER. Down On His Luck!

MR. QUELCH'S gimlet eyes glittered at his Form. Monsieur Charpentier, gasping, picked himself up. Suddenly reduced to order the Remove sat quiet, trying to look as if butter would not melt in their mouths. But it was rather too late for that.

Harry Wharton gave his Form master one startled look, and then his face set hard and sullen. Mr. Quelch had arrived at an unfortunate moment for the scapegrace of Greyfriars. And he had arrived in an acid temper. Having handed over his Form to the French master, Mr. Quelch might have justly expected to be given a rest from them. He had been taking a walk in the quadrangle. It was a fine frosty day—very bright and sunny for December—and Mr. Quelch had been enjoying his walk in the quad, till he heard the hulla-balloo from the French class-room. Then he came back to the House, with a deep frown on his brow and a glitter in his eyes. And he had opened the door of the French class-room just in time to see the rebel of the Remove whizz his grammar at Monsieur Charpentier's coat tails.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!" drawled Wharton.

His manner was cool, and there was a faint sneer on his lips. The scapegrace of the Remove was "for it" again; but he was getting hardened to trouble now. It was the first time he had "ragged" Mossoo, and, in his

opinion, at least, Mossoo had asked for it. But Mr. Quelch could only judge by what he saw, and by his already deeply unfavourable opinion of that troublesome junior.

"I had no doubt that I should find that you were the ringleader in the disturbance here, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch bitterly. "You seem to glory in being the worst boy in the school."

Wharton's lip curled. It was Skinner who had placed the cat in the French master's desk. Wharton had not started to "rag" till after he had had that undeserved six from Loder, and he had done no more than half a dozen other fellows. But he was a "dog with a bad name."

"I shall cane you with the utmost severity!"

"Non, non!" exclaimed Monsieur Charpentier, gesticulating with both hands. "Non, mon bon Quelch! Pas du tout! Zat garçon already have ze cane! I zink zat vun detention—"

Mr. Quelch paused.

His Form, having been handed over to Monsieur Charpentier, was in that gentleman's hands. For that lesson it was no longer Mr. Quelch's Form, but a French set. Mr. Quelch had a profound contempt for a master who allowed himself to be ragged. But he was not the man to take authority out of another master's hands.

He breathed hard and deep, but he had to assent.

"Very well, sir, if you think a detention sufficient punishment for Wharton's outrageous conduct. Wharton,

you will be detained for the half-holiday this afternoon. You may thank Monsieur Charpentier that you are not punished more severely. Monsieur Charpentier will set you a detention task in French."

"Mais, oui," said Mossoo.

Mr. Quelch's eye lingered over the class. Every fellow tried to avoid catching it, except Wharton, who looked steadily and icily at his Form master, as if to make it clear that he had no terrors.

The Remove master compressed his lips hard.

That cool and steady look roused his ire. But Wharton was done with, and Mr. Quelch affected not to notice him further. The other fellows looked like lambs—quite unlike fellows who had been banging desk lids and shying books about.

"I trust," said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice, "that there will be no further disorder in this class. I will not allow boys of my Form to give trouble to another member of the staff!"

Mr. Quelch quitted the class-room.

His trust was well founded—there was no further disorder in the class. The juniors had a strong suspicion that Quelch was within hearing of that class-room, and nobody wanted to bring him back.

Fortunately, from the point of view of the juniors, nearly half the time of the lesson had already elapsed. The remainder passed quietly, much to the relief of little Mossoo.

The Remove were dismissed at last, and they streamed out cheerily into the sunny quad.

Only two fellows had glum looks.

Billy Bunter was thinking of his confiscated cake, and, like Rachel of old, he mourned, and could not be comforted.

Harry Wharton was thinking of his afternoon's detention.

Bob Cherry and his friends started punting a ball about, but Wharton, once the inseparable comrade of the "Co.," did not join them. He never joined his old friends now, or spoke to them, or even seemed aware of their existence.

Not a fellow in the Remove spoke to him, or gave him a glance, as he came out with the Form.

Wharton was not exactly in Coventry, but he was a good deal of an outcast in the Form these days.

From the beginning of that unlucky term, matters had gone from bad to worse, and it was not his own fault. If it was partly his own fault he could not see it, or perhaps he was determined not to see it.

Last term he had been captain of the Remove and head boy, and as popular as any fellow at Greyfriars. Now all had been lost.

But if he cared, his looks did not betray it.

He sauntered away across the quad, with his hands in his pockets, and with a face of indifference.

Under the old elms he passed Lord Mauleverer, and Mauly swerved a little so as to give him a wide berth, and avoid him without appearing to do so. Mauly was always polite. Mauly, who had stood by the scapegrace longest of all his friends, had "chucked" him at last.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders indifferently. But, as a matter of fact, it gave him a pang to see Mauly's kind face averted.

His face was dark as he strolled under the elms. He had no friends left at Greyfriars. But he had friends outside the school, and he had intended to spend the afternoon with them. Detention knocked that plan on the head. There were angry and rebellious thoughts in his mind. Breaking detention was a serious matter—more serious for Wharton than for any other fellow, for there was already a long list of reckless offences against him. But he was thinking of it as he paced moodily under the elms, idly kicking the fallen leaves on the path. From among the trees a voice came to his ears—the voice of Frank Nugent, once his best chum; now, not only unfriendly, but almost an enemy.

"You young ass! Of course I can't!"

Wharton glanced round.

Frank Nugent, at a little distance, was speaking to a fag of the Second Form—his young brother, Nugent minor.

Dicky Nugent's face, usually chubby and cheeky and extremely self-satisfied, seemed to be full of trouble now.

Trouble came often enough to the scamp of the Second Form. Often enough his Form master, Twigg, was down on him for laziness and carelessness. A good many times he had been caned for smoking, for Master Richard

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'HOME'

Nugent sometimes rather fancied himself as a sort of doggish man of the world.

But Wharton, as he glanced curiously at the fag, thought he could read in his face a deeper trouble than usual.

Frank, however, was obviously impatient.

He was an affectionate major, and generally so concerned about his young brother that Remove men considered him rather an ass. But no doubt it was possible for the most affectionate brother to get fed-up at times.

"It's a pound—" Nugent minor was saying.

Frank gave an angry grunt. "You young ass! You spend half my pocket-money as well as all your own! You know you do! Anyhow, it's impossible—I've only half-a-crown."

"You might borrow it—" "Oh, chuck it!" snapped Frank. "I can see myself borrowing money up and down the Remove for you to chuck away! Give a fellow a rest."

He turned away; and as he did so, saw Wharton. His eyes gleamed at the fellow he had once liked better than any other fellow at Greyfriars.

"Look here, Frank—" muttered the fag.

Frank Nugent walked away without answering. Almost ostentatiously he turned his back on Wharton and departed from the spot.

Wharton flushed faintly. Dicky Nugent did not look at him. He stood staring after his brother, with a dark, dismal, almost haggard look on his face that struck Wharton strangely.

He made a step towards the fag; and then, changing his mind, walked on. But that strange look on Dicky Nugent's face haunted him, and till the bell rang for dinner the scapegrace of Greyfriars was thinking more about Frank Nugent's brother than about his own troubles.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Chez Monsieur!

"**M**AUVAIS garcon!" ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier.

Mossoo's little fallow face flushed with anger.

He had arrived in the doorway of the Remove Form Room at a quarter to three, with a detention paper in his hand.

Wharton's detention began at half-past two; and at that time he had gone to the Form-room.

Mossoo was late with his detention paper.

Mossoo had been delayed. He had found gum, instead of ink, in his ink-well; and he had found that the nibs had been carefully extracted from all the pens in his study! Mossoo often made discoveries like this. Sometimes he sighed deeply; sometimes he flew into a temper. The path of a French master is often a thorny one; and little Mossoo sometimes found his path at Greyfriars very thorny indeed.

Naturally, he was not in a good temper when he arrived at last. And as he looked into the Form-room, he did not behold the detained junior sitting dutifully at his desk waiting. What he beheld was, the detained junior clambering up to the window, with the obvious intention of dropping out into the quad.

"Arretez!" hooted Mossoo. Wharton started, and glanced round. His brow blackened as he dropped back into the Form-room.

He had waited a quarter of an hour. By that time, he had really wondered whether Mossoo had forgotten him;

and he had decided, at last, to cut. Mossoo had arrived just in time to stop him.

"Mauvais garcon!" snapped Monsieur Charpentier. "You would run away viz you, isn't it?"

Wharton did not answer. He was strongly inclined to clamber out of the window, even in the presence of the French master. Bright sunshine and a clear frosty air called to him. However, he remained where he was, with a black look on his face.

Monsieur Charpentier frowned at him. A detention was really a light punishment in comparison with the "whopping" that Mr Quelch would have administered. Mossoo's view was that the rebel of Greyfriars was ungrateful, as well as disrespectful.

"Wharton, I zink zat you are ze verree vorst boy in ze school," he said.

"You may think what you please, sir!" said Harry coolly.

"Zat is no vay to speak to me! You put vun cat in my desk—"

"I did nothing of the kind."

"Somevun put gum in my ink—I zink zat I know who do so!"

"It was not I, anyhow."

"I see you go to climb out of a window! If I leave you here viz your task, you get out of a window! Mais oui!

there. However, there was no help for it.

"You may seat yourself at ze table, garcon," said Monsieur Charpentier. "Here you vill not run away, I zink."

Wharton sat down in silence.

Monsieur Charpentier sprawled himself luxuriously in an armchair, with his feet on the fender, and opened the "Echo de Paris." He was fairly toasting as he sat there, and he enjoyed the toasting.

Wharton was not enjoying himself.

He sat on a hard chair at the table, wearily grinding through an exercise in French irregular verbs.

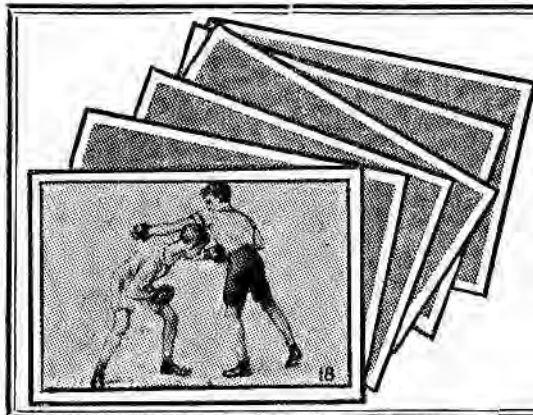
The stuffy study grew more and more stuffy.

Wharton would have given a great deal to exchange his present quarters for the Form-room; which was cold, but at least airy.

But there was no help for it; and he worked wearily on with French irregular verbs, longing for five o'clock and freedom.

Monsieur Charpentier glanced round at him several times with a suspicious eye. But Wharton worked steadily. Doing nothing would have been even a wearier bore than doing French verbs.

After a time, Mossoo gave no further attention to the detained junior. He



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I vill not trust you! Venez avec moi!"

Monsieur Charpentier signed to the junior to follow him from the Form-room.

"Are you letting me off detention, sir?" asked Wharton sarcastically.

Mossoo snorted.

"Mais certainement non!" he snapped. "You vill do your task in my study you mauvais garcon, sous mes yeux—under my eyes! Comprenez?"

Harry Wharton breathed hard. Never had he been nearer to open rebellion. In silence he followed the French master from the Form-room.

The House was utterly deserted. It was a wonderfully fine day for December, and all the fellows were out of doors, and most of the masters. Mr. Quelch was busy in his study, as Wharton knew; but hardly anyone else remained in the House. Monsieur Charpentier, however, had no intention of going out. Fresh air did not appeal to the French gentleman; and the cold of "Angleterre" made him shiver and eringe. Monsieur Charpentier intended to spend the afternoon before a roaring fire in his study, reading a bundle of French newspapers that had arrived for him from Paris—with the door shut, and the window shut, and every breath of air carefully excluded.

Harry Wharton followed him into his study. Stuffiness spelt cosy comfort to Mossoo; but it seemed to the healthy junior that he could hardly breathe

read his "Echo de Paris" through, and picked up the "Petit Journal" for a change.

But even on Mossoo, the close atmosphere and the heat of the fire produced some effect at last. He nodded over the "Petit Journal"; nodded and nodded, and at last the paper rustled down to his knees, his chin fell forward, and an unmelodious snore awoke the echoes.

Monsieur Charpentier was fast asleep.

Wharton looked at him. It would have been easy to tiptoe from the study now, without awakening Mossoo and get clear. But he had already been an hour in the study; and it was too late to think of seeing his friends, Dick Trumper & Co., at Courtfield. It was hardly worth while to incur the dire penalties of breaking detention for the sake of an hour that remained. He resumed French verbs; and the scratching of his pen mingled with the unmelodious snore of Henri Charpentier.

But he ceased again, and once more watched the sleeping master. Mossoo was in sound slumber. Wharton's eyes glimmered. He was not thinking now of getting out of the school—that was not worth while. But other thoughts were working in the mind of the rebel of Greyfriars.

He rose at last, without a sound, and tiptoe to the door. Silently he opened the door and tiptoe out of the study,

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cautiously closing the door after him. Mossoo snored on.

There was no one about the House. Wharton heard a rustling of papers as he tiptoed past Mr. Quelch's door; that was all. He lost no time. In a couple of minutes he was in Gerald Loder's study in the Sixth. He emerged from that study with Loder's Sunday hat in his hand, and Loder's Sunday trousers over his arm. Then he vanished up a back staircase.

Monsieur Charpentier, sleeping the sleep of the just, remained blissfully unconscious that he was alone in his study.

Hardly ten minutes had elapsed, when the door reopened without a sound and Wharton stepped in on tiptoe. He gave one quick glance at the French master; and grinned as he saw that he was still sound asleep. He closed the door silently and sat down in his chair at the table.

Then he stirred the chair-legs noisily. Mossoo gave a grunt in his sleep. Wharton stirred again, with more noise, and Mossoo's eyes opened. He sat up, yawned, and blinked round at the junior. Wharton was sitting exactly where Mossoo had seen him before his eyes closed, and it did not occur to the French master that he had been out of the study.

"Excuse me, sir," said Wharton politely, "I don't quite understand this—would you be kind enough to explain it—"

"Mais certainement, mon garçon," answered Monsieur Charpentier.

Mossoo was always ready to explain any difficult point in his beautiful language to any fellow who wanted to know! Few fellows did!

He rose from his chair and stood looking over Harry Wharton's shoulder. This keen interest in the French exercise on the part of the detained junior quite restored Mossoo's good-humour.

"Ah! Zat imperfect—sometimes he puzzle you, hein?" said Mossoo genially. "Mais cest tres simple. It is verree easy. Zat is ze third person plural of ze subjunctive imperfect—'qu'il's fusent'—zat zey might be—"

Mossoo explained at great length, heedless, though the junior was heedful, of a buzz of voices and laughter in the quadrangle. It did not occur to Mossoo's mind that it was Wharton's object now to keep him awake, for reasons of his own.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Chimney-pot Hat!

MR. QUELCH sniffed. He sniffed again. Really, it was annoying! Sitting in his study, Mr. Quelch was busy with Latin papers for his Form. It was a cold December day. There was frost on the window-panes, frost on the leafless old trees in the quad. In Mr. Quelch's study burned a cheery fire. On a cold and frosty day a bright fire was grateful and comforting. Mr. Quelch found it so—till all of a sudden he ceased to find it so.

A volume of smoke rolled out of the chimney.

Busy with his papers, Henry Samuel Quelch gave it no particular attention for the moment. He sniffed and sniffed and carried on.

Then he snorted. "Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

He spun round in his swivel chair and stared at the fire—or, rather, glared at it. For a whole hour or more that fire had been burning brightly and cheerily.

as a fire ought to burn on a frosty winter's day. But something had gone wrong with it now. The chimney, apparently, did not "draw." Why, was a mystery. But there was no mistake about it. A second volume of smoke rolled out and eddied round the study.

Mr. Quelch coughed. "This—is this intolerable!" he exclaimed.

A third volume rolled out. It was thicker and blacker than ever. Mr. Quelch almost disappeared in eddies of smoke.

He sniffed, snorted, coughed, wheezed, and rubbed his eyes. Blacker and blacker rolled the smoke. The Remove master of Greyfriars made a jump for the window, and threw up the sash wide. He put his head out and gasped for breath.

Then he became aware of a little crowd in the quadrangle, all of them staring up at the roof high above his study. Apparently they had noticed something wrong with Quelch's chimney. Some of them, he observed, were laughing. He distinctly saw Bob Cherry, of his Form, laughing. He saw Johnny Bull grinning, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiling a dusky smile. Frank Nugent was chuckling; so were other fellows. There was nothing, so far as Mr. Quelch could see, of a comic nature in a smoking chimney. But from his study he could not see what the fellows in the quadrangle saw.

A Sixth Form prefect came hurrying towards his window as the Remove master put his head out and gasped for air. It was Loder of the Sixth.

"Mr. Quelch—" exclaimed Loder.

"Urrgggh!" said Mr. Quelch. His mouth and nose were full of smoke, his eyes smarted with it. He blinked at Loder with a watery blink. "Yurrgh! There is—is something amiss with my chimney, Loder—" He broke off with a snap. "What are you laughing at, Loder?"

"I—I wasn't laughing, sir!" gasped Loder. "I was going to tell you that there's a hat—"

"A what?"

"A silk hat—"

"What do you mean, Loder? Something is amiss with my chimney. I am choked—suffocated! My study is full of blacks! What do you mean by talking nonsense to me about a hat—a silk hat?"

