

1/- A WEEK FOR A YEAR! — See our Easy —
Competition on page 27.

The **MAGNET**^{2D}



HIS PAST AGAINST HIM!



By
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Coker's Catch!

BILLY BUNTER blinked into Study No. 1, in the Greyfriars Remove, with a grin on his fat face.

The study was empty.

Bunter rolled in, and rolled across to the window.

He pushed up the sash, leaned out, and blinked down into the quadrangle.

It was a cold and frosty morning, but it was bright and sunny. Most of the fellows were out of doors, after morning classes.

There had been a fall of snow overnight, and the roofs and window-sills were thick with it.

In the distance Bunter could see Harry Wharton & Co., and a crowd of other Remove fellows, engaged in a hilarious battle with some of the Fourth.

Leaning over the snow-packed window-sill of Study No. 1, Billy Bunter blinked down at the path that ran below.

On that path a Fifth Form fellow was standing talking to two other Fifth Form fellows.

His voice reached Bunter, at the window above. The voice of Horace Coker of the Fifth had great carrying powers.

Coker of the Fifth, leaning in a more or less graceful attitude on the wall, with his hands in his pockets, was talking football, and Potter and Greene were listening to the great Coker as he laid down the law.

Football was a subject on which Coker's knowledge, in Coker's opinion, was immense. Being a generous fellow, always willing to help on fellows less gifted than himself, Coker was admitting his friends to a share in his great

stores of knowledge. Potter and Greene were looking as interested as they could, only hoping that the dinner-bell would ring soon, and interrupt Coker.

The dinner-bell was not due yet. But Coker was booked for an interruption. That was where Bunter came in.

Blinking down at the top of Coker's head, Bunter grinned. He had observed, in the quad, that Coker was standing underneath the window of Study No. 1 in the Remove. He hoped that Coker would not shift from that position before he could weigh in. Coker had not shifted. He did not look like shifting. Coker prided himself on being one of those strong, silent characters, and when his chin was going he forgot time and space. Coker was still going strong when the Owl of the Remove blinked down from the window at the top of his head.

Having ascertained that Coker was still there, Billy Bunter proceeded to gather up the thick snow on the old stone window-sill into a heap. That heap was intended for Coker.

Billy Bunter had many old scores to pay off against Coker of the Fifth. Coker had a short way with fags—which did not make him popular.

It was a large, wide window-sill, and there was a lot of snow on it. Billy Bunter gathered quite a stack to push over on Coker. Carefully he kept back out of sight. He did not want Coker to know who had given him this little surprise. He wanted to keep that dark. In fact, he could not keep it too dark.

Grinning gleefully, and keeping well back in case Coker should look up, Billy Bunter put both hands to his stack of snow, and pushed.

As a matter of fact, Coker was looking up.

Some fragments of snow had been dislodged, and had pattered down on Coker, and caused him to look up.

As he looked up, the stack toppled off the window-sill, and fell—fairly on Horace Coker's upturned face.

Squash!

"Oh!" gasped Coker. "Oooh! What the—whoooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Potter and Greene involuntarily.

It seemed funny to them.

Not to Coker!

That heap of half-frozen snow, crashing on Coker's rugged features, floored him. He sat down with a bump, smothered in snow. For a moment or two he hardly knew what had happened. It seemed to him as if the skies were falling.

He sat and spluttered.

"Oh! Ow! Ooooooh! What—Oooooh! Wha-a-at! Grooooh!" Coker clawed snow from his face, gasped and gurgled, and scrambled up, red with wrath. "Wow! Ow! I'm smothered!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling idiots!" roared Coker, in wrath. "What is there to snigger at, I'd like to know! Look at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Potter and Greene. Looking at Coker only seemed to make them snigger the more.

Coker glared upward.

"Some cheeky fag in that study—Wharton or Nugent—or that new kid, Valentine! It's No. 1 in the Remove! One of those young scoundrels! My hat, I'll spifficate him!"

Coker rushed away for the door of the House, bent on vengeance, leaving Potter and Greene still sniggering.

Meanwhile, Bunter was moving!

He fully expected Coker to rush up to the study. He wanted to be safe off

the things which it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! "Urrrrrrgh!" said Coker into the carpet. "Wurrgh! Yurrgh! Gugg! Leggo! Leave off! Urrrrrrgh!"

Whack! Whack! Whack! "Go it!" chorled Bob. "Put your beef into it, old man!"