"It's on your chimney-pot, sir!" gasped Loder.

"What?"

"Stuck on the top—"

"Goodness gracious!"

"It can be seen from the quad, sir!"

Mr. Quelch gazed at Loder dumb-founded. The smoking of his chimney was annoying, inexplicable, amazing. But the explanation was more amazing than the fact.

"A top hat, sir!" said Loder. "Some young rascal must have climbed up and stuck it on your chimney—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a shout from the gathering crowd in the quadrangle.

Mr. Quelch whisked away from his window. He whisked to the door through volumes and masses and eddies of smoke. He could hardly see his way across the study now. He tore open the door and rushed out, and a rolling volume of smoke followed him into the passage.

In less than a minute the Remove master was out of the House and staring up at the roof.

Round him were fifty or sixty fellows, all staring, too. The Remove had been playing football that afternoon, but the game was over—fortunately in time for this unexpected entertainment. Remove fellows and fellows of other Forms

crowded round to stare up at Mr. Quelch's chimney.

Laughter ceased when Quelch arrived. His expressive expression did not encourage merriment. But the fellows were all grinning. They could not help it. Greyfriars fellows wore top-hats on dressy occasions, but nobody had ever seen a chimney wearing a top-hat before. The unaccustomed sight was surprising and entertaining.

Mr. Quelch gazed as if he could hardly believe his amazed eyes—as, indeed, he hardly could.

The roof was high, but the chimney could be clearly seen by standing well back from the House. The top-hat was there, plain and conspicuous.

Something of a more substantial nature had evidently been crammed down the chimney, for only a few spirals of smoke escaped upwards, round the hat perched on the chimney-pot.

Really, it was rather ludicrous to see a red chimney-pot surmounted by a black top-hat. It was no wonder that the fellows grinned. Mr. Quelch might have smiled himself had he not been smoked out of his study. As it was, he did not feel like smiling.

"What—what—what young rascal has done this?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

At a little distance from the chimney-stack was a little dormer window, jutting from a slanting roof.

It was plain that some person unknown had crept out of that little window to stuff Quelch's chimney and bonnet it with the top-hat.

But whoever had done it had not lingered.

It must have been a fellow with plenty of nerve, that was certain. Whoever he was he had got back out of sight immediately, and had probably scuttled down from the attics even before Mr. Quelch's chimney began to smoke; certainly before anyone had observed that strange and unusual decoration on the chimney-pot.

"Has anyone been seen on the roof?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

There was no answer from the grinning crowd. Apparently no one had been seen on the roof.

"Wharton is not here, sir!" said Loder in a significant tone.

Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes swept over the crowd with a searching glare. Fifty or sixty fellows were on the spot, but Harry Wharton was not there. Quelch's lips tightened.

He hardly needed the hint from Loder. Who could have done this, but the rebel of Greyfriars, the scapegrace of the school, the junior who had been a thorn in his side all that term? Only that day Wharton had been given a detention for ragging in the French class, and this was retaliation—or, rather, revenge. Wharton, of course!

Then Mr. Quelch remembered that Wharton's detention had not yet expired. It was hardly past four, and Wharton was in the Form-room till five.

"Wingate!" rapped out the Remove master. The head prefect of Greyfriars had arrived on the scene.

"Yes, sir!"

Wingate stared up at the chimney-pot hat and grinned.

"This is not a laughing matter, Wingate!" hooted Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, no, sir! Certainly not!" gasped Wingate.

"Please go to the Remove Form room, Wingate, at once, and ascertain whether Wharton is still there. He is under detention."

"Very well, sir!"

Wingate of the Sixth hurried back to the House.

"Nugent!" rapped Mr. Quelch,

The moment Monsieur Charpentier's back was turned a French grammar whizzed through the air and smote the little gentleman in the back. Messoo plunged forward and dropped on his hands and knees. The class shrieked; but the roar died away suddenly as the sharp voice of Mr. Quelch rapped from the doorway: "Wharton, I saw you throw that book! How dare you!"



"Oh, yes, sir!"

Frank Nugent ceased to grin suddenly, as his Form master's eye turned on him. "Call Gosling! Tell him to bring a ladder."

Nugent out away to call Gosling. Mr. Quelch was anxious to discover the young rascal who had stuffed his chimney, but he was still more anxious to get the chimney unstuffed.

But there was considerable delay before Gosling arrived with his ladder. In the meantime the smoke thickened in Mr. Quelch's study, and the crowd thickened in the quad, all staring up at the chimney-pot hat and chortling.

Wingate came back.

"Wharton is not in the Form-room, sir," he said.

Mr. Quelch's eyes glittered.

"I had no doubt of it!" he said, with a bitter compression of the lips.

And Mr. Quelch strode towards the House, with an expression on his face that made every fellow who observed it glad that he was not standing in the shoes of the rebel of the Remove.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

"Whose Hat?"

"**C**ELA m'etonne!" ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier.

Messoo had become aware, at last, that something was going on outside Masters' Studies. Wharton had glanced from the window several times, and Monsieur Charpentier followed his glance. Then he stepped to the window and stared out, and remarked that it astonished him.

Really, it was rather an astonishing sight. Half Greyfriars seemed to have gathered there, gazing up at the roof. Remove fellows, Fourth-Formers and

Shell fellows, fags of the Third and Second, were there, as well as seniors of the Fifth and Sixth. Several masters had joined the crowd. The small fry were laughing—even the seniors were grinning—and something like a smile could be detected on the portly visage of Prout, master of the Fifth—and little Mr. Twigg, of the Second, was almost chuckling. Only one face was grim and wrathful—the face of Henry Samuel Quelch.

Monsieur Charpentier opened his window and put out his head. Then he became aware of the volume of smoke rolling from the window of Mr. Quelch's study.

"Mon Dieu! Le feu!" he exclaimed, in alarm.

"Is it a fire, sir?" asked Harry innocently.

"Mais je crois—zere is beaucoup of smoke! Much smoke! Voila, here come ze good Quelch. I go to demand vat is all zat!"

Monsieur Charpentier leaned out of his window as Mr. Quelch came striding towards the House.

The French master waved an excited hand to him from his window.

"Monsieur Quelch! Mon bon Quelch!" he called. "Vat is ze mattair? Is it zat ze house he is on fire?"

Mr. Quelch paused in his stride towards the House doorway to answer.

"No, no! It is a smoking chimney," he answered. "The chimney of my study has been obstructed by a boy who has climbed out on the roof—Wharton, I have no doubt—"

"Vharton!" repeated Monsieur Charpentier blankly. "Mon Dieu! But it is not Vharton who do zis zing, sair—zat is pas possible! Zat garçon Vharton he is undair ze detention, sair. Zat boy is here now."

"What?" Mr. Quelch jumped. "What did you say, monsieur? Wharton is with you?"

"Mais oui! He is in zis study, and he has been in zis study since zree o'clock," answered the French master.

Mr. Quelch stood rooted to the ground for a moment or two. Then he came quickly towards the French master's window. The study windows were high from the ground, but Mr. Quelch was a tall gentleman, and he could see into the room. His eyes snapped as he saw Harry Wharton standing there, a pen in his hand, just as he had risen from the table. Wharton's face was mildly surprised in expression—that was all.

"Wharton! You are here!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir!" answered Harry.

"How long has this boy been in your study. Monsieur Charpentier?"

"Some few minute before zree o'clock, sair," answered the French master. "I take him from ze Form-room, because I zink zat perhaps he not stay zere ven ze eye is off him. N'est-ce-pas? I zink zat perhaps he latch—"

"Latch?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Vat you call latch—to run away quick—"

"Oh! Bolt!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"You call him bolt? Mais oui, now I zink, he is bolt, not latch!" agreed the French master. "I zink perhaps he bolt, sair, so I bring him to my study to do zat task. He do him undair my eye."

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch blankly. "You brought Wharton to your study before three o'clock, Monsieur Charpentier?"

"Mais oui—but yes! All zat time he is here—he vork verree good at ze task, I give him."

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"Bless my soul!"

If Harry Wharton had been in the French master's study since three o'clock, working at his task under the French master's eye, evidently it could not have been Harry Wharton who had stuffed Quelch's chimney and adorned it with a top-hat.

Mr. Quelch hurried away from the French master's window. Wharton's eyes gleamed mockingly after him.

Monsieur Charpentier, of course, had spoken in absolute good faith. He was aware that he had nodded off over his newspaper before the fire, but he was not aware that he had been asleep for a considerable time. Certainly it never crossed his mind that he had slept so long and soundly that the junior had been able to leave the study, remain absent ten minutes or more, and return, without his knowledge. His impression, so far as he thought of the matter at all, was that he had dozed for a minute or two! He had not the remotest suspicion that Wharton had been out of the study at all.

Wharton sat down at the table again,

and resumed his task—in a much more cheerful mood. Indeed, he smiled over it, as if he found something amusing in French irregular verbs.

Mossoo sat in his armchair again, and restarted on "Le Petit Journal" after the interval.

Meanwhile, more and more fellows were gathering to stare up at the roof, and at Gosling rearing his ladder, with the help of some of the Sixth—Wingate and Gwynne, Loder and Walker and Sykes, lending helping hands. Sixth Form men held the long ladder while Gosling mounted.

It was not an easy task for old Gosling, and he grunted and groused very expressively as he set about it. But he reached the chimney stack at last, and knocked off the silk hat. It floated away on the wind, and fluttered down to the quad, and there was a rush of a dozen fellows after it.

Then Gosling was seen to blink into the chimney-pot, and to reach his horny hand inside. He dragged out the obstruction, and there was a yell of

laughter below as a pair of trousers came into view.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Whose bags?"

The trousers fluttered down on the wind, and fellows dodged them as they came. They were rather too sooty for anyone to desire to establish contact.

Smoke, at last, poured from the chimney, and ceased to pour from Mr. Quelch's study window. The Remove master had come back to the spot, to watch Gosling's performance. It was a relief to him to see his chimney restored to order; but his gimlet eyes were turned rather on the crowd of Greyfriars fellows, in a faint hope of detecting the delinquent among them.

"The culprit must be found!" said Mr. Quelch, between his closed lips. "An outrage like this cannot be allowed to pass unpunished."

"May I make a suggestion, sir?" asked Loder officiously.

"Most certainly," said Mr. Quelch.

"The hat, sir!"

"The hat?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir. As all the fellows have their names written in their hats, there is a clue—"

Mr. Quelch nodded quickly. He had not thought of that for the moment; but undoubtedly it was a clue, as Loder said. Tubb of the Third had picked up the hat, and Mr. Quelch glanced round.

"Bring that hat to me."

Tubb ran up with it.

It was quite a handsome silk topper—or had been! Now it was rather ruffled, and rather smoky! Mr. Quelch took it from the bag, and looked into the interior—where the name of the owner was to be found, according to the invariable rule of the school.

Then he jumped.

"Bless my soul!" he ejaculated.

He stared into the hat. The name was there! There was no mistake about that! And the name was "G. Loder!"

Loder looked at him in surprise.

"Whose hat is it, sir?" he asked.

And it was Loder's turn to jump when Mr. Quelch answered grimly:

"Yours!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Letter from Home!

"MUM-MUM-MINE!" stuttered Loder.

"Yours!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob Cherry involuntarily. Really, he could not help it.

It was Loder's hat!

All the fellows had heard Loder's suggestion to the Form master, and wondered whose hat it would turn out to be. In the innocence of their hearts they had supposed that the identification of the hat would lead to the identification of the japer. Now it occurred to most of them, what really was rather obvious, that the japer had not used his own hat to adorn the chimney-pot.

"Mr. Quelch," gasped Loder, "you do not think—you cannot imagine—"

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Quelch. "Your hat was taken by the young rascal who obstructed my chimney, of course!"

"It—it—it's my best hat!" said Loder, taking the topper and examining it. "My Sunday hat! It was in a hat-box in my study! It's ruined!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!"

"Might have guessed that Wharton wouldn't have used his own hat!" murmured the Bounder to Tom Redwing.

ALL ABOUT THIS WEEK'S FREE PICTURE STAMPS!

I PITY the "tough" who tries any tricks on **MAGNET** readers these days! No matter how big the bully may be, if you have a look at the first of this week's free gift picture stamps, which depicts the "Ankle Pull and Hip Push," you'll learn a very easy way of dealing with him. If you carry out the "pull and push" movements smartly, he'll collapse flat on his back—and he's not likely to ask for more!

When you realise that the amount of main line track operated by the

CANADIAN NATIONAL RAILWAYS

is no less than 23,500 miles in length, you'll understand why this railway possesses some of the finest and most powerful giants of the iron way! The C.N.R. commences at Halifax, Nova Scotia, and runs right across Canada to two terminals on the West coast—Vancouver and Prince Rupert, in British Columbia. Two of their latest locomotives appear on our picture stamps this week—the 6,100 and the Oil-Electric.

The Canadian National Railways have gone quite extensively into the use of oil-electric locomotives, and their latest is one of 2,660 h.p. These locomotives have self-contained equipment for generating the required electrical energy. They use internal combustion engines as prime movers, and then transform the power by means of a generator which applies the electrical energy through motors geared to the driving axles.

The C.N.R. runs through some of the most picturesque country in the world. On one stretch—from Montreal to Winnipeg—the railway crosses two hundred or more bridges, totalling eleven miles in length! They cost no less than £1,200,000 to construct!

The Norwegian Elkhound, which is pictured on another of this week's free gift stamps, greatly resembles the Eskimo dog, from which it is descended. They are very active dogs, and strongly built, especially in the shoulders. They

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have very thick coats, erect and pointed ears, and wedge-shaped heads, with strong jaws. Their eyes, which are dark brown in colour, have a decidedly wolfish expression.

The two stamps of our "Rough Riders" series, which are presented this week, show two of the most famous of all horsemen. The Syrian bedouin gets his name from the Arab word "badwa," meaning a desert, hence a bedouin is a dweller in the desert. Even to-day they preserve the same characteristics which they had three thousand years ago. Expert horsemen, living in the open, they despise town dwellers. But if you went amongst them you would be extremely well received, for hospitality is a religion with them.

The Tunisian Spahi was originally an irregular cavalryman, but the French adopted the name for bodies of their colonial troops. The word comes from Persia, and is practically identical with Sepoy. You would find it very difficult to ride a Spahi's horse because they are practically untamed, and only the Spahis themselves can master them.

L OOKING forward to Christmas, chums? Harry Wharton & Co. are. You can bet your life, too, your old chums of Greyfriars are booked for the most exciting time ever. You'll enjoy every line of

"THE RUNAWAY REBEL!"

By Frank Richards.

which is the "piece de resistance" in next week's specially enlarged Christmas Number of the **MAGNET**.

In addition to other topping Christmas features there will be a splendid Yuletide Supplement in which the contributors to the "Herald" have allowed their imagination to picture life at Greyfriars a hundred years ago. The result will surprise you!

If you take my advice, chums, you'll tootle round to your newsagent at the earliest opportunity and ask him to reserve you a copy of next Saturday's

ENLARGED CHRISTMAS NUMBER,

which will also contain six more FREE picture stamps to add to your collection. Don't miss this extra-special issue, chums. It's great! It's wonderful!

YOUR EDITOR.

"But it wasn't Wharton, Smithy! You heard what Quelch said—"

The Bounder winked.

It was proved to Mr. Quelch's satisfaction that the worst boy at Greyfriars was not, for once, the culprit! But Herbert Vernon-Smith had his own opinion on that subject, all the same.

"Who the dickens was it, if it wasn't Wharton?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows, it was Loder—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder strode away and picked up the trousers that had fallen at a distance. He did not hope to obtain a clue to the culprit from those trousers—after the ownership of the hat had transpired! He had a strong suspicion that they would turn out to be his own Sunday trousers. And they did!

With a smoky hat, and a sooty pair of trousers, Gerald Loder stamped into the House in a frame of mind that was positively homicidal. Quelch had been smoked out of his study—and Loder's Sunday bags and Sunday topper had been used for the purpose! And it was not—apparently—Wharton who had done it!

But Loder, like Smithy, had his doubts; though, as Mr. Quelch was satisfied, he could not push the matter further. But he resolved savagely that he would take it out of his old enemy in the Remove as soon as he could.

Mr. Quelch went back to his study—still very smoky and thick with blacks. Trotter was very busy with a duster for a long time before the Remove master could resume work on his Latin papers.

Meanwhile, Harry Wharton was finishing his task in the French master's study in quite a cheerful mood. His afternoon's detention had been unexpectedly entertaining.

At five o'clock Monsieur Charpentier dismissed him with a word of commendation for the exercise.

Wharton found Billy Bunter waiting for him at the corner of the passage.

The fat Owl gave him quite an affectionate blink.

"I say, old chap. I've been waiting for you," he said. "I say, have you heard? Loder of the Sixth stopped up old Quelch's chimney—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Fathead!" he answered.

"Well, he jolly well did!" said Bunter. "He said himself that the name would be found in the hat—and it was—Loder's name, you know. He, he, he! Old Quelch doesn't think it was Loder, but I jolly well know! He, he, he! I say, old fellow, don't walk away while a man's talking to you! There's a letter for you. I've got it here."

"Why the thump don't you leave a fellow's letters alone?" growled Wharton, taking it from the Owl's podgy hand.

"Oh, really, Wharton! If that's how you thank a fellow for getting your letter for you—"

"Scat!" snapped Wharton.

He walked on, with the letter in his hand, and Bunter blinked after him through his big spectacles, and then rolled in pursuit.

"I say, it's from your aunt, old chap—I know her fist!" said Bunter. "I know your uncle doesn't send you any tips now, but the old lady—what?"

Harry had already noticed that the letter was addressed in the hand of Miss Wharton, his Aunt Amy. Bunter evidently had noticed it, and scented a tip for the scapegrace of Greyfriars. Colonel Wharton, in a state of deep displeasure with his nephew, had not written to him once since his visit to Greyfriars School, when he averted the "sack" from the rebel of the Remove. But Miss Wharton was still the affectionate Aunt Amy, unchanged. In her eyes, her dear Harry could do no wrong.

"Hit of an old fossil, but not a bad old geezer, what?" said Bunter. "I'll tell you what, old chap! If there's a tip in that letter from the old frump—Yarooooop!"

Billy Bunter sat down suddenly in the passage, with a heavy bump, and roared. Leaving him to roar, Harry Wharton went on his way.

In the dark days that had fallen on him a letter from his kind Aunt Amy was a comfort. Indeed, it was the thought of the kind old lady, the only person in the world who still seemed to care for him, that had kept the rebel of the Remove from many an act of recklessness. He was anxious to get to the study to read the letter—though not nearly so keen as Billy Bunter to ascertain whether there was a "tip" in it.

"Wharton!"

He stopped impatiently as Wingate of the Sixth called to him.

"Yes?" he snapped.

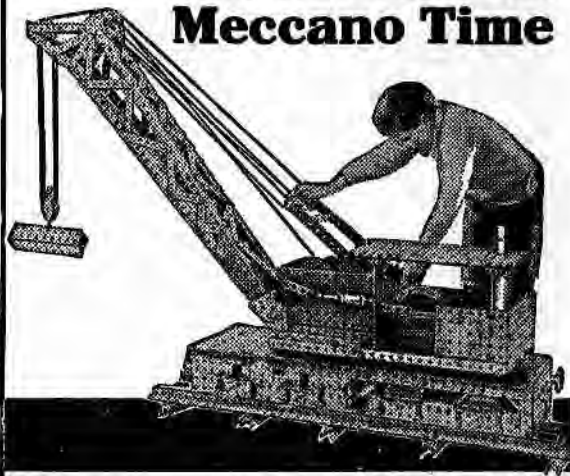
"Have you seen my fag—Nugent minor?" asked the Greyfriars captain.

"I've been in detention!"

"Well, the young scamp hasn't turned up to get my tea—go and find him, and tell him to come to my study."

(Continued on next page.)

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Wingate turned away, and Wharton, suppressing his impatience, changed his direction, to look in the Second Form quarters for Nugent minor. Gatty and Myers of that Form were in the passage, and Wharton called to them.

"Is Nugent mi about?"

Gatty gave a sniff.

"He's in the Form-room," he answered; "sulking as usual!"

Wharton went into the Second Form room. Dicky Nugent apparently was not on his usual chummy terms with his friends in the Second. Wharton recalled the strange look he had seen on Dicky's face that morning under the elms. Something, it was clear, was wrong with the scamp of the Second.

Nugent minor was sitting at his desk in the Form-room, his elbows on the desk, his chin cupped in his hands. He was staring directly before him, with a glum and gloomy face. Gatty and Myers had concluded that he was sulking, but Wharton could see easily enough that it was something more serious than sulks that was the matter with the usually boisterous fag.

"Here, Dicky—" said Wharton.

Nugent minor stared at him glumly; then, as he saw the letter Wharton was still holding in his hand, he started, and his look became eager.

"That for me?" he exclaimed.

"Eh? No; it's mine—"

"Oh! What the thump do you want, then?" snapped Dicky.

"Wingate wants you—"

The effect of that statement on Nugent minor was startling. He jumped up from the desk, trembling like a leaf, and stood staring at Wharton with an ashen face.

"Wingate!" he repeated faintly. "He—he wants me?"

Wharton looked at him blankly.

"Yes; he asked me to find you."

"Oh! I'm done for, then!" groaned Dicky.

"What the dickens!" exclaimed Wharton, in astonishment. "Wingate isn't going to lynch you for forgetting his tea—"

"His tea?" repeated the fag.

"Yes, you've forgotten—"

"Oh!" Dicky Nugent panted. "Is that all? Sure that's all?"

"Yes, you young ass! What the thump did you think Wingate wanted?" asked the Removite, staring at him.

Dicky did not answer that question. The colour came back into his cheeks slowly, the sudden terror faded from his eyes. Without speaking, he went to the door and left the Form-room.

"What on earth's the matter with that kid? Harry Wharton asked himself, as he went up to the Remove passage.

Had he still been on his old friendly terms with Frank Nugent he certainly would have spoken to him on the subject of Dicky. But that was out of the question now. If he had thought of it, he would have abandoned the idea as he came up the Remove staircase. The Co. were on the landing, talking and laughing over the mysterious affair of the chimney-pot hat. Three of them took no notice of Wharton as he came by; but Frank Nugent looked at him with a scornful eye and a curling lip.

Harry Wharton passed them quietly and went to his study and shut the door.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Major and Minor!

LODER of the Sixth scowled. It was after class the following morning.

There had been a slight fall of snow over night. Not much of it was

left in the morning, but some Remove fellows were making the most of what there was. Bob Cherry and his friends, and some more Removites, were snow-balling Coker of the Fifth—and Horace Coker was barging and charging about in a state of wild excitement and indignation, amid roars of laughter.

But it was not the merry Removites, or the unhappy state of Horace Coker, that brought the scowl to Loder's face. His eyes rested on Harry Wharton, who was standing by one of the frosty old elms with a letter in his hand. Wharton was not joining in the onslaught on Coker—he never joined in Remove affairs now. Since the day when he had played for Courtfield Rangers and helped them to give the Remove a record beating at Soccer his popularity had been at the lowest ebb. Had he joined the merry crowd he would have been likely to get the snowballs instead of Coker. His Form had made him an outcast, and he kept his distance with an air of contemptuous indifference.

Heedless of the merry scene, Wharton had taken a letter from his pocket to read it over again. It was the letter from his aunt, Miss Wharton. Loder, watching him sourly, saw the cheerful expression that came over his face, and concluded that there was a tip in that letter from home. As a matter of fact, there was; but it was not that that brought the cheerful look to Wharton's face. The letter from Aunt Amy was a solace to the ostracised junior of Greyfriars.

A fag of the Second Form was loafing about among the elms with his hands in his pockets and a dismal expression on his face. Gatty and Myers, and a crowd of the Second, were making a slide in some remote corner—but Dicky Nugent evidently had no heart for such things. Loder took no interest whatever in Nugent minor, and only observed him because, his eyes on Wharton, he saw that the fag's eyes were on Wharton also.

And he saw another little incident, which drew his attention. Frank Nugent of the Remove had left the merry crowd round the barging Coker and was coming towards the spot. There was a dark and bitter expression on his face, and his glance went from his minor to Wharton and back again as he came up. And, as he noticed this, Loder began to take interest in the matter.

The bully of the Sixth was well aware that Wharton was on the worst of terms with his former friends—it had, indeed, been his own doing to some extent. Now he judged, from Nugent's look, that that member of the Co. was bunting for trouble with the fellow who had once been his best friend. It made Gerald Loder feel almost kindly towards Nugent!

In spite of Monsieur Charpentier's statement, which had completely satisfied Mr. Quelch the previous day, Loder had very little doubt who had planted his top-hat on the Remove master's chimney-pot. How the young rascal had managed it without detection he did not know, and could not guess. But he was sure that the rebel of the Remove had "wangled" it somehow. He had had to let the matter pass; but he was as watchful as a cat for some pretext to handle his official ashpant. If there was a scrap in the quad, there was a pretext ready-made for Loder—and Nugent looked like it! So the bully of the Sixth watched the little scene with considerable interest.

Harry Wharton drew the letter from the envelope and unfolded it. He had read it once, and now he was going to

read it through again before answering it. As he unfolded the letter a pound note was revealed; Loder had been right in guessing that it contained a tip.

"I say, Wharton—"

Dicky Nugent came up to the Removite. He did not notice either Loder lounging by the elms or his brother coming towards the spot. His eyes had snapped at the sight of the pound note.

Wharton frowned a little.

"You'd better not speak to me, kid," he said. "Cut off!"

"But look here—"

"Dick!" It was Nugent's voice. He called to his minor as he came up, breaking into a run. "Dick!"

Nugent minor stared round at him blackly. Frank came up a little breathless. He gave Wharton a savage look.

"Dick! I've told you you're not to speak to Wharton!" he snapped.

"Mind your own bizney!" growled the fag savagely. "I'll speak to any man I like, and you can go and eat coke!"

"You're to keep clear of Wharton!" said Frank Nugent, setting his lips.

"You know what he is—a rotter and a rank outsider! He's been caned for smoking and flogged for pub-haunting! Every fellow in the school expects to see him sacked before the end of the term—and everybody knows that he deserves it a dozen times over!"

Nugent spoke with utter disregard of the fact that Wharton was standing within three feet of him.

Wharton's face crimsoned.

"Haden't you better draw it a little mild, Nugent?" he said quietly.

Nugent turned on him with flashing eyes.

"You rotter! You've disgraced yourself and your Form and your school! Can't you leave a little fool of a fag alone? You're not going to drag my brother the way you've gone yourself!"

"You fool!" said Wharton contemptuously.

"Dick, I've told you—"

"Leave a fellow alone!" exclaimed Nugent minor, with shrill anger. "You silly, meddling ass—"

"Will you clear off and keep away from Wharton?"

"No, I won't!" snarled Dicky.

"Then I shall speak to Quelch!" said Frank between his teeth. "I'm not going to see you sacked along with that cad!"

"You needn't bother Quelch!" drawled Wharton. "I want no more to do with your minor than with you, Frank Nugent! I haven't the faintest idea why the young ass wants to speak to me—"

"That's a lie!" exclaimed Nugent. "I've found him in your study, smoking there, and he had a racing paper! I'd have hammered you for it, if you hadn't been too funky to put up your hands. You're not dragging a silly kid like that down with you if I can stop you! You rotter—"

"Loder's listening to all that!" said Harry, catching sight of the bully of the Sixth approaching.

"I don't care if all Greyfriars hears me! You're going to leave my brother alone, or I'll make you!"

"You silly, meddling ass!" snarled Dicky.

Loder of the Sixth broke in. Loder was quite enjoying this.

"That's enough, Nugent minor!" he said. "You'd better do as your brother tells you, and steer clear of that young blackguard! Cut off!"

Nugent minor gave the prefect a sulky look and unwillingly walked away. Frank Nugent followed him.

"I shall report this to your Form master, Wharton!" said Loder. "This is a matter for him to deal with!"

Wharton's lip curled.

"Go it!" he said.

Loder grinned as he walked away to the House. Somehow or other, the scapegrace of Greyfriars had escaped the "sack" so far, though he had been asking for it all through the term. It was, in Loder's view, a consummation devoutly to be wished, and it seemed to him that this little episode would draw it perceptibly nearer.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders, and gave his attention to his letter again. The black look faded from his brow as he read. It was a long letter—Aunt Amy's communications were never brief. But every word of it was pleasant enough to the junior, feeling that there was at least one left whose affection and trust were unfaltering. Only once in the lengthy missive was there a mention of his uncle:

"Your uncle seems to be displeased with you, dear Harry. I am afraid your recent reports from the school have not been good. Perhaps you have been a little thoughtless, my dear boy. I am quite sure that it could not be anything more than that. Of course, I should never believe that you could be guilty of any serious fault. That would be absurd—"

Wharton put the letter in his pocket, and walked away under the elms, with a thoughtful shade on his brow.

The good old lady was far from guessing what black trouble had fallen on her nephew at school. She supposed that he had been "a little thoughtless," perhaps! Evidently Colonel Wharton had told her little or nothing, and certainly Harry was not likely to tell her. If she could have known that he had fallen into disgrace—that he was in danger of expulsion, that he was looked on throughout the school as a young rascal and a shady sweep—even then, he knew, she would not have turned against him; she would have believed that he was misunderstood and misjudged, and his heart warmed as he thought of it. He paced under the trees, thinking.

The bitterness was gone from his face and from his heart. If only for the sake of that kind old lady who loved and trusted him, could he not make one more effort to pull out of the deep waters into which he had fallen? If he made the effort, would it be of any use? He wondered.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Last Straw!

"WHARTON!"

Class was over in the Remove room, and the Form dismissed. Mr. Quelch rapped out Wharton's name as the juniors went out.

"Yes, sir!"

Harry turned back.

Some of the juniors grinned at one another as they went down the corridor. Wharton, evidently, had been kept back in the Form-room for a "jaw." Trouble was incessant for the scapegrace.

Wharton compressed his lips as he stopped at his Form master's desk. That afternoon he had been quite unlike his late self; he had been quiet, orderly, attentive, painstaking. Miss Wharton's letter had produced its effect on him, and he had resolved, or half-resolved, to make a new effort. But the old bitterness came back into his heart as



Fellows gathered from near and far to stare up at the roof, and at Gosling as he climbed the ladder. It was not an easy task to remove a silk hat from a chimney stack, and the old school porter grunted and grouched very expressively as he set about it!

he was called by Mr. Quelch. What was the use of trying again? He was a dog with a bad name now, and that was that!

"I have to speak to you very seriously, Wharton!" said the Remove master, when the rest of the Form were gone.

"What is it now, sir?" asked Harry, accenting the word "now."

"This term," said Mr. Quelch in a deep voice, "you have gone from bad to worse, Wharton! You have taken up vicious habits, such as smoking—"

"I have not!"

"I have caned you for smoking in your study, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch, raising his voice.

"I told you at the time that it was not I who smoked there!"

Mr. Quelch made an impatient gesture.

"You have been flogged by your head-master for visiting a disreputable resort out of school bounds."

"That is true," said Harry. "But if you knew my reason—"

He broke off.

"There can be little doubt about your reason, I think," said Mr. Quelch. "But we need not go into that. I am now informed that you have taken up a boy in the Second Form, and that this boy's brother—Nugent of the Remove—"

very naturally fears the effect of such an association. This must cease!"

"I have done nothing of the kind!" said Wharton, his voice vibrating with anger. "The little fool butted into my study one day last week, and I never knew he was there till I went to the study. Nugent found him there, and fancied that I had asked him there. That was all. I've lost my friends in my own Form, but I'm not looking for friends among the fags."

"I am informed that Nugent major intervened to-day when the boy was speaking to you in the quadrangle," said Mr. Quelch coldly.

"Can I prevent a fag coming up to me and speaking?" demanded Wharton.

Mr. Quelch set his lips.

"You must, if the case is as you state," he said. "I cannot believe that a Second Form boy would seek out a Remove boy without encouragement. You have taken to bad ways this term, Wharton, and, unless you amend, I have no doubt that you will be expelled from Greyfriars! It is my duty to see that you do not lead other boys, especially younger boys, into your own bad and reckless ways. I warn you, therefore, that your acquaintance with Nugent's

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brother must cease! That is all. You may go!"

Wharton left the Form-room, trembling with anger.

This was the last straw.

That term he had been reckless, insubordinate, mutinous, and he had, or believed that he had, plenty of cause. No more than that could justly be laid to his charge. The fatuous Bunter had smoked in his study, and he had been caned for it. He had gone to the Three Fishers to warn Hilton of the Fifth that the prefects were on his track, because Hilton had done him a good turn. That was all there was in it. And for that he was judged a young rascal, a "bad hat," a shady sweep—a fellow whose acquaintance was a danger to other fellows.

That young ass, Nugent minor, persisted in speaking to him—he could not even guess what the kid wanted. But Nugent and Loder, and now Quelch, took the view that he was the one to blame—he was leading a silly fag into mischief. It was injustice piled on injustice, and perhaps it was no wonder that the scapegrace's new resolves melted away like snow in the sunshine.

He came out of the House, with a black brow. Vernon-Smith joined him, with a nod and a grin. There was hardly a fellow in the Remove now who ever spoke to Wharton except the Bounder—and, indeed, Billy Bunter, when that fat and fatuous youth was in want of a little loan. The Bounder was taking a rather sardonic interest in the fellow who was descending, step by step, the road to ruin.

"More trouble, old bean?" asked Smikby.

"No need to ask that!" snapped Wharton.

"Quelch spotted who stuffed his chimney?"

Wharton stared for a moment, and then laughed.

"No, not that I know of."

"How the dooce did you wangle it?" asked Vernon-Smith. "Mosco wouldn't stretch the facts in your favour; he's down on you like all the beaks. But he seems to have satisfied Quelch that you were in his study all the time."

"The old ass went to sleep for a quarter of an hour."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "So that was it! I jolly well knew. Ha, ha, ha! But what's the trouble now, if it isn't that?"

"Oh, a mere trifle!" said Wharton, with bitter sarcasm. "One day last week Nugent's young brother came to my study, and I found him smoking there. He had heard of my juicy reputation, and came to consult me about backing a horse, the silly little idiot! I was kicking him out when Nugent butted in, and, of course, made a fool of himself. His minor being an angel, you know, incapable of doing wrong unless led into it by somebody else, wasn't it clear that I had taken him up and encouraged him to smoke cigarettes in my study—what?"

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The Bounder gave Wharton a queer look.

"Was that how it was?" he asked.