Valentine was putting a lot of beef into it. Coker felt as if he was putting tons and tons of beef into it.

"Keep still, Coker!" said Bob. "How's a fellow to sit on the back of your head if you keep on wriggling and wagging it?"

"Gug-gug-gug-guuurrrgh!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Oh crumbs! Oh, Christopher Columbus! Stop it! Urrrrgh! Ooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker wriggled and gurgled and gasped, and the ruler rose and fell fast and furious. The Famous Five chorled. Coker had handled that ruler not wisely but too well. Now he was getting it back with liberal interest.

"Oh gad!" Lord Mauleverer of the Remove looked into the study. "You fellows killin' a pig, or what?"

"Not killing him!" chuckled Bob. "Only dusting his bags!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Urrrrrrgh!"

Whack! Whack!

"That's rather over a dozen, I think!" gasped Valentine.

"Ha, ha! Rather!" chuckled Bob.

"But give him a few more! We don't often get Coker to oblige like this!"

"Urrrrrrgh! Oh crikey! Yooop!"

"Had enough, Coker?" asked Bob.

"Say when!"

"I'll smash you! Oh crumbs! I'll spicate the lot of you!" gurgled Coker.

"If he won't say when, that means he hasn't had enough!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Owl! Wow! Yes!" gurgled Coker.

"Yes! Oh, my hat! Wow! Yes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Valentine laughed, and threw down the ruler. Coker was allowed to rise to his feet. He rose rather painfully. He was feeling the effects of that terrific whopping.

"Now cut, old bean!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "And don't butt into this study again unless you want some more!"

Coker did not cut. He jumped at the Famous Five like a tiger. Coker had admitted that he had had enough; but it seemed that, on second thoughts, he had not had quite enough. Apparently he was thinking of vengeance.

But second thoughts were not best in this case. The Famous Five collared Coker as one man. Once more Horace smote the floor of Study No. 1 with a mighty smite.

"Help him out!" said Nugent.

Coker was helped out. His legs and his ears and his hair were grasped, and thus he was helped out of the study. He went, yelling. Six fellows had hold of Coker, and when they got into the passage Lord Mauleverer lent a hand, and then there were seven. If any fellow had asked Coker whether seven fags could handle him like a bundle of rags, Coker would have laughed scornfully at the idea. He would have undertaken to whop seven fags, or seventeen for that matter, if not seventy! Nevertheless, it was like unto a bundle of rags that Coker was rolled across the landing and tipped over the Remove staircase. And when he reached the next landing Coker—on third thoughts—decided that he had

had enough, and continued on his way unaided.

Harry Wharton & Co. walked away cheerfully to Study No. 14 in the Remove for their coffee. Coker limped away—not cheerfully—to his study in the Fifth for repairs.

At dinner that day Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, glanced several times at Coker, with a disapproving eye.

"Sit still, Coker!" rapped Prout at last.

But Coker simply could not sit still. How many times the ruler had smitten him in Study No. 1, Coker had not counted; but it had smitten him too many times for him to sit down with comfort. Coker would have preferred to eat his dinner that day standing up like a horse. In spite of Prout, Coker wriggled and wriggled.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Shadow!

"COMING, Valentine?" called out Bob Cherry cheerily.

Jim Valentine hesitated.

It was after dinner, and the Famous Five were going down to the gates. Valentine was heading in the same direction.

Four members of the famous Co., at least, were prepared to welcome the new fellow if he joined them. But Valentine's dark, hazel eyes turned on the face of Harry Wharton.

Wharton avoided his glance.

His face was a little set.

That glance was enough for Valentine.

"Which way are you going?" he asked.

"Courtfield Common," answered Bob.

"I'm going the other way!"

And Valentine went out of the gateway and turned in the direction of Friardale.

Bob Cherry glanced after him and then looked at Wharton.

"You haven't been rowing with Valentine?" he asked.

"No!" answered Harry shortly.

"Well, you might have asked him to trot along with us," said Bob. "We've taken the chap up, and it's rather rotten to give him the cold shoulder for nothing."

The captain of the Remove made no reply to that. He started in the direction of Courtfield, and his chums walked with him, rather silent.

All the Co. knew that Jim Valentine would have been glad to join up with them for the ramble before classes, and that it was Wharton's grim look that had prevented him. They had all been friendly with the new fellow since he had been at Greyfriars, and why Wharton had changed—as plainly he had—was a mystery to his chums, and rather an irritating mystery. They knew, too, that Valentine did not understand it any more than they did, and that it must have hurt him, though he never showed any sign of resentment.