"Was it?" repeated Wharton. "I've just said that that was how it was, Herbert Vernon-Smith!"

The Bounder laughed.

"Keep your wool on, old bean!" he said. "I hear that Nugent interfered again to-day between you and his minor. And if that's what you've just had from Quelch—"

"That's what I've just had—a warning! My hat, if the young sweep comes in my reach again, I'll kick him across the quad! I'm fed-up with the whole tribe of Nugents!"

"I'd keep to that, if I were you!" said the Bounder dryly.

Wharton's eyes glittered at him.

"If that means that you don't take my word, Vernon-Smith—"

"Oh, of course!" said Vernon-Smith, laughing. "Anyhow, you're not going to row with me, old bean—dash it all, don't you want to leave a single fellow in the Form that you haven't rowed with?"

And the Bounder walked away—none too soon, for Wharton's temper was at boiling point, and he was on the verge of hitting out. Wharton cast a savage glance after him, and tramped away in the falling dusk. He was a dog with a bad name—there was no doubt about that! What was the use of trying to pull out?

Good resolves were forgotten now. Wharton, as he tramped in the thickening dusk, glanced at the lighted window of Mr. Quelch's study, and saw the Remove master pulling the blinds. He was tempted to gather up a snowball and send it through the window. Fortunately, he resisted that temptation, and Mr. Quelch certainly never dreamed what a narrow escape he had had.

The outcast of Greyfriars went into the House at last, and up to his study. Fellows in the Remove were coming up to tea. Wharton tramped into Study No. 1, and turned on the light, and slammed the door after him.

The next moment an exclamation of rage broke from him. The study was not empty. A Second Form fag was in the armchair, and had evidently been waiting there in the dark for Wharton to come in. It was Nugent minor, and Harry Wharton's temper broke out fiercely at the sight of him. He made a furious stride towards the fag.

"You young rotter! How dare you come here? Get out, or, by gum, I'll throw you out on your neck!"

His angry hands were almost on the fag, when he stopped. Dicky Nugent was not looking much like the sportive young rascal whom Wharton had found in the study on the previous occasion. There was no sign of cigarettes, no sign of cheeky impudence. Dicky's face was white as chalk, and there were tears on his lashes. He did not stir or answer, but a sob came from him, a sob of utter misery and wretchedness. And as he heard that, Wharton's anger faded away and he looked at the fag with compassionate concern.

"Dicky! You young ass! What on earth's the matter?" he asked.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Deep Down!

DICKY NUGENT did not speak. He sat catching his breath, huddled in the chair, trying to keep back his tears.

Wharton watched him, amazed and uneasy. It had crossed his mind several times that the scamp of the Second

Form was in some trouble—more serious than was usual with him, though he was seldom out of trouble of some kind. He could not doubt it now. It was not only something serious, but something terribly serious, and every trace of anger was gone from Wharton's face as he realised it. His own troubles were heavy enough, and Dicky was the cause of some of them. But Wharton, with all his faults, could forget about himself when there was another fellow in need of help. Obviously, Dicky was in deep water, for the hardy young rascal was never known to "blub"—he would have scorned the mere idea. Now he was struggling in vain to choke back his sobbing.

"Dicky! Kid! Tell me what's the row. I'll help you out if I can!" Harry's voice was kind and gentle.

Not a dozen yards away Frank Nugent was with his friends. It was plain that he did not know that his brother was in Study No. 1. Why the fag was there was clear; he was in want of help of some kind, and he had come for it, not to his brother, but to the scapegrace of Greyfriars—the "bad hat," who was in peril of the sack. That reflection might have brought a sardonic grin to Wharton's face had it occurred to him. But he was thinking of Dicky now, with deep concern.

"What is it, kid? Cough it up!" said Harry. "You've come here to tell me, I suppose? You were going to tell me this morning, when Frank butted in."

Dicky nodded and choked. Wharton's own words had recalled Frank to his mind, and his face changed a little.

"Haden't you better go to your brother?" he asked.

"That's no good."

"Frank will do anything he can."

Look here, Dicky, you'd better go to him. You oughtn't to come to this study—you've landed me in a row with my Form master. I've had a jaw from Quelch—about taking up a fag and teaching him my own shady ways." Wharton laughed. "Dash it all, Dicky, if your brother knew you were here he would come in and want to punch my head!"

"Frank's a fool!" muttered Dicky.

"I know that! But—"

"He can't help me. I'm not sure he would if he could! But he can't. I-I asked him yesterday. He's got no money—"

"Oh, it's money!" That was a relief, at least. Money troubles were common enough among the fags, and such a trouble could hardly be very severe. "You young ass! Have you been going over the limit at the tuckshop?"

"Don't be an idiot!" That answer was a touch of the old Dicky. "Think I'd care about that?"

"Well, look here, you can't stay in this study. If you want me to know what it is, get it off your chest! I've said that I'll help you if I can."

"You can if you like," muttered Dicky. "It—it—it's a pound note."

"Oh!" said Harry.

He sat on the corner of the table looking at the wretched little rascal crumpled in the armchair. He knew now that Dicky had seen the pound note he had taken from his Aunt Amy's letter. But the fag's words struck him strangely. Dicky did not say that it was a pound, but that it was a "pound note." That was odd.

Dicky Nugent knuckled his eyes and blinked at Wharton hopefully. But his hope was faint enough. He knew that Harry had received a pound note as a tip from a relative. But certainly he

knew of no reason why Wharton should give it to him! Wharton was on fighting terms with his brother, chiefly on his account. His pestering the rebel of the Remove had added to the cloud of disgrace that hung over Wharton. In sheer desperation he had come to Study No. 1 for help; but he knew what a forlorn hope it was.

"You owe somebody a pound?" asked Harry very quietly.

"Yes!" breathed Dicky.

"Well, that's not a tragedy!" said Harry, with a touch of impatience. "You can pay it off out of your pocket-money in time—or your brother will see you through if you tell him—"

"I—I can't! I—I—I— Don't you understand? I—I—I lost on—on—on a— a horse!"

Wharton jumped.

"You disgraceful little rascal!" he ejaculated.

He remembered now the fag's fatuous talk on his previous visit to the study. He had known then that Dicky was kicking over the traces once more. Evidently Dicky had kicked over!

The fag covered back from his angry voice. All the cheek and impudence had gone out of Richard Nugent. And as he cowered, Wharton's heart smote him again, and once more he grew gentle. He realised that he had not heard all, and that there was worse to come.

"You—you mean that some villain has let you bet with him and you owe the man money?" he asked quietly.

"No! I put up the money! Ponsonby wouldn't have taken a bet on tick!" muttered Dicky.

"Ponsonby!" repeated Wharton. "That Highcliffe cad!"

He gritted his teeth.

"But I don't understand," he said. "If you put up the money and lost it, it serves you right. You don't owe him anything in that case."

"I—I borrowed the pound—"

Dicky's voice was the faintest whisper. "Oh! And somebody is dunning you for it?" asked Wharton, puzzled.

"No! He—he doesn't know!" whispered Dicky.

"He doesn't know!" repeated Wharton blankly. "What do you mean? How could you borrow money of a fellow without his knowing—?" He broke off as the dreadful meaning of the fag's words rushed on his mind. "Good heavens!"

He slipped from the table, and stood staring at Nugent minor, his face almost as pale as the fag's own.

"Dicky, you wouldn't—you couldn't—steal!" he breathed.

Dicky shuddered.

"No! No! It wasn't so bad as that! I—I borrowed it—you see. Look here, I tell you I took it only for a day—just one day! I—I thought that Bonny Bunion was sure to win—"

"You—you thought—"

stuttered Wharton. "You haven't forgotten what I told you one day last week? I'd heard Loder speaking to Carne about that horse—"

"Loder!" said Wharton, between his teeth.

"He—he thought it was a winner. He knows a lot about horses. He told Carne to put his shirt on him! Then—I read it in 'Racing Tips,' and—and the man thought the same, and—I—I was sure he was going to win, and—and I met Ponsonby, and—and—"

"And what?" muttered Wharton.

"He wouldn't take a bet on tick—he laughed," muttered Dicky. "So I—I—I knew where there was a pound note that wasn't wanted till Saturday, so—so—"

"You awful little idiot!"

"I—I was sure Bonny Bunion was going to win," groaned Dicky. "Loder told Carne it was straight from the horse's mouth. I heard him. And—and I put up the pound. Gadaby held the stakes. Pon put up his money, too—it was all fair and square—he'd have paid if the horse had won. Pon's a sportsman, but—but he lost!" Dicky's voice trailed off.

"I'll remember this when I see Pon again!" said Harry.

"It wasn't his fault! I went to look for him, really. You see, being in the Second, I—I can't get in touch with bookmakers, like you do—"

"Like I do?" Wharton started as if an adder had stung him.

"Well, the fellows all say you do—"

"Yes, the fellows say a lot of things," said Wharton. "Your brother thinks the same, of course. No wonder he doesn't want you to have anything to do with me. But, never mind that! Tell me what you've done, without so much beating about the bush."

"It—it was Wingate's pound!" whispered Dicky. "You see, being his fag, I knew. He chucked it into a drawer in his study, and told Gwynne that he was going to pay a man in Friardale with it on Saturday. They didn't take any notice of me being in

there."

LOOK, LADS, HERE'S A CLEVER GREYFRIARS LIMERICK!

The lesson was dull Latin prose,
Fat Bunter indulged in a doze.
He snored loudly and clear,
Not a word did he hear,
Till Quetch bade him reach for
his toes!

One of our fine leather pocket
wallets has been dispatched to
L. Golds, Combermere, Whirley
Road, Macclesfield.

the study—the Sixth never do. Well, as I knew Wingate wasn't going to use that pound note till Saturday, I—I—"

Dicky was going to say that he had "borrowed" it, but the look on Wharton's face checked him. He groaned instead of finishing the sentence.

"Wingate hasn't missed it yet?"

"I should have been up before the Head and bunked, if he had!" wailed Dicky. "You see, it was last Saturday, and—and I was going to have my winnings that evening, and—and I was going to put it back when I went to get Wingate's tea. Only—only Bonny Bunion didn't win!"

"He can't have missed it yet—there would have been a row!" Wharton nodded.

"I know he hasn't. It's not till Saturday this week that he wants it. He—he oughtn't to have left it about; it—it's careless!" Dicky was apparently making some attempt at self-defence. "Tempting a fellow—"

"No decent fellow would be tempted by the sight of a million pounds that did not belong to him!" said Wharton savagely. "Don't talk that rot!"

Dicky cringed.

"Well, I never took it to keep! I was absolutely certain I could put it back the same evening—the same note, too! That horse—"

"Oh, cut that out!" snapped Wharton.

"When—when you told me, last evening, that—that Wingate wanted

me, I—I thought he'd found it out!" groaned Dicky. "But—but he hadn't. He—he doesn't know yet!"

Wharton remembered the wretched fag's ghastly terror when he had taken him Wingate's message the previous day.

"If—if you'd stand by me," muttered Dicky, "I—I'd pay it back later, somehow. I'm not a cadger like Bunter. I—I shall be sacked—"

His voice broke. Wharton stood silent. What Richard Nugent had done was, in plain English, theft; but he could see that the foolish young rascal had not realised it. He had "borrowed" that pound note, nothing doubting that he could replace it the same day—in a few hours.

Certainly, now that the disaster had happened, he realised what he had done, and he knew that he would be turned out of Greyfriars as a thief.

Wharton could understand the terror and stress of mind that the wretched fag had been through the last few days—a sufficient punishment, perhaps, for what he had done.

Sacked—as a thief! Wharton could only feel pity for the shivering little wretch—and he was thinking of Frank, too! What a blow for Frank! It did not take the scapegrace of Greyfriars long to think out what he was going to do.

"You don't think Wingate noticed the number of the note, Dicky?"

"Of course not! Any pound note would do! If he finds it in the drawer on Saturday it will be all right." Nugent minor sat upright, more hopeful now. "If—if you'd help me out, Wharton—I know you've got a pound note—"

"I won't tell you what I think of what you've done, Dicky," said Harry, in a low, quiet voice. "You can guess all that. I think you've been too thoroughly frightened to do such a thing again—and that's all that matters. If you've got sense enough to keep straight after this—"

"Only give me a chance!" groaned Dicky.

Harry Wharton took the envelope from his pocket, and extracted the pound note from it. It was not a light matter to part with his aunt's "tip"; but he gave that hardly a thought. Not only for the trembling fag's sake, but for the sake of his estranged friend—the fellow who was now his enemy—he had to save the young rascal.

Dicky's fingers closed almost convulsively on the pound note.

"Put it in your pocket, you young ass! Put it back in Wingate's drawer the first chance you get! Now out!"

Dicky picked himself out of the arm-chair. Already a mountain seemed to have rolled from his heart and his mind. There was deep relief in his face and something like gratitude.

"You're a good chap, Wharton," he muttered. "I—I don't believe half the things they say about you!"

"Cut!" repeated Wharton gruffly.

And Richard Nugent, looking more like his old self, went to the door and scudded away.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Newly Decorated!

"W HAT the thump—"

groined Loder.

Loder of the Sixth arrived at his study and turned the door handle, naturally expecting the door to open. The door did

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not open, and Loder rattled the handle and growled. Then it dawned on him that the door was locked.

Walker and Carne, who were with him, stared.

"Why don't you open the door?" asked Walker.

"It's locked!" breathed Loder.

"Well, unlock it, if you've locked it," said Carne.

"I haven't looked it, fathead! Somebody's locked it on the inside! Somebody's in the study."

"Oh, rot!" said Walker. "Who'd be in the study?"

Loder gritted his teeth.

"It's a rag, I suppose! That young scoundrel Wharton, as likely as not. I can hear somebody."

The three seniors listened. There was undoubtedly a sound of a movement inside Loder's study. Someone was there; and, as that someone had locked himself in the room, it looked like a "rag." And if it was a rag, Loder had little doubt who was the ragger.

He rapped sharply at the door.

"Who's in there?" he called out.

"Little me!" came a drawing voice, in answer.

"That's Wharton!" said Walker.

"Open this door, you young rascal!" shouted Loder. "By gad, I'll give you six of the best for this!"

"Rats!"

"What?" yelled Loder.

"Rats!"

Loder fairly gasped. Walker and Carne stared blankly. It was Harry Wharton of the Remove who was in the study. That was not really surprising, as he was at bitter feud with the bully of the Sixth. But his answer was surprising. Lower boys could not answer "Rats!" to a Sixth Form prefect with impunity.

"By gad!" Loder ground the words between his teeth. "I'll take the skin off his back! Wharton! Open the door at once!"

"Go and eat coke!" came Wharton's cool voice.

"Do you want me to call your Form master?" roared Loder.

"Yes."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Call him, by all means! I want him to see your new study decorations."

"My-my what?" stuttered Loder.

"I'm papering your study, old bean! I'd like Quelch to see it! Call the Head, too—it would interest the Head!"

Loder stood almost dumbfounded. Wharton, it was clear, was busy in his study, and it was evidently a "rag." But the junior's cool defiance was amazing. Caught in the very act, he was booked for severe punishment; yet he coolly invited Loder to summon Mr. Quelch and the Head to the spot.

"Is the kid potty?" said Carne, in sheer wonder.

"By gad! I'll get Quelch here, and—"

"Hold on, old man!" said Walker quietly. "Don't be in a hurry to call the beaks! If that cheeky kid wants you to, you can depend on it that you'd better not."

"What do you mean, you silly ass? I'll have him flogged—"

"Better see what his game is first," said Walker sagely. "Is there anything in your study you'd rather the beaks didn't see?"

Loder started! Certainly there were things in his study that would have caused Loder serious trouble had the beaks seen them. The blackguard of

the Sixth had a good many secrets to keep.

"Oh!" he muttered. "If he's rooted out my things— Oh!" Loder decided very quickly not to call any beaks on the scene.

"Squint through the keyhole and see what the young rascal's up to before you call the beaks!" said Carne. "Can't be too careful!"

It was good advice, and Loder acted on it. He stooped to the door and applied his eye to the keyhole.

Then he had a glimpse of a junior in the study. Harry Wharton had what looked like a pink newspaper in one hand, and a large brush in the other. He was dipping the brush into a can on the table, which evidently contained paste.

Through the keyhole, Loder had a limited view, but he could see that the walls of the study, or a good part of them, were already newly papered. It was a rag—of rather an uncommon kind!

Loder gasped with rage as he "squinted."

He saw Wharton lay down the paper and brush and pick up something from the table. He did not know what it was—for a moment. The next moment he knew, as the junior placed the nozzle of a laboratory syringe filled with ink to the keyhole of the study door, pressed in the piston, and ejected its contents through the aperture.

Loder staggered back from the keyhole, clasping one hand to his eye, which streamed ink.

"Oooogh!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Walker and Carne.

Loder glared at them savagely with one eye. He could not glare with the other; it was floating in ink.

"You cackling dummies! Grooogh! You silly idiots! Ow, my eye! You gurgling chumps! Oh crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I'll smash him! I—I—I'll—"

Loder panted with rage as he mopped his inky eye with his handkerchief.

There was a chuckle from within the study. Wharton was going on with his papering. Loder mopped his eye, and Carne and Walker grinned. But Gerald Loder was not thinking of calling a "beak" to deal with the scapegrace! The very last thing in the world that Loder desired was for a beak to behold the pink papers with which Wharton was decorating his study walls. Coolly and calmly, heedless of the fact that three prefects of the Sixth were standing outside the door, the scapegrace of Greyfriars pasted up sheet after sheet.

"Well, my hat!" said Carne. "Are you leaving him to get on with it, Loder?"

Loder ground his teeth.

"He's got my 'Sporting Snips' and 'Racing Times,'" he muttered. "He's papering the walls with them!"

"Oh scissors! Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Carne.

"I—I don't want anybody to see that—"

"I should say not!" gasped Walker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder wrenched at the door handle. "Wharton! Let me in at once! I—I—I'll let you off if you open the door this instant."

"Thank you for nothing!" came the answer from within. "I don't want to be let off! Why don't you call Quelch!"

"You—you—you young scoundrel—"

"Why not call the Head?" asked Wharton.

Loder spluttered with fury.

"Wait till I get in!" he breathed.

"Shan't be long now," came the cool answer. "I've pasted up all 'Sporting Snips,' and half the 'Racing Times,' Loder. And the pack of cards—"

"Oh!" breathed Loder.

"And the cigarettes. Do call the Head, Loder! Don't you think he'd be frightfully interested in your new study decorations?"

Loder could only gasp. He ceased to wrench at the door handle. So far from desiring to call anyone to the scene, Loder was anxious now not to attract attention to his study. He fairly trembled at the thought of any eyes falling on those decorations. But he longed, with a deep longing, to get into the study and get his hands on the cheeky junior.

Wingate looked out of his study doorway along the passage.

"Anything up?" called out the Greyfriars captain.

Loder choked.

"N-no! It's all right! Look jammed, that's all!" he stammered.

"Oh, all right!" Wingate went back into his study, much to Loder's relief.

"Well, we shan't get our little game, at this rate," yawned Walker. "Better go to my study, you men."

"Hold on," hissed Loder. "The little scoundrel will have to open the door sooner or later. It will be prep soon. Stay here, and see that he doesn't dodge off when he gets out."

"Oh, all right!"

The three black sheep of the Sixth waited. Walker and Carne were grinning, Loder scowling like a demon in a pantomime. There was nothing for Loder to do but to wait quietly till the junior chose to open the door. His fury intensified as he waited. Like wine, it improved with keeping. His first intention had been to give the rebel of the Remove "six." Now he was more likely to give him sixty, once he got into the study.

But he had a quarter of an hour more to wait. Then there was a click as the key turned back in the lock.

Loder buried the door open and strode in. Walker and Carne stood in the doorway, to cut off any attempt at escape.

But Wharton did not seem to be thinking of escape. He had picked up the poker from the grate, apparently to use as a weapon, if needed; and the end of it had been jammed in the fire and was red. Loder made a spring at him like a tiger, and leaped back again still more swiftly, barely escaping the hot end of the poker.

"Hands off, old bean!" said Wharton coolly.

Loder, panting with rage, grabbed up an ashplant from the table. His eyes blazed at the cool junior.

"Put that poker down!" he roared.

"Rats!"

"Walker—Carne—come and lend a hand—"

"Do!" said Wharton coolly. "I'll soon get a crowd here. Is that what you want, Gerald, old sporting man?"

Loder paused. He glared round his study. Two of the walls were covered with sheets of "Sporting Snips" and the "Racing Times." The looking-glass over the chimney was decorated with a complete pack of playing-cards pasted on the glass. On either side of the glass was a row of cigarettes, gummed to the wall. Walker and Carne stared at the scene open-mouthed. Loder gasped with rage and terror.

"Like your new decorations, old top?" asked Wharton. "Rather arty, what?"

Loder gurgled.

"Think the Head would like to see it?" asked Harry.



Loder, clutching at the swaying, slender willow branches with both hands, tossed on the current like a cork. "Help!" he gasped. "Help!" Harry Wharton swung along the drooping, creaking, cracking branch in water that seemed to pluck at him like a giant's hand, and reached out to the prefect. "Catch hold of my hand!" he panted.

"I—I—I'll smash you! Put down that poker!" said Loder thickly.

Wharton laughed and threw the poker into the fender, and stepped to the door. Loder made a step towards him, and Walker and Carne closed up to stop him. The scapegrace was as cool as ice.

"If you want a crowd here, begin!" he drawled. "I'd be glad to see all Greyfriars around. Shall I call Wingate?"

Walker gave a low whistle.

"Better let the kid cut, Loder," he murmured.

"Much better, I think!" grinned Carne.

Loder writhed with rage.

"I—I—I'll—" His fury overcame his prudence, and he made a jump at the rebel of the Remove.

"Wingate!" shouted Wharton, at the top of his voice. "Gwynne! Sykes! Come here!"

His voice rang and echoed through the Sixth Form passage. Walker hastily pushed Loder back.

"Cut, you cheeky little villain!" he breathed. "Loder, don't be a mad fool! If Wingate sees this he will fetch the Head!"

"I—I—I'll—"

"Wingate!" roared Wharton.

"What the dickens—" Wingate stepped out of his study. "Who the thump is that yelling? What the dooce—"

Walker gave the junior a shove into the passage. Carne stepped back, and Walker followed the scapegrace out. Wingate was coming along the passage, angry and astonished. Walker gave the infuriated Loder an almost imploring look.

"Get your door locked—quick!" he hissed. "Wingate's coming!"

Loder slammed the door and turned the key. He was only in time. In a few more moments Wingate would have seen what was to be seen.

Wharton walked away coolly down the passage. He was quite well aware that Loder would never dare to let other eyes see what had been done in the study.

"Did you yell to me, Wharton?" snapped Wingate, frowning at him.

"Yes, Wingate," answered the junior

meekly. "Loder was so awfully excited I was rather alarmed."

"You young ass!"

Wingate went on to Loder's study. Wharton strolled away, smiling. Carne and Walker disappeared promptly, and Wingate stared after them, perplexed, as he rapped at Loder's door. It was locked on the inside.

"What on earth's the row here?" exclaimed the Greyfriars captain. "Are you there, Loder? What are you sporting your oak for, you ass?"

"The—the lock's out of order!" stammered Loder, within. "It—it's got jammed somehow—"

"Has Wharton been up to any tricks here?"

"Oh, no!" gasped Loder. "It—it's all right—nothing! No, not at all! It's all right, Wingate!"

Wingate gave a grunt and walked back to his study. Loder almost panted with relief as his footsteps receded. Wharton was entitled to a Head's flogging for ragging a Sixth Form study. But Loder was not dreaming of getting him that flogging. He had to let the reckless young rascal escape scot free, or his last state would have been worse than his first.

For a good hour Loder was hard at work, undoing what the rebel of Greyfriars had done, and getting rid of those remarkable decorations in his study. And as he laboured he breathed fury and vengeance.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Loder on the Trail!

HARRY WHARTON smiled as he walked out of the gates of Greyfriars on Saturday afternoon.

Three fags of the Second Form had just gone out—Dickie Nugent, Gatty and Myers. Richard Nugent, evidently, in exuberant spirits, had snatched the caps from the heads of his comrades, and started at a run down the road, waving them in triumph. Gatty and Myers dashed in pursuit. The three fags disappeared, yelling, down the road.

Dickie Nugent, just then, could hardly have been recognised as the trembling, despairing little wretch Wharton had found crumpled up in the armchair in his study a couple of days ago. His trouble was off his mind, and the young rascal had apparently forgotten it already.

Wharton smiled as he walked on his way.

The smile died off his face as he sighted Loder of the Sixth loafing in the lane.

Loder did not glance at him, or appear to notice him; but the junior was well aware that when he walked on, Loder followed.

The spy of the Sixth had not had much luck in shadowing the scapegrace when he went out of gates. But hope springs eternal in the human breast.

Loder, like most people, judged others by himself. He had not the slightest doubt that the scapegrace of Greyfriars was a shady young rascal, who, sooner or later, could be spotted, and reported for the "sack." Loder would not have believed, had he been told, that Wharton's occupations out of gates were entirely harmless.

Friendless, in these days, in his school, he did not desire to understudy Robinson Crusoe; and as he had friends out of gates, it was natural enough for him to go and see them on a half-holiday. But that explanation would not have done for Loder. He believed, and desired to believe, something much worse than that. And he was savagely determined to catch the young rascal out, and see him expelled from the school before the end of the term. The "sack" for Harry Wharton would be enough to make it a very merry Christmas for Loder of the Sixth.

Harry Wharton walked on, without looking back. He had intended to walk to Courtfield and pick up some of the footballing fellows there. But he was in no hurry; and as he had no doubt that the spy of the Sixth was watching him again, he determined to give Loder a run for his money, as it were. He turned from the road into the path through the coppice, and reached the

towpath by the river. He had no doubt that Loder would conclude that he was heading for the Three Fishers, and would be keen on the trail.

On the towpath, however, he turned in the opposite direction and walked down the river. At a bend in the winding path he glanced back, and had a glimpse of Loder's cap. Loder, no doubt, had concluded now that he was making for the Cross Keys, which was down the river near the bridge. Wharton smiled sarcastically as he walked on. If Loder kept on his trail, he was going to have a long walk that cold and misty afternoon.

He turned from the towpath into Friardale Wood, and followed a footpath among the leafless trees. That turn must have puzzled the shadower—but perhaps Loder guessed that he was going to meet some disreputable acquaintance in the seclusion of the wood. Another glance back showed him Loder's cap bobbing over the frosty brambles.

In the heart of the wood, Wharton left the path, and dodged away quickly among the trees. He vanished from all knowledge; and Loder was left to wonder what had become of him.

At a distance, out of sight of Loder, Wharton made his way to another path which led in the direction of Courtfield Common. Loder was lost like a babe in the wood, and the scapegrace did not expect to see him again that afternoon. The path led him to the little stream that intersected Friardale Wood, a feeder of the Sark. It was crossed by a plank bridge, which in summer was high above the water; but in winter washed by the swift current. The little stream was full from the rains, and overflowing its banks, and the plank was wet and slippery.

Wharton had almost reached it when he sighted a fellow approaching it from the other side, an elegant and well-dressed fellow, whom he immediately recognised as Cecil Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe.

His eyes glinted.

This was the fellow with whom Dicky Nugent had made his bet on Bonny Bunion. Wharton had made up his mind, when the fag told him, that the next time he saw Ponsonby he would give the cad of Highcliffe what he richly deserved. He hastened his steps.

Ponsonby, on the other hand, slowed down as he saw the Greyfriars junior across the stream. Had his friends been with him, Pon would have welcomed the meeting—but alone, and man to man, was not good enough for Pon. He halted at the plank in dismay. His first thought was to run; but he was aware that he had no chance in a foot-race with the Greyfriars junior. He stooped and grasped the end of the plank as Wharton reached the other end.

Wharton was about to step on the plank; but he paused. The lapping water had loosened it; and it was easy for Pon to shake it and tip him off into the water. Now that the stream was full, there were ten feet of water rushing fast to join the Sark.

"Let go that plank, you cur!" Wharton shouted across the stream.

"Keep your distance, you Greyfriars rotter!" retorted Pon. "I'll tip you in if you try to come across!"

"You rotten funk!" shouted Wharton.

"What's the good of raggin', old bean?" said Ponsonby, in a conciliatory tone.

"I'm not lookin' for trouble if you're not!"

"That means that your friends are nowhere near to help you!" snapped Wharton contemptuously.

It did mean exactly that. Had Gadsby and Monson been with the dandy of Highcliffe, Pon would have been looking for trouble with great glee.

"Well, is it pax?" asked Ponsonby. "What are you gettin' your rag out for? I know we rather ragged you a few weeks ago on the common, but your low pals from the Council School ducked us for it; we got worse than we gave! What's the good of bearin' malice?"

"It's not that, you rotter! You've been helping a little fool of a fag to play the goat, and I'm going to thrash you for it!"

Pon started a little. He had rather wondered to find Wharton on the warpath; it was generally Pon & Co. that started trouble.

"Oh! Has that kid Nugent been gabblin'?" he asked. "My dear man, the little idiot fairly hunted me into takin' his bet—"

"That's no excuse for you."

"Well, it needn't worry you," said Ponsonby. "From what I hear, you've got a rather gaudy reputation in that line yourself. I've heard from Skinner that you came near gettin' sacked for pub-hauntin'."

"Will you let go that plank?"

"Will you make it pax?" grinned Pon.

"No!"

"Then you can keep on your own side."

"You can't hold the plank for ever!" said Harry scornfully. "I'll wait!"

"Right on the wicket," agreed Pon. "But there's more ways than one of killin' a cat!"

Ponsonby wrenched the end of the plank out of place. It slipped from the supporting stones into the muddy margin of the water. Then the dandy of Highcliffe rose grinning to his feet.

"You can walk across now, if you like," he jeered. "I fancy you'll get a duckin' if you do! Go it!"

Wharton tried the plank with his foot as Ponsonby stepped back. It trembled at a touch, and he withdrew his foot. Crossing the plank meant a ducking in deep and dangerous water.

"You rotten funk!" panted Wharton.

Ponsonby laughed and turned and walked away. He disappeared from sight in a few moments, leaving the Greyfriars junior impotent, on the wrong side of the stream. Wharton stood breathing hard and deep.

Pon was gone—taking another route to his destination, whatever it was—probably the Cross Keys at Friardale. Wharton realised that he would have to do the same to get to Courtfield. But he had already spent a great deal of time on leading Loder by the nose; and he was unwilling to lose more. He tested the plank again with his foot, more than half-inclined to take the risk of a ducking. But it was plain that the plank would slip into the water if trodden on, and again he withdrew his foot. It was not a risk, but a certainty; and he did not want a plunge in icy water on a December afternoon.

As he stood in angry hesitation and doubt, he heard a sound on the footpath behind him, and remembered Loder. He glanced round quickly. Over the brambles at a little distance, a hat bobbed in view. It was Loder's hat.

"That rotter again!" muttered Wharton.

Loder certainly could not have tracked

him there. But no doubt he had guessed that the elusive junior might take this route, after dodging him in the wood, and was coming along to see.

Wharton stepped quickly out of sight among the trees by the stream.

A minute later Loder was in full view. He came quickly along to the stream and stopped, peering about him. Wharton, behind a tree-trunk a dozen feet away, was quite out of sight.

Loder was peering at the wet mud at the end of the plank. Loder had been rather distinguishing himself as a detective of late. Now he seemed to be shining as a scout. He grinned as he picked up the fresh footprints in the mud. Someone had trodden there quite recently, and the track was that of a boy's boots. Loder had no doubt that it was Wharton who had passed that spot. Making for the Three Fishers, after all, by that roundabout route, was Loder's opinion. If he was to sight the young rascal again, Loder had no time to lose—and he ran quickly across the plank.

Wharton shouted a warning. But it was too late. Loder was in the middle of the plank before the shout had fairly left the startled junior's lips. Even as it rang out, the plank tipped over, and Loder of the Sixth, with a gasp of horror and fright, went headlong into the rushing water.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Touch and Go!

HARRY WHARTON dashed forward.

A ghastly face, drained of colour by the sudden terror of death, stared for a moment from the swirling water, and was whirled away.

The woodland stream, fed to overflowing by heavy rains, ran almost like a mill-race. Loder was swept helplessly on the rushing current. Wharton's face was white, too, as he saw him go. All thought of enmity was gone. He forgot that the fellow was his enemy, a ruthless bully, that he had been watching and shadowing him, that it was his spying that had landed him in this terrible danger. Loder's danger was all that Wharton thought of now.

He plunged along the rugged, brambly bank of the stream, trying to keep pace as Loder was swept down, hoping to get within reach to help. But the swift current swept Loder on faster than the junior could scramble along the tangled bank. The Sixth-Former was struggling wildly. Loder was a swimmer, but, like many men before him, he found that striving to swim in his clothes, in a fierce current, was very different from swimming in a bathing pool in bathing costume. He was almost helpless in the tearing water.

An inarticulate cry left his lips, that seemed to indicate that he saw the junior on the bank and was trying to call to him.

"Loder!" Wharton shouted. "Look out! The willows! Catch hold—for your life! The willows!"

Ahead of Loder, where the stream was narrow, the current boiled and foamed madly; but at that spot a willow swept over the water, the trailing branches reaching almost across. They dipped in the rushing water, and Loder must have brushed them as he swept by—if he had swept by. But Wharton's words rang in his ears and he understood, and as he rushed down on the drooping willows he saw them, and clutched, and held.

The current tore at him, but he held fast, holding on for his life. Harry Wharton came plunging and scrambling along the bank. Loder, clutching the swaying, slender willow branches with both hands, tossed on the current like a cork. He was hardly two or three yards out from the bank, but he could not attempt to reach it without letting go his hold on the drooping branch, and that he dared not do. In the middle of the whirling stream he swayed and tossed and plunged, able to do nothing, but hold on till the current should tear away his grasp and rush him on to the wide waters of the Sark—and certain death.

"Help!"

He panted out the word.

Harry Wharton plunged waist-deep in the water, holding on to a branch with one hand, reaching the other out towards Loder. But the senior was far out of reach, and the junior swung along the drooping, creaking, cracking branch, neck deep in water that seemed to pluck at him like a giant's hand, and again reached out to Loder.

This time his fingers touched the Sixth-Former.

"Catch hold!" he panted.

Loder, dazed and dizzy, in terror of death, seemed not to understand. His eyes were glazed, and he clung to the tendrils of the willow with a convulsive clutch. If he could not help himself Wharton could not help him, and the junior shouted at him desperately.

"Loder! Can't you hear me? Catch hold, you fool! Do you hear? We shall both be gone in a minute. Catch hold!"