Jim Valentine, as he sauntered along Friardale Lane, was thinking of it.

The boy who had once been called "Dick the Penman," in Nosey Clark's gang of crooks, had not left his troubled past behind him, as he had hoped, when he came to Greyfriars School.

All the Co. knew that he had fled from Nosey Clark, but that, so far as Valentine was aware, was all they knew; and knowing that, they had stood by him and were his friends. He wondered whether something more had come to Wharton's knowledge to account for the change in him; a change that was unmistakable.

They were in the same Form and the same study, and could not help meeting continually, yet for several days now Wharton had not spoken a word to him if he could possibly avoid it. He seemed to shrink from his presence; to avoid him whenever he possibly could.

Honk, honk!

At the sound of a motor-horn behind him the schoolboy stepped to the side of the road.

He was deep in thought, and he did not glance at the car. The horn honked and honked again, the car slowing down as it came abreast. Honk, honk!

Jim Valentine realised that the motorist was trying to draw his attention, and he looked round at the car at last.

Then he started violently.

The man who was driving was a small, pale, pasty-faced man with fishy eyes, and in the car sat a man whose nose was like a vulture's beak—Nosey Clark!

Honk, honk, honk! went Nutty Nixon on the horn, grinning at the startled face of the Greyfriars boy.

The car halted, and Nosey Clark leaned out, Nutty ceasing his solo on the horn at last.

Jim Valentine stood staring, his eyes glinting, his face savagely set. For a moment he wondered whether the crooks were there to attempt to seize him by force. But that was only for a moment. He knew that they dared not.

"Hold on, Jim, and speak to an old friend," said Nosey Clark, with a sour grin.

Valentine clenched his hands.

"What are you doing here, Nosey?" he asked, between his teeth.

"Looking for a chance to speak to you, Jim!"

"You scoundrel!" muttered Jim.

Nosey Clark grinned as the boy shot a swift glance up and down the frosty lane. That involuntary glance told how anxious Jim Valentine was that nobody connected with Greyfriars School should witness this meeting.

There was no one in sight. But just ahead the lane made a sharp curve, and anyone might come round the corner any moment. It occurred to Valentine's mind that his Form master, Mr. Quelch, had gone down to the village after dinner. If he should be coming back—

"Can't you leave me alone, Nosey, you rotter?" muttered the boy. "You're mad to show yourself here; your description's known to the police!"

"I'm taking the risk to see you, Jim," answered Nosey. "You've been some weeks at your new school now. How long do you fancy you're keeping it up?"

"Leave me alone!"

"We're not losing Dick the Penman, Jim," said Clark coolly. "You're coming back to us!"

"Never!"

"That's a long word! Jump into the car, Jim, and come!"

Valentine gave the beaky-nosed crook a glance of contempt and turned from him, walking on up the lane. Nutty put the car into motion again, and it crawled on, keeping pace with the schoolboy, Nosey Clark still leaning from the window.

"You won't come, Jim?" he asked.

"No, you rotter!" answered Valentine, over his shoulder.

"You're banking on staying at Greyfriars?"

"You know that."

"How long do you fancy you would stay there if I got your headmaster on the phone and told him who and what you are?"

the scene before Coker could arrive. He turned from the window, and raced across the study to the door. He shot out of the doorway like a stone from a catapult—right into Jim Valentine, who was coming in.

"Oh!" gasped the new Remove fellow, staggering back.

"Ow!" gurgled Bunter. Valentine sat in the passage. Bunter sat in the doorway. Both of them gasped.

"You—you fat chump!" gasped Valentine. "What are you up to?"

"Grooooooh!" Valentine staggered to his feet, gasping for breath.

"What are you up to in my study?" he demanded.

"Ow! Nothing! Wow! Leave off kicking me, you beast!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Wow! I'll jolly well—Yarooooooh!"

"Get out, you fat Owl!" "Beast!"

Assisted by the new fellow's boot, Billy Bunter got out of the doorway. He scrambled up in the passage, and cut off to his own study, and the door of Study No. 7 slammed after him. Already there was a sound of heavy footsteps on the Remove staircase. Coker was coming—and the fat Owl had only escaped in time.

In Study No. 1 Jim Valentine glanced round him, wondering what the Owl of the Remove had been there for.

But he had little time to think about that.