The water tore madly at the junior, and it seemed a miracle that he kept hold, with one hand. But he held on desperately, and Loder, at last, seemed to gather his scattered wits. He released one hand from its hold and caught Wharton's, and the junior gripped hard.

How he dragged himself back along the cracking branch he hardly knew. Every moment it seemed that he must be tossed away to death. But he got his arm over the branch somehow and dragged himself back, and Loder after him. Inch by inch he struggled back to the bank, still holding on to Loder's hand with a grasp of steel, and dragging the prefect after him. Loder, at last, got a grip on Wharton's branch, and was able to help himself.

Soaked to the skin, utterly spent, feeling as if his arms had been almost wrenched from his body, Wharton scrambled on the rugged bank and Loder sank down, gasping, beside him, his feet in the water, too exhausted to drag himself farther. It was several long minutes before either of them stirred.

Wharton was the first to move. He dragged himself to his feet, panting, and began to squeeze the water from his clothes.

Loder sat up dazedly.

He shivered as his eyes turned on the water rushing past him towards the wide Sark at a little distance.

"I—I—I might have been drowned!" stammered Loder.

Wharton nodded, with a faint grin. There was no "might" about it, in his opinion. Loder of the Sixth had been within an ace of being drowned.

Loder staggered up. Water streamed down him, and he was shivering. His face was like chalk.

"You helped me," he said.

"Yes. Lucky I was here—what?"

"I—I thought—"

"Yes; I knew what you thought." Harry Wharton laughed. "Lucky for you I hadn't gone on to the Three Fishers, as you thought!"

"Somebody must have shifted that plank," said Loder slowly. "It's always perfectly safe."

"It was a Highcliffe rotter. He did it to prevent me from crossing. I called out to you when I saw you going to cross, but—"

"Yes, I heard you."

Wharton wrung his clothes as hard as he could. Loder seemed too dazed to realise that he was drenched and streaming.

"I'm getting back to the school," said Harry. "You'd better do the same, Loder, and run all the way. You'll catch a fearful cold, otherwise."

It was odd enough for the Lower Fourth junior to be giving advice to the Sixth Form senior. But Loder was still dazed by his narrow escape and the exhaustion following his struggle for life. He leaned heavily on a tree. His eyes lingered strangely on Wharton's face.

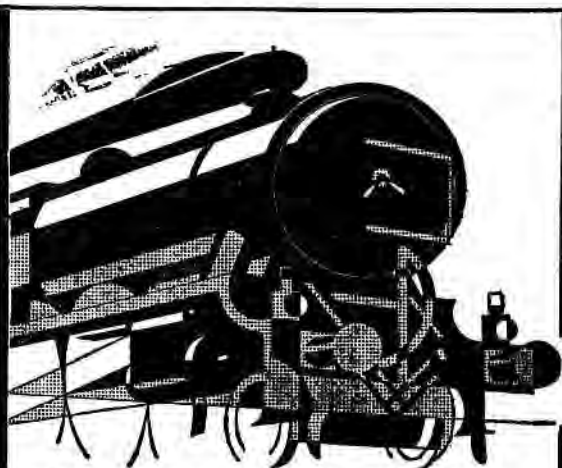
"You knew I was after you?" he asked.

"Yes; that's why I got out of sight."

"It was decent of you to lend me a hand." Loder shuddered. "I—I might have been drowned."

"Well, I wasn't likely to stand by and see you drown," said Harry. "Look here, Loder, get a move on. You'll be frozen. If you don't feel fit to get as far as the school there's the boatman's cottage on the Sark. It's not a quarter of a mile—"

(Continued on next page.)



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"I—I feel pretty rotten!" muttered Loder.

He made an effort, and stood away from the tree on which he was leaning. With a curt nod to the junior, he started, taking the direction of the boatman's cottage.

Wharton looked after him, as he went, with a curious expression on his face. Loder had seemed quite unlike his usual self for those few minutes. Wharton wondered whether, by any possibility, the bully of the Sixth was feeling rather ashamed of himself. He had been tracking down the rebel of Greyfriars, in the hope of catching him in some delinquency for which he could be "sacked"—and it was the scapegrace whose hand had dragged him back from almost certain death.

Wharton did not linger. He was wet to the skin, and the December day was bitterly cold. He started at a run and kept on the trot till he reached Friar-dale Lane. By that time he was in a warm glow.

As he came out into the lane he passed four Greyfriars juniors—Bob Cherry & Co., walking towards Friar-dale. They stared at him, and he saw Frank Nugent's lip curl contemptuously.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry spoke without stopping to think. "What the—"

"Oh, come on!" snapped Nugent.

And the Co. walked on.

Wharton coloured with anger. He realised that he was in a muddy, draggled, and untidy state, looking a good deal as if he had been rolling in muddy puddles. The Co., certainly never dreamed of guessing what had happened, and it did not occur to them that Wharton had been in the water. They could only see that he was muddy and untidy and wet and dishevelled—in a disgraceful state, in which no Greyfriars fellow was supposed to exhibit himself in public.

Wharton tramped on towards the school. He was tired—terribly tired—and had to cease running. But he kept up a rapid walk, to keep as warm as he could.

As he reached the school gates a fat cackination greeted him. Billy Bunter was blinking out into the road through his big spectacles; and the Owl of the Remove evidently saw something entertaining in Wharton's unusual aspect.

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter. "I say, old chap, been under a mudcart? He, he, he! I say, better not let Quelch see you! He, he, he!"

Wharton tramped angrily in. Gosling stared out of his lodge at him, with strong disapproval.

"My eye!" said Gosling, loud enough for the junior to hear as he passed. "Wot I says is this 'ere—wot are things coming to? My eye!"

Wharton tramped on towards the House. He passed Coker and Potter and Greene, of the Fifth, who burst into a roar.

"What's that dirty tramp doing here?" demanded Coker.

"My hat!" said Potter. "Haven't you washed for weeks, Wharton?"

Wharton had not realised that his face was smothered with mud. Anyhow, it could not be helped. With his face burning crimson where it was not hidden by streaks and daubs of mud, he tramped on savagely. Fellows stared at him on all sides, and some laughed. In the doorway of the House stood Mr. Prout, master of the Fifth, portly and ponderous. Prout's gaze fell on the draggled junior with deep disapproval.

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"Upon my word!" said Prout, addressing Mr. Capper. "Upon my word! That is one of Quelch's boys, I think, Capper!"

"I think so," agreed the master of the Fourth. "Although in his present disgraceful state it is a little difficult to recognise who he is."

"Boy!" said Prout in a booming voice. "What do you mean by this? How dare you appear in the quadrangle in this shocking and disgraceful state!"

"Have you been made master of the Remove, Mr. Prout?" asked Wharton.

Prout blinked.

"Eh? What? Certainly not! What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you haven't, you'd better mind your own business."

"Wha-a-t?"

Prout almost staggered at that answer—as well he might! Wharton tramped past him and went into the House. But he had had a glimpse of Mr. Quelch at his study window, staring out with glinting eyes, and he was not surprised to meet his Form master as soon as he got into the House.

"Wharton! What does this mean?"

hooted Mr. Quelch. "How dare you walk about in a dirty, muddy, disgraceful state like this—your very face dirty and unwashed! Are you not ashamed of yourself?"

"Not in the least," answered Wharton.

"What?" Mr. Quelch gasped. "What did you say, Wharton?"

"I said not in the least."

"Boy!" Quelch boomed like a megaphone. "Boy! Go and wash yourself and change your clothes immediately! This instant! In what disgraceful way you have been acting I cannot guess, but I am surprised at nothing that you do—nothing—absolutely nothing! Get yourself clean at once; you will not be allowed to disgrace your school, Wharton, by appearing in public looking like an unwashed tramp! You will take five hundred lines of Virgil, and go to the Form-room and write them at once—after you have cleaned yourself!"

"Thanks!" said Wharton.

And he passed on, leaving his Form master dumbfounded by that answer.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

"TEN bob!" said George Gatty of the Second, with deep satisfaction.

"Fine!" said Myers.

"Um!" said Dicky Nugent.

Of late—until that very day, in fact—Gatty and Myers of the Second had had serious fault to find with their friend Richard Nugent. He had been sulky, morose, dismal, and extremely snappish in temper. That day, however, Richard had been himself again, and Gatty and Myers had generously forgiven him and re-admitted him to their valued friendship. Now they not only forgave him fully, but loved him like a brother. For Richard had discovered a whole ten-shilling note in his letter from home.

During the past few days Dicky had written various ill-spelt and very pathetic appeals for financial aid to various kind relatives. One of them had turned up trumps—though only to the extent of half the amount that Dicky had desperately needed, and too late for even that to be devoted to the intended object.

Still, ten shillings was ten shillings—quite a handsome sum for a fag in the Second Form to possess.

Gatty and Myers beamed.

Dicky was dubious.

Wharton's pound note had saved his bacon. Richard Nugent was a young rascal, but he was not built on the lines of the Bunter tribe, and he fully intended to repay that pound at the earliest opportunity. Here was an opportunity of clearing off half the debt, and Richard knew what he ought to do—and intended to do it. But it was rather a struggle.

"Supper in the Form-room after prep, what?" said Gatty.

"What-ho!" said Myers heartily.

"Um!" said Nugent minor, for the second time.

It was a struggle, but Dicky's better self won it. He crammed the ten-shilling note into his pocket.

"Nothing doing, old beans!" he said with an effort. "I owe a man some money, and I've got to square."

And leaving Gatty and Myers staring, and feeling that they had been rather thoughtlessly quick in forgiving Dicky for his late serious faults, Nugent minor hurried away—perhaps anxious to get rid of that ten-shilling note before the temptation to "blow" it became too strong for him.

He sudded up to the Remove passage, forgetful or careless of the fact that he had been warned to keep away from Wharton's study. It was tea-time now, and he expected to find Wharton there. Remove fellows who were coming up to tea stared at him, and Skinner winked at Snoop as Dicky stopped at Wharton's door. Heedless of Remove men, Dicky banged at the door of Study No. 1, threw it open, and barged in.

"Here, Wharton—"

The study was empty. Wharton at that moment was sitting at his desk in the Remove Form Room, with a black brow and a bitter heart, grinding at the heavy imposition Mr. Quelch had given him. Dicky, of course, knew nothing about that. He stared round the study and uttered an exclamation of annoyance, and then looked out of the doorway.

"You men know where Wharton is?" he called out.

"You young ass!" Vernon-Smith called back from the doorway of Study No. 4. "You'd better cut; your major's coming up!"

"Look here, I want to see Wharton!" snapped Dicky.

"Look out for squalls!" grinned the Bounder, as Frank Nugent and the rest of the Co. came across the landing.

"Oh, don't be an ass! Where's Wharton—if you know?" snapped Dicky.

"In the Form-room, doing lines," answered the Bounder. "But—"

He broke off, his eyes on Frank Nugent's face. Nugent stopped at the doorway of Study No. 1, where Dicky was standing. The look that came over his face made his friends exchange uneasy glances.

"Dick, what are you doing here?" Frank Nugent spoke in a low voice between his closed lips.

Dicky gave him a glare of defiance. "Mind your own bizney! I came up here to speak to Wharton—"

"After what I've told you—"

"Oh, don't be a fool!" said Dicky unceremoniously. "Smithy says he's in the Form-room, so I'm going down—"

"You're not to see him!" roared Nugent.

"Rats to you!"

Frank Nugent, pale with rage, grasped the fag by the shoulder. Dicky gave a startled howl, so hard and fierce was his brother's grasp.

"Let go, you bully!" he shouted shrilly.



"Boy!" said Mr. Prout, in a booming voice. "What do you mean by this? How dare you appear in the quadrangle in this shocking and disgraceful state?" "Have you been made master of the Remove, then, Mr. Prout?" asked Wharton. "Eh? What?" "I mean, that if you haven't, you'd better mind your own business." "Wh-a-at?"

"This does it!" said Nugent between his teeth. "That blackguard's been warned by his Form master to keep clear of you—and he won't! I'm going to see that he does! Come with me!"

"What do you mean?" gasped Dicky.

"You're going to the Head!" said Nugent grimly. "I'm going to ask the Head to interfere, as there's no other way. You're not going to be sacked when Wharton goes, if I can help it!"

"Frank——" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Leave me alone!" snapped Nugent. "I tell you that rotter isn't going to get my brother sacked along with him. I'm going to the Head—and Dicky's going with me."

Nugent was in deadly earnest.

"You—you—you fool!" panted Dicky, white with terror. "I can't go to the Head! If it all came out——"

"What is there to come out, then, you young sweep?" said Nugent bitterly.

"You fool! You fool!" panted Dicky. "Let me go! You fellows, make him let go! You rotten bully, I'll hack your shins——"

"Better think twice, Frank," said Johnny Bull.

"What's the good?" demanded Nugent fiercely. "It's for the Head to interfere, and I'm going to him——"

"Do you want me to be sacked?" shrieked Dicky. "You fool! You fool! Look here, come into the study and I'll tell you——"

Nugent, enraged as he was, was struck by the terror in the fag's face. He hesitated, and then led Dicky into Study No. 1, and shut the door. The Co., with worried looks, waited in the passage. In the study Nugent fixed a cold, hard, grim look on his brother.

"Now say what you've got to say, you young scoundrel!" he said. "It's the

sack, is it, if you go to the Head? What has Wharton got you into, then?"

"You fool!" panted Dicky. "You fool! You don't understand! Oh, you fool! I should have been sacked already but for Wharton! And all you can do is to jeer at the chap, you fool!"

Nugent started.

"What do you mean?" he snapped. "Don't tell me any lies! I've found you smoking in this study, with a racing paper, and Wharton with you—only a week ago, and——"

"Oh, you silly idiot!" snarled Dicky. "Wharton was kicking me out of the study when you butted in that time, if you'd had sense enough——"

"Don't tell me any lies!" said Nugent harshly. "You've been hanging about the fellow time and again——"

"Yes; because you wouldn't help me, and I thought he might," said Dicky savagely. "And he jolly well did, and I owe him the money now."

"Wharton's lent you money?"

"Yes; a pound. And I'm going to give him ten bob off it to-day. And you can mind your own business!"

Nugent gritted his teeth.

"What did he lend you money for—to gamble?"

"Oh, you fool!" gasped Dicky. "I'm not going to tell you what he lent it to me for, but he did, and it was jolly decent——"

"You can tell the Head, then," said Nugent; and he made a stride towards the fag. "This is going to end! Our people at home expect me to look after you here, and I'm going to do it! I dare say it would please that rotter to get you sacked, too, when they kick him out! I——"

"You fool! If he wanted me sacked, he could have left me to it!" snarled

Dicky. "I should be gone now, but for him."

"I've told you not to tell lies! Now come——"

"You fool!" shrieked Dicky, as his brother grasped his shoulder. "If I go to the Head, I'm done for. Wharton will have to let out what he lent me the money for, if it comes out before the Head."

"That's what I want! He will have to answer for it!"

"Will you let go, you dummy?" shrieked Dicky. "Look here, I'll tell you, then! I—I—I made a bet with Ponsonby for a—a pound."

"And that was what Wharton lent you the money for?"

"No, you dummy!" hissed Dicky. "He never knew anything about it till I told him. He lent me the pound yesterday to—to—to——"

"To what?" snapped Nugent.

"To put back in Wingate's drawer, where—where I took it from to bet with Ponsonby," whispered Dicky.

Frank Nugent started back as if a bullet had struck him. He stared at his minor with a ghastly face.

"You—you took a pound! You—you stole——"

"No, I didn't. I—I thought the horse was going to win, and I could put the money back the same day—last Saturday. But—but it lost. That's why I wanted some money, and I asked you. And—and that's what I was pestering Wharton for. I knew he'd help if he could, though I don't know why he should, with you always jeering and gibing and rowing with him. You've been a beast to the chap; and he gave me his whole tip from home to save my bacon. If you were half as decent as him——"

Nugent did not speak. He only

stared with a pale face at his brother. He leaned on the door as if his strength had deserted him.

"You fool!" went on Dicky, his voice shrill with anger and indignation. "You never helped me—you said you couldn't. You talk about looking after me, and if Wharton hadn't weighed in, I should be gone now—kicked out! I should be home by this time, with the mater crying over me, and the pater kicking up a shindy. There was nobody to help me, only the chap you're all down on. And I'm blessed if I know why he did! He looked sick enough when he heard what I'd done; but he did help me out, and you didn't."

Nugent's lips trembled. "You silly fool!" panted Dicky. "Making out that the chap was leading me into trouble. He was slinging me out of his study for smoking here, and I jolly well hacked his shins that day you butted in and went off at the deep end, like the silly fool you are. And I heard afterwards that you smacked his face, and he never knocked you into a cocked hat—as he could have done with one hand tied, if he'd chosen. You silly idiot! I don't believe he goes blagging at all. I know I've never heard anything from him on the subject, except sermons and pi-jaw. And I checked him, and hacked his shins. And—and, after all, he gave me his tip from home to save me from the sack."

Still Nugent did not speak. "Now do you want to go to the Head?" snarled Dicky. "All he'll find out about Wharton is—that he gave me a lot of good advice, and I hacked his shins for it. And what he'll find out about me is that I pinched a pound note out of Wingate's study. And perhaps you'll get Wharton into a row for giving it to me to put back again, and saving me from being a thief. You fool!"

Nugent stepped away from the door. "You can cut!" he said, in a low voice.

"Look here, you've forced me to tell you," muttered Dicky. "It's all right now. Wingate found the pound note in his drawer, and never dreamed that it was a different one. If he'd known I'd—"

Nugent shuddered. "Well, I never wanted to tell you," said Dicky. "You made me—"

"Cut now, Dicky!"

"Glad to!" grunted Dicky. And he cut willingly enough. Nugent stood leaning weakly on the study table after his brother was gone. His brain was in a whirl, and there was an ache in his heart. He had forgotten his friends in the passage waiting for him. He was thinking of Wharton, whom he had turned down—suspected, wronged, and even struck—and who had saved his brother.

Bob Cherry looked into the study, at last.

"Frank, old bean!"

Nugent glanced round. "Dicky's out," said Bob uncomfortably. "Is it all right, Frank?"

"Yes," Nugent's voice was almost a whisper. "It's all right. I—I was mistaken. I've been rather a fool—"

"Well, I rather thought you were barking up the wrong tree, old chap," said Bob. "Wharton may be going off the rails, but he's not the fellow to drag a silly kid after him."

"I know that—now."

"Well, are you coming along to the study to tea?"

Nugent shook his head.

"No; I'll wait here."

"What on earth for?"

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"For—for Wharton."

Bob stared at him. Nugent turned away his face, and Bob, puzzled and perplexed, left Study No. 1, and went up the passage with Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. In Wharton's study Frank Nugent waited alone, with a bitter ache at his heart, and the tears very near his lashes.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Surprising News!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Oh, blow away, Bunter!"

"Poor old Loder—"

"Blow Loder!"

"Well, you might speak a bit more kindly of a fellow when he's drowned, Bob Cherry."

"What!"

The Co. jumped. Billy Bunter grinned. Certainly it a fellow had been drowned, it was no time to grin. But Billy Bunter liked to produce a sensation. Now he had produced one; so he grinned.

"Thought I'd surprise you," he remarked.

Bob Cherry & Co. were on their way to Study No. 13 to tea, when Bunter butted in, full of news and excitement. Bunter's news, whether well-founded or not, was sufficiently startling to call them to a halt.

"You pernicious, pie-faced porker!" said Bob Cherry, in measured tones. "What do you mean by telling us such whoppers?"

"Oh, really, Cherry, I saw Mossoo come in!"

"What's Mossoo got to do with Loder, you fat frump?"

"I heard what he said," explained Bunter. "He came in buzzing with it—fairly dancing. Hopping with excitement, you know. I heard him tell Wingate and Gwynne, and then Coker of the Fifth, and then three or four other fellows before he got to the House. He just couldn't keep it in. I saw him hop into the Head's study, and he never even thought of shutting the door, so I heard—"

"You would!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"My esteemed Bunter," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "it is not easy to make the headfulness or the tailfulness of your idiotic yarn."

"Oh, really, Inky! Mossoo saw Loder drowned, you see."

"Saw him drowned?" gasped Bob.

"He fell into the water in the wood, you know, and was washed away, or something, and Mossoo saw him at the boatman's cottage. You know, that place on the Sark where they hire boats in the summer. Well, that's where Mossoo saw him. Old Frenchy was taking a walk, you see, and came on him there, drying his clothes in the boatman's cottage."

"Drying his clothes!" ejaculated Bob.

"Yes. You see, he was soaked."

"Drying his clothes at the boatman's fire, after he was drowned!" shrieked Bob.

Bunter started a little.

"I—I mean, he wasn't quite drowned—nearly drowned—near as a touch, you know. I meant to say he would have been drowned, if—if he had been drowned, you know."

"You blithering idiot!" roared Johnny Bull. "Has anything happened at all?"

"Oh, really, Bull! I tell you I heard old Charpentier spouting it out to the Head—Loder's knocked out; coughing and snorting; frightful bad cold—in fact, I think pneumonia, and—and a touch of—of consumption."

"Kick him!"

"The Head's sending the car to bring him home, I tell you!" roared Bunter. "Three prefects are going in the car to carry Loder to it, or help him, anyhow. The car can't get on the towpath, of course. But Loder being at death's door—"

"Let's go down and see!" said Bob.

"I say, you fellows—"

Leaving Bunter unheeded, the Co. and a good many other fellows scudded down the stairs to ascertain what really had happened. Obviously Bunter's account was exaggerated in a good many respects. They heard Monsieur Charpentier's voice as they came down. Apparently he had finished with the Head, and now he was telling the world. A crowd of fellows and some of the masters had gathered round to hear.

Monsieur Charpentier was in a state of considerable excitement. He waved both hands as he talked.

"Vous voyez, I talk viz myself by the senter—vat you call a path—along ze river, and I see zat pauvre Lodair. I see him pottering—"

"Tottering!" suggested Prout.

"To potter and to totter, is not zat ze same zing? Yes! He potter into the chaumiero—ze cottage of ze batelier."

"The boatman!" said Prout.

"Mais oui! He is completely expended—"

"Exhausted!" said Prout, who was apparently setting up as interpreter.

"Mais oui, oui, oui! He is at ze last pant—"

"The last gasp—"

"Ze gasp and ze pant, zat is ze same, I zink! Yes! I offer him ze arm to assist. I help him; I convey him into ze cottage! I remain viz him. Ze boatman, he is verree bon—good! Yes! Lodair he strip off ze vet clobber—vat you call clobber—"

"Clothes!" said Prout.

"Les habits—ze clobber! He go to bed while ze clobber dry before le feu—"

"The fire!" chimed in Prout.

"He cough—he sneeze—he verree bad! He tell me how it chance. Zere is a plank zat slip, and he tombe—fall—in ze vatair! A brave garcon—un garcon tres brave—pull him out of ze vatair! Mon Dieu! Ou est le bon Quelch. Where is Mistair Quelch? I must see Quelch and ask him how goes zat brave garcon—"

"Quelch is in his study," said Mr. Capper. "But do you mean that one of Quelch's boys pulled Loder out of the water?"

"Mais oui! Zat bon Wharton—"

"Wharton!" exclaimed Mr. Prout.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Cherry.

"Mais oui! C'est un mauvais garcon. It is a bad boy in some vays, but tres brave. Savez-vous, has zat boy come back to ze school?"

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Prout. "The boy came in in a dreadfully muddy and dirty and untidy state. Do you really mean—"

"Dear me!" said Mr. Capper.

"But I must see zat bon Quelch!" exclaimed Monsieur Charpentier, and he rushed off to the Remove master's study.

The buzz of voices had not drawn Mr. Quelch from his study. Quelch was busy with papers. He was suddenly interrupted as his study door flew open as if a thunderbolt had struck it, and the little, excited French gentleman bounced in like an indiarubber ball.

Mr. Quelch jumped up.

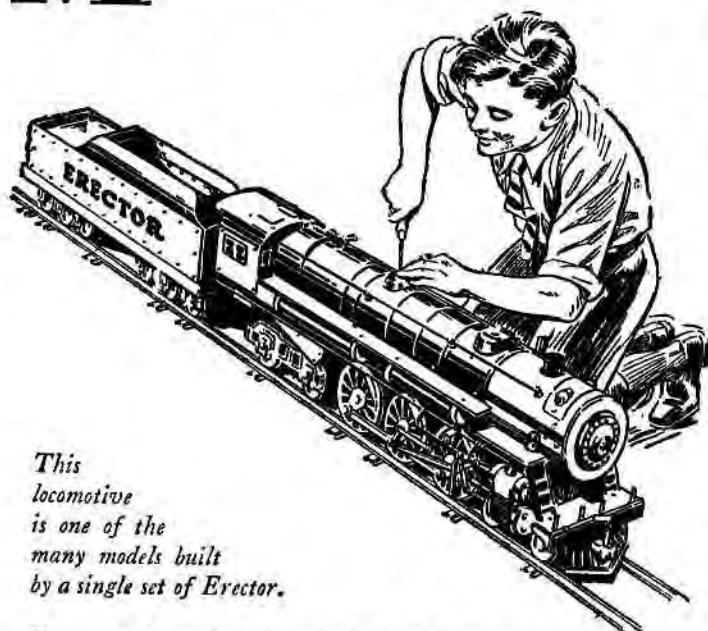
"Mon bon Quelch—" gasped Mossoo.

"Really, Monsieur Charpentier—" exclaimed Mr. Quelch crossly.

He had dropped blots as he jumped, and he was annoyed.

(Continued on page 26.)

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SAVED BY A SCAPEGRACE!

(Continued from page 24.)

"Mais, you have not hear, isn't it? Zat pauvre Lodair, he falls to be drowned—"

"What?"

"Almost he come to be drowned, and now he cough, he sneeze, he blow ze nose in ze cottage of ze batelier. Le bon Wharton lug him—ze you call lug—from ze vatair. I demand to know zat good garcon he goes well?"

Mr. Quelch stared blankly at the French master. Foreign excitability had no appeal to the cold, self-contained Remove master. He disapproved of it. Monsieur Charpentier gesticulated with both hands, very nearly catching Mr. Quelch a smack on his nose.

Quelch started back.

"Monsieur Charpentier, will you kindly explain what you mean to say?" he yapped.

"Mais oui! Le bon Wharton he lug zat pauvre Lodair out of ze vatair, and perhaps—qui sait?—save him ze life! How goes he? Is he damage? Suffers he? You have seen him? Yes! I demand to know how he goes!"

Mr. Quelch snapped out a series of questions, and at length extracted from the voluble little gentleman what had happened. It was startling news for the Remove master, and disconcerting news. He understood now why Harry Wharton had returned to the school in such a shockingly untidy and muddy state. And he had rewarded him with detention and five hundred lines. Even at that moment Wharton was in the Form-room grinding out the lines!

Mr. Quelch's cheeks reddened.

Once more his prejudice had led him astray. Certainly the boy should have told him. But he had asked him nothing; indeed, he had given him little chance to speak if he had wanted to. The boy had come in, wet and weary, after a struggle in deep water, and he had met him with an angry face and a severe punishment. It was bitterly disconcerting for Mr. Quelch.

Monsieur Charpentier was still talking, but the Remove master did not heed him, or even hear him. He walked out of the study, leaving the French master still talking and gesticulating.

He hurried to the Form-room.

Harry Wharton sat there at his desk, wearily grinding out lines. His face looked pale and worn; his whole attitude was one of heavy weariness. Mr. Quelch's heart smote him as he looked at the boy. Obviously that terrible experience had told hard on the junior, sturdy as he was. He sat limply at his desk, wearily scribbling.

But as he saw the Form master in the doorway Wharton's attitude changed at once. He drew himself up, pulling himself together instantly. Mr. Quelch stepped in, and Wharton rose to his feet. He stood erect, all limpness gone, with a face of cool indifference.

"Wharton, I have just heard what happened this afternoon," said Mr. Quelch.

"Indeed, sir?"

"It seems that you helped Loder of the Sixth out of the water when he fell in and was in danger—"

"I gave him a hand!"

"That is how you came to return to the school in such a state!" Wharton's lip curled.

"Yes."

"You should have told me!"

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"Indeed, sir?"

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. The boy was hard, sulky, half-defiant. Yet he must have known that Mr. Quelch, as soon as he heard the facts, would regret having given him that punishment. Perhaps he was glad to place his Form master in that uncomfortable position. It was likely enough. The Remove master's face hardened.

"You need not finish the lines, Wharton. You may leave the Form-room," said Mr. Quelch coldly.

And he turned away without another word. Wharton glanced after him with a sneering smile. Mr. Quelch returned to his study, with a grim brow; and Wharton left the Form-room.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

HARRY WHARTON glanced at the Head's car as it turned in at the gates.

Loder of the Sixth, thickly muffled, sat limply in the car, with a couple of prefects—Wingate and Gwynne. Loder was not taken to the House. It was easy to see that he was in the throes of a severe cold, and he was booked for the school sanatorium.

Wharton, fortunately, had escaped a cold himself; but he was feeling tired and thoroughly "rotten," and was in far from a pleasant humour. For a whole hour he had been grinding at lines in the Form-room, with bitterness growing in his breast all the time. His face was dark and clouded, as he walked in the dusky quad. Three or four fellows, apparently forgetting that he was an outcast, had spoken to him as he left the House, and he had not answered.

He came back to the House at last; it was past tea-time. Monsieur Charpentier met him as he came in.

"C'est vous, mon garcon! I have vish to see you, to demand if you feel ze malade effect—"

"Thank you!" answered Wharton curtly, and walked on without waiting for more, leaving Mossoo gesticulating.

At the foot of the staircase Wingate of the Sixth called to him—his manner more genial than it had been all that term to the scapegrace of Greyfriars.

"Here, kid! I've heard from Loder that you pulled him out of the water—"

"The clumsy ass tumbled in," said Wharton. "He hadn't gumption enough to get out again."

"What?" ejaculated Wingate.

"It looks as if you saved his life, kid," said Blundell of the Fifth.

"What utter rot!" answered Wharton. "He could have pulled himself out if he'd had the sense of a bunny rabbit."

And Wharton went up the stairs, leaving the seniors staring.

"I say, you fellows, here he is!" squeaked Billy Bunter, as Wharton came across the Remove landing.

A number of the Remove were there—it looked as if they were waiting to see the outcast of the Form when he came in.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" called out Bob Cherry, with an attempt at his old cheery hail.

Wharton gave him an icy glance.

"Did you speak to me?" he asked.

"Sort of!" agreed Bob.

"Well, don't!"

"My esteemed and ridiculous Wharton—" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wharton went on to his study.

The Co. exchanged rather expressive glances, and went up the passage.

Squiff, the new captain of the Remove, tapped Wharton on the arm.

"Look here, old bean—" he said.

"Leave me alone, for goodness' sake!" snapped Wharton. "You haven't had anything to say to me for weeks, and I thought I was safe from your cackle."

"Oh!" said Squiff. And he walked off, and the other fellows followed his example. If the Remove had relented towards the outcast, it seemed that the outcast, on his side, had not relented towards the Remove.

Wharton, with a dark brow, threw open the door of Study No. 1, and tramped in, and flung the door shut behind him. He found that the light was on, in the study, and the next moment he saw Frank Nugent.

He stopped dead, staring at Nugent. Study No. 1 was Nugent's study, as well as Wharton's; but Frank had kept clear of it that term. Only once, since the break in the Co. had he entered, and then it was as an enemy. Now he was there again, and Wharton set his lips as he saw him.

"You!" he said. "What do you want?"

"I—I've been waiting for you to come up—"

"Is your young rascal of a brother in trouble again, and are you putting it down to me?" sneered Wharton. "If you've come here to kick-up another shindy, you won't have to ask for trouble twice. I kept my temper last time—and I was a fool for my pains—don't try it on again."

Nugent's face quivered.

"I—I've found out—what you did for Dicky—" he faltered.

Wharton started.

"What the thumb do you mean?" he snapped.

"He's told me what he did, and— and what you did for him—"

"The little fool! If he chatters it all over Greyfriars he will be sacked. Not that that matters to me. You haven't come here to jaw about it, I suppose—"

"I—I wanted to say—I'm sorry—I—I've been rather a fool. I—I—"

Wharton laughed harshly.

"Have you found out that I wasn't leading a silly kid into mischief—that it was only the young rascal bothering me to get him out of trouble? Dear me! Sure you're quite satisfied that I'm not the rotter you've been calling me?"

"Yes, and—and—"

"Thank you for nothing!"

Wharton threw open the door of the study.

"This is your study, as well as mine. You've kept out of it so far. If you're coming back, it's my turn to keep out—that's only fair. I can tea in Hall."

Nugent, his face white, made a quick step towards him.

"Harry—"

Wharton walked out of the study and went down the stairs.

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss next week's grand enlarged Christmas Number of the MAGNET, which will contain an extra-special Yuletide story of the chums of Greyfriars, entitled: "THE RUNAWAY REBEL!" You'll find a real jolly feast of reasonable fun and adventure in this bumper issue, boys, and six more free picture-stamps to add to your collection. A word of warning—be sure to order your copy in good time!)

THE RED FALCON!

By ARTHUR STEFFENS.

READ THIS FIRST.

Sent to the hulks on a false charge engineered by the Earl of Huntford, Hal Lovett and Jerry McLean escape and take to the open road. After a series of exciting adventures, they learn that their enemy is making for London with a quantity of gold. Riding hard for Blackheath, they hold up the earl's coach, grab the gold, and make for the woods just as the Bow Street Runners, led by Martin Cosgrave, appear on the scene.

Trapped!

THE two adventurers had not a long start, and another quick glance behind showed the Bow Street officers opening out in fan-like fashion as they came tearing from the wood.

"We've got 'em!" Hal heard Martin Cosgrave shout. "They can't get out of this field. Aymes and you, Marlowe, go left. Get over on the right, Stevens. You go with him, Henshaw. Baker, stay with me!"

Hal followed Jerry on to the footpath, where the ground was firmer, and on they galloped until they saw the footpath narrow to a stile set between the high hedges.

"Hey, Galloper, boy!" cried Jerry, riding easily and giving his horse a gentle dig with his heels.

Galloper took the stile almost in its stride, and on the other side Jerry waited to see Hal come over. The boy made a clumsy job of it, keeping too tight a rein. But Bow Street Beauty landed safely, however, and away they galloped across a meadow to a five-barred gate which led into a lane.

Would the gate be locked or open? Jerry charged down on it, and, seeing it stand out boldly against a background of trees and rutted road, he sent Galloper over it—a magnificent jump, the horse just grazing the top bar with its hind legs as it came down.