There was a heavy tramp in the passage, and the bulky figure of Horace Coker of the Fifth Form appeared in the doorway.

Coker glared in.

He had lost no time in getting to the study, hoping to catch the delinquent still there! He had no doubt that it was one of three fellows to whom the study belonged—Wharton, or Nugent, or the new fellow, Valentine. That was quite a natural suspicion. Finding Valentine there, Coker naturally had no doubt that he had got his man!

"Oh! You're here!" gasped Coker. He was a little winded by his race up the stairs.

Jim Valentine stared at him.

"Yes, I'm here," he answered. "Why shouldn't I be here, in my own study?"

"Well, I'm jolly glad you're here!" said Coker grimly. "I fancied you might have cut, you cheeky young scoundrel!"

"Eh?"

"Now I've got you!"

And with that, Coker rushed.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Valentine, as he went whirling under Coker's rush. "You potty ass! Are you mad? What the dickens— Oh crumbs! Whoop!"

Valentine was a strong and sturdy fellow. But he was no match for the mighty Coker. He went over, crashing. His face rubbed the dust from the study carpet, and Coker's hefty knee was planted in his back. Coker's hand grasped a ruler from the study table. His arm rose and fell.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Oh crikey! Stop it, you potty ass, I—"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Stop it!" yelled Valentine, struggling frantically.

Coker was not likely to stop it. Coker had got his man—or he supposed he had—and Coker was there for just vengeance. So far from stopping, Coker accelerated. The ruler rose and fell hard and fast, and the whacks rang through Study No. 1 like pistol-shots.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Turning the Tables!

HARRY WHARTON laughed breathlessly.

"Beaten to the wide!" he said.

"The beatfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Our win!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

The battle with the snowballs ended suddenly. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth were in flight. The Famous Five of the Remove and their comrades remained victors on a hard-fought field. Some of the Remove men pursued the scattering Fourth-Formers, whizzing snowballs after them as they dodged. The Famous Five strolled away to the House. Johnny Bull suggested hot coffee in the study. The idea of hot coffee on a cold and frosty morning was grateful and comforting, and the suggestion was adopted nem. con. In a cheery, ruddy bunch the chums of the Remove came into the House and made their way to the Remove passage.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's that row?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the five came up the Remove staircase.

Quite an uproar greeted the juniors as they reached the Remove landing. The door of the first study in the

Like an evil shadow, the past rises constantly before Jim Valentine's eyes, mocking him, taunting him, seeking to drag him back to the dingy, lawless life he has left behind.

passage was wide open, and from that study came sounds of woe and strife.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Ow! Wow! Stop it!"

Whack! Whack!

"You potty dummy! Wharrer you up to? Lemme gerrup!"

Whack! Whack!

"Yarooooooh!"

"That's Valentine yelling!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "Somebody pitching into him in the study! Come on!"

The juniors ran into the passage.

They stared into Study No. 1.

"Coker!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Rescue, you fellows!" yelled Valentine, who was on his face on the floor, wriggling frantically, with a sinewy knee planted in his back. The dust rose from his trousers under the swipes of the ruler.

Horace Coker stared round.

"Don't you fags butt in!" he snapped.

"Don't you— Oh! Ah! Ow! Hands off— Whoooooop!"

Bob Cherry got there first. He took Coker round the neck and dragged. The other four were on the spot the next moment.

Coker was dragged off Valentine in the twinkling of an eye. He smote the study floor with a resounding bump.

Valentine sat up, gasping.

"Oh, my hat! Keep that potty rhinoceros off! Oh crikey!"

"We've got him!" chuckled Bob.

They had got him—there was no doubt about that! Coker was sprawling on his back. The Fifth-Former was a big fellow, but with Wharton's weight on his arm, and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh sitting on his legs, he was helpless. They pinned him on the floor—roaring.

Valentine scrambled up. He was hurt, and he was breathless and wrathful. Coker was still more wrathful. He raved.

"Gerroff, you young villains! I'll smash you! I'll spifficate you! I'll—Gug-gug-gug!" Coker wound up, as Bob Cherry reached the inkpot from the table and playfully tipped it over his open mouth.

Coker gurgled ink.

"Now, what's the row about?" asked Bob genially. "What are you rowing with Coker for, kid?"

"Blessed if I know! The potty ass rushed into the study and collared me!" gasped Valentine. "I haven't the faintest idea why!"

"Well, that's rather thick, even for Coker! What did you do it for, Coker?"