One look and Jerry saw that the gate was padlocked.

"Over it, Hal boy!" he cried. "Give Beauty its head!"

Hal urged his mount on, and over it went as clean as a whistle. Hal, however, losing his balance, toppled out of the saddle, dragging at the reins as he lay on his back in the road. Beauty stood steady, only rolling its eyes in protest as it felt the tug on the bit.

Hal was up in a moment, and into the saddle a second later.

"You're a wonder, boy!" said Jerry McLean. "A novice at riding only a while ago, you'll be as good as the best of us before long."

They rode on side by side now, easing because they reckoned that gate might check the Runners.

It did. They could see the six horse-men crowding up to it, could hear them shouting as they found the padlock there. But the key of the padlock could not have been turned, for they heard the latch click and saw the gate swing wide as they reached the end of the lane.

The six Runners scrambled past the gate and came on at top speed again.

Whipping off his three-cornered hat, Jerry waved it at arm's length, and sent a ringing defiance echoing along the grove of trees.

"Now, Cosgrave, catch us if you can!" At the end of the lane they came upon a highway, and along this they galloped at top speed. The two adventurers were more than a quarter of a mile ahead when Martin Cosgrave led his Bow Street officers into the road.

"We've got the heels of 'em, boy," laughed Jerry. "We are going to get away. But we're in for a hard ride."

They continued at a hard gallop until a toll-gate loomed up ahead, and then they slowed.

"We'll pay toll and take our time here, Hal, lad," said Jerry. "It would be madness to attempt to jump the gate. Once past it and we'll take the Maidstone road. Then we'll double on our tracks and slip Cosgrave somehow. We're better mounted than they are, and I reckon we can manage it."

To their annoyance they found the toll-gate shut and the toll-house in darkness. A row of pointed spikes topped the gate, and Jerry shook his handsome head as he measured the jump.

"Too risky," he said. "But devil take the toll-man. Why isn't he on duty?"

Jerry rode Galloper almost up to the door of the house and rapped on it with his riding whip. A sleepy voice answered, and after an interval, a light was lit. Then the door opened and the toll-keeper appeared stifling a yawn.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, gentlemen," he said, darting swift, shrewd glances from one to the other, "but we don't get many travellers along the road this time o' night."

He took their coppers, and then strode to the gate and opened it.

"Thanks, and good-night!" said Jerry, urging Galloper through.

But, even as he did so, the road was barred by a body of horsemen who had been lurking in the shadows on each side of the highway. They came in a scrambling gallop from right and left and formed up in an unbroken line.

Clang! The gate swung shut behind them, and two men rode up to Hal and gripped him by each arm. Two more did the same to Jerry McLean.

The next moment steady hoofbeats echoed threateningly, and Jerry, shaking himself free of the clutching hands which held him, swung Galloper about, only to see Martin Cosgrave and his redbreasts riding at a steady canter towards the toll-gate.

"Trapped, by thunder!" cried Jerry. "Hal, boy, I'm sorry! I led you into this mess!"

"Surrender yourselves in the name of the King!" said a stern voice in Jerry's ear.

With an oath, Jerry tried to ride away, but hands of steel grasped the horse's reins and pulled the beast up. Four men were now surrounding Hal, and they had their pistols out. Jerry saw his chum drive one of the men back with a smashing blow of his fist.

Then he was tipped out of the saddle and held down by two men who rushed up to secure him.

"Steady, boy! We've no chance! Don't shoot! It'd be murder. Let's take our chance at the trial," called Jerry, as handcuffs were snapped on to his wrists by the men who had unhorsed him.

Half a minute later Jerry was on his feet, safely manacled. He saw Hal handcuffed also. Martin Cosgrave was grinning at them over the spiked top-rail of the toll-gate.

"So," said Mr. Cosgrave, "I've got you at last, eh, Jerry McLean—and the boy, too? Escaped prisoners from the hulks, eh? Well, well—and he chuckled happily—"and there's my stolen horse, Bow Street Beauty! Horse stealing is a hanging job, do you know that, Hal Lovett? Here, tie their feet together under their horses! And if they can't ride with the handcuffs on, take 'em off. Then we'll head for London Town. The sooner we're back, the better!"

Martin Cosgrave began to whistle breezily.

"Never thought I'd be taking you up for highway robbery, boy," the Bow Street Runner remarked. "Always thought you were a nice lad when I used to call and see your thieving father in his shop in Wych Street."

Hal Lovett bit his lip defiantly as one of the men helped him up into the saddle and another started to rope his feet together under the horse's belly.

"I was driven to this, Mr. Cosgrave," he said. "But I'm not sorry we robbed the Earl of Huntford to-night. He's a villain!"

"A villain, is he?" muttered Mr. Cosgrave. "Dear me!"

"Your men were hidden here as if they expected us to ride into the trap, Martin," said Jerry, as he submitted to the tying-up process. "May I ask who betrayed us?"

"A cove of the name of York—Colonel York!" laughed the Bow Street Runner. "But you'll be able to have a word with him. He was wanted badly, and four of my men arrested him before we rode out here after you."

The grinning toll-keeper opened the gate, and the handcuffed and trussed-up prisoners were led through. As they went, Mr. Cosgrave rode close up to Jerry and drew a bag of gold out of his pocket.

He weighed it calculatingly, and smiled as he heard the clink of coins.

"Highway robbery means hanging, too," he murmured. "And then there's that mutiny on the convict hulk. You burned the convict ship down, didn't you—and some of the guards were killed, do you know that, Jerry McLean?"

"Yes, I know it," answered Jerry irritably; "but I didn't murder any of them. Neither did my pal. Take us to the lock-up as fast as you can, but for pity's sake don't gloat!"

"H'm!" said Martin Cosgrave. "Well, bad as you are, you two served me a good turn out at Epping."

(Continued on page 28.)

"You'd have been scragged if we hadn't put in a word for you, Martin," said Jerry. "But, there, forget it! What's the good—we're thieves, and you're a thief-taker. Let's get along with it."

The Runners closed in on either side of the prisoners and in front and behind them. Then at a steady canter they moved off in a body, heading for London.

Martin Cosgrave must have had half the Bow Street Force out that night, Jerry reckoned as they rode along. Half the Force! That showed how badly Cosgrave wanted them.

They moved at a rapid, but steady pace, and soon were in the Borough.

Jerry winced. A man of breeding, he loathed being made a laughing-stock. Handcuffed and roped! Here was a fine way for a gentleman to return to London Town!

Luckily, nearly all the shops were closed and the streets were almost deserted as they made for London Bridge.

"To which gaol are you taking us, Martin?" called Jerry. "The Marshalsea, Tooley Street, Horsemonger Lane, or Newgate?"

"Newgate is where you're going," remarked Martin Cosgrave. "It's the nearest port for Tyburn! Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's right, laugh at us, you blood-hound!" sneered Jerry. "Your turn will come! As sure as you send us to the gallows, Martin Cosgrave, so surely you'll follow us!"

"Follow you, if I send you to the gallows! Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Cosgrave, dropping back and riding alongside Jerry and Hal. "Why, now, I really do believe you're telling the truth, McLean!"

His keen eyes rested on the handcuffs, and then travelled from the irons to the rope which bound their legs together.

"I'd take those darbies off and free your legs," he said, "only I'm taking no chances. I don't want you to escape again."

"I'd give you my word, and you can

trust the boy," answered Jerry. "Hal Lovett is as straight as a die, Martin Cosgrave."

"Straight! And him a highwayman, a convicted thief, and wanted for arson and attempted murder! H'm!"

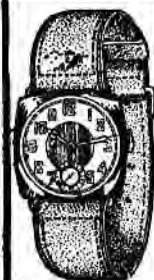
"The boy never stole the Earl of Huntford's star," said Jerry warmly. "Samuel Lovett did that. Nobody would listen to us at the trial. Lovett was in the plot with the earl. And I got my seven years' sentence for trying to rescue the boy. That's the sort of justice we meet with in this world."

"You can't explain away robbing the earl to-night, McLean," said Cosgrave. "Why, didn't I catch you red-handed, and with the money on you?"

Jerry did not answer.

(To be continued.)

(Don't fail to read the concluding chapters of this thrilling highwayman yarn in next week's enlarged Christmas Number of the MAGNET, chums. This bumper issue will also contain six more picture-stamps to stick in your album.)



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"I am undone!" groaned the Head. "In fact, what with all the worry and anxiety, I feel quite done up!" So saying, he sank into his chair, mopping his forehead with a hot over-clean handkerchief.

Mr. Lickham smirked with him.

"What is the trouble, sir? Get it off your chest, and confide in your Uncle Licky! If it's some gilly secret you want me to keep, I promise you it shall go no farther than the Masters' Common Room!"

"The trouble is, Lickham," said Dr. Birchmell, running his fingers through his bald locks, "I have lost my riches!"

Mr. Lickham stared. He seemed rather disappointed, as if the Head was making a molehill out of a mountain.

"Poor! That's nothing, sir! Aren't we all stony-broke in these hard times?"

"My dear Lickham—"

"If it's a lone you're wanting, sir," said Mr. Lickham, edging nervously towards the door, "there's nothing doing! You still owe me that five bob you borrowed last term."

"Tut, tut!" said Dr. Birchmell hastily. "You quite misunderstand me, Lickham. When I said I had lost my riches, I did not mean my worldly wealth. There is still a large over-draught to my credit at the local bank. Though not exactly a Milly O'Naire, I have enough money to keep your Head above water!"

"Then what in the world do you mean, sir, by saying that you have lost your riches?"

"I mean the boy named Riches— young Riches of the Third—the apple of my eye, and the strawberry of my nose, so to speak!"

"He is lost?" gasped Mr. Lickham.

"Vanished without trace!" cried the Head dramatically. "Vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed and opened him up!"

"Grate pip!"

"Only last night," went on the Head, speaking with deep commotion, "I dropped into the fags' Common-room and played tiddleywinks with him, and we went together by the fire, toasting herrings on penholders. I liked young Riches, you know—not because he happens to be the son of a Milly O'Naire or—"

"Of course not!"

"But because of his high nobility of character—his sweet and sunny nature. If he hadn't a penny piece in the world, I would love him just the same!"

Mr. Lickham had his doubts about this, but he was too wise to give tongue to them.

"He has gone!" cried Dr. Birchmell. "Mr. Riches plump heir has vanished! Into thin air! Last night, at calling over, he failed to answer his name."

"Have you searched for him, sir?" asked Mr. Lickham.

"High and low, near and far! Every nook and corner of St. Sam's has been searched and scoured. From garret to basement, I have had the place ransacked. But Riches is not to be found."

Mr. Lickham stuck his thumb in his pocket.

"Extraordinary!" he ejaculated. "Why should the boy suddenly disappear like this? He had no troubles—nothing to cause him to run away from St. Sam's. Then why—"

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HELD TO RANSUM!

By Dave Neave



There are more ways than one of killing a cat—and there are more ways than one of making a hundred quid! Read how Dr. Birchmell broke an ever, raises the wind!

the grubby envelope with an equally grubby fourfinger, and drew out the following missive:

"To the Headmaster of St. Sam's. The boy Riches has been kidnapped. He is in our custody. We are holding him to ransom for the sum of ONE HUNDRED POUNDS. Please arrange to collect this sum from his father; we will then arrange to collect it from you. Unless the money is paid within one week, we will put the boy to the torch, and perhaps flag him alive. This is not a joke, but a solemn threat. We mean business!"

(Signed)

"THE BLUD-RED BROTHERHOOD."

Dr. Birchmell and Mr. Lickham poured over the letter together.

"The villains! The dabble-died villans!" cried the Head. "They have kidnapped young Riches—taken him from under our very noses! And they are holding him to ransom for a hundred quid! Did you ever?"

"No, never!" said Mr. Lickham solemnly.

He blinked at the letter again, and was struck by the fact that the handwriting, the polished phrases, and the perfect spelling, all seemed to be in the style of Dr. Birchmell himself.

For a moment an awful suspicion crossed Mr. Lickham's mind. He wondered if the hole thing was a stunt, engineered by Dr. Birchmell, for the purpose of getting rich quick. But

"Prepare yourself for a shock, sir," said Dr. Birchmell. "Your son has been kidnapped! He has fallen into the clutches of a gang of thugs known as the Blud-Red Brotherhood. They are demanding a ransom of a hundred pounds!"

"Oo!" gasped Mr. Riches, ringing his hands. "This is the worst news I've heard for many a long day! You are quite sure of your facts, sir—there is no possibility of a mistake?"

"None!" said the Head gravely. "Come to my study, and I will show you the letter I have received from the gang."

Dr. Birchmell scampered away with his dignified stride, the Milly O'Naire at his heels.

When Mr. Riches saw the letter, and the terrible threat to put his son to the torch, he was quite broken up, and stamped and stormed like a man censored.

"The skoundrels!" he cried. "The fearful rough 'uns! I'll have the law of them!"

Dr. Birchmell smiled scornfully.

"The law—as I explained to one of my masters just now—will not help us," he said. "His machinery is too rusty; its methods too old-fashioned. We are at the mercy of the Blud-Red Brotherhood. Take my advice, Mr. Riches, and yield to their demands."

"What! Fork up a hundred quid?" gasped the Milly O'Naire.

"Exactly! Otherwise your son will be torn limb from limb; brandished with hot irons; stretched upon the rack till his bones crackle—"

"Don't!" implored Mr. Riches, putting his hand before his eyes as if to shut out some ghastly sight. "I can't bare it! Of course, I must pay the ransom—must I?"

"In banknotes, please!" said Dr. Birchmell, in a sudden brisk and business-like manner. "A check is no use to me—or, rather, to the members of the Blud-Red Brotherhood."

Mr. Riches drew a fat wallet from his breast-pocket, and proceeded to count out twenty banknotes of five pounds. The Head's eyes watered, and his mouth sparkled, at the site of so much wealth.

"There you are, sir!" said the Milly O'Naire. "One hundred pounds, which you will pay to those villains in order that my son may be restored."

Dr. Birchmell clutched eagerly at the notes, counting them over carefully in the hope that he might find a couple stuck together.

"This is only just right!" he said. "I am only just right!" "I will get in a disappointed tone. "I will get in touch with the kidnappers, and see that your son is returned without delay."

"I shall know no piece of mind till I clasp him in my arms," said Mr. Riches, with deep commotion.

The Head nodded. It was a touching moment.

"Rely on me, sir," he said. "Now, if

"A magnificent second-hand Ford car swung into the gate-way of St. Sam's, bowling over Fossil, the porter, like a skittle, and scattering a group of juniors right and left.

Screams were breaking; brakes were squealing; and Dr. Birchmell came rushing out of his study to greet his visitor—a plump, prosperous-looking man, whose florid face was of a delibly paler.

"I am Mr. Riches!" panted the visitor. "Where is my son? What is the meaning of your somewhat cryptic message, sir?"

"You will just take a drive in your car, I shall hope to present your son to you on your return."

"So soon, sir?"

Dr. Birchmell nodded.

"I am not the law, sir," he said scornfully. "When I set, I set swiftly. The Flying Squad is a set of torturers compared with me!"

Mr. Riches went off, with a new hope scrying in his breast. And Dr. Birchmell stood at his study window, and watched the Milly O'Naire drive away.

When the Ford had swept threw the school gateway—bowling over Fossil, the porter, for the second time, Dr. Birchmell turned from the window. He lovingly fingered the banknotes which had been given into his custody, and stored them away in the safe. Then, whistling cheerfully to himself, he set off in the direction of the school tower.

Up the long, spiral staircase he went, puffing and blowing like a grampus. He halted at last outside the door of the room in which the snake was supposed to be confined.

Dr. Birchmell put his ear to the key-hole.

The only sound from within the room was not the sibilant noise of a reptile hissing, but the plaintive sobbing of a small boy.

The Head fumbled in his pocket for the key, which he inserted very quietly in the lock. Then he stealthily turned the handle and flung the door open suddenly, jumping behind it as he did so.

Out of his prison staggered young Riches, of the Third. He blinked around him in bewilderment for a minute, as if looking for his liberator; then, rejoicing in his unexpected freedom, he went dashing down the stairs. And within a few seconds the news spread threw St. Sam's like wildfire.

Riches had returned—with the same mysterious suddenness as he had disappeared! And when Mr. Riches came back from his drive, and found his son in the quad, surrounded by an eggshelled throng, his joy knew no bounds. He folded his son to his breast, and whooped with delight.

When pressed to tell the story of his capture, young Riches could only give a very hazy account of what had happened.

A tall skoundrel with a flowing beard, his face covered by a hideous mask, had pounced upon him unawares, and dragged him up to the room in the tower.

The tall skoundrel, everyone supposed, was a member of the criminal clek known as the Blud-Red Brotherhood. Certainly, nobody dreamed of connecting him with the sedate and scholarly Dr. Birchmell, headmaster of St. Sam's.

Mr. Riches was so delighted that he insisted on giving Dr. Birchmell a hundred pounds for himself, for the delilket and dangerous part he had played in parting with the kidnappers. And the next morning, when all the eggshement had died down, Dr. Birchmell peddled gleefully into the village on his bicycle, to pay into his bank the sum of two hundred pounds!

THE END.

Enjoyed the laugh, chums? Good! Now you can look forward to next Saturday's bumper Christmas Number of the MAGEERY, which will contain an extra-special edition of the "Greysfairs Herald" on the lines of what the staff imagine would have been published for Christmas one hundred years ago!

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WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?