"Grooooooh!"

"Speak up, old bean!"

"Gug-gug-gug-gug!" Coker was still gurgling ink. "Ooooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Must be off his rocker, I should think!" gasped Valentine. "But he's not going to lam me with a ruler, whether he's off or on his rocker!"

"Groogh! Gerroff!" Coker recovered his voice. "I haven't finished with that cheeky young villain yet! I'll teach him to mop snow over me! Gerroff!"

"Who mopped snow over you, you silly ass?" demanded Jim Valentine. "I haven't seen you to-day before this, that I know of!"

"You did, you young villain! I'll smash you!" roared Coker. "Mopped half a ton of snow over me from this window when I was standing under it in the quad—"

"I didn't, you howling ass! If anybody did, it was not I!"

"Rot! I found you in the study—"

"Oh!" gasped Valentine. "That's what Bunter was doing here, I suppose! I knew he was up to something!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

"You potty chump, I'd only just got into the study when you barged in!" howled Valentine. "Couldn't you ask first, you howling idiot?"

"Will you gerroff?" boomed Coker. "I'll spifficate the lot of you! I'll pulverise you all round!"

"Turn him over!" said Valentine, picking up the ruler which had dropped from Horace Coker's hand. "He's given me about a dozen with this. I'll give him a dozen, and then he may learn to get hold of the right man before he goes off at the deep end."

"Good egg!"

"Over you go, Coker!"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"You—you—"

"Not an hour," said Valentine quietly. "Get on with it, if you choose, Nosey! You'll repent it! There's ten years at Dartmoor waiting for you, whatever my happen to me."

Nosey Clark smiled an evil smile. "It's check on both sides, Jim," he said. "We dare not give one another away. But there are other ways and means. You will not stay long at Greyfriars."

Valentine walked faster.

The car kept pace with him, and they turned the corner of the lane together. A tall, rather angular gentleman, coming from the village, glanced at Valentine and gave him a smile and a

"Some—some men I—I knew—once, sir," stammered Jim.

His colour deepened under Mr. Quelch's penetrating eyes.

"You met them?"

"No, sir. I did not know they were about, or I should not have come out of gates."

"Then it was a chance meeting?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am glad of that, Valentine." Mr. Quelch paused, and went on in a very kindly tone: "It is necessary for you to be careful, Valentine. I have, as you know, a high opinion of you. You have told me that you were at one time in

were strong. But the sight of Nosey Clark's dark and evil face had given him a shock.

Valentine was aware of that as he walked slowly on, and, not for the first time, he wondered wearily whether he had acted wisely in coming to Greyfriars at all. He had hoped to get clear of the gang. But he was not clear of them; they would not let him go if they could help it. In Nosey Clark's evil, scheming mind there was some plan for getting him back. What it was he could not guess, but it was a lurking fear in his mind. Greyfriars School had been a haven of refuge to him. But how long was it to last?



Billy Bunter put both hands to the stack of snow on the window-sill and pushed. As Coker, who had been discussing football with Potter and Greene, looked up, the snow toppled off and fell fairly on his upturned face. Squash! "Oh!" gasped the Fifth-Former. "Ooooh! What the—Whooooh!"

nod. It was Mr. Quelch, the master of the Greyfriars Remove. His keen eyes turned immediately on the men in the car, and a frown darkened his brow. He had never seen Nosey Clark or Nutty Nixon before, but he did not need telling the type of men they were.

Mr. Quelch came to a halt, his face growing very grim. Valentine's face was scarlet.

"Well, good-bye, Jim!" called out Nosey. "See you again another time. Get on!"

Nutty drove on, grinning.

Valentine would have moved on, but Mr. Quelch made him a sign to stop. They stood for some moments in silence, the Form master watching the car till it disappeared up the lane. Then he turned to the junior.

"Who were those men, Valentine?" he asked quietly.

bad hands, and that you were anxious to keep clear of your former—h'm—associates. I have accepted your assurance on that point with confidence—complete confidence and faith. But—"

"Thank you, sir!" muttered Jim.

"But," went on Mr. Quelch, "you are aware that I took a very great responsibility in placing you at Greyfriars. I made myself responsible for you to the headmaster. I am sure that I shall never have any reason to regret it. But you will realise, my boy, that you must be very careful indeed. I fully believe that this unfortunate meeting was by chance. But take every care, Valentine, every possible care not to see such persons again!"

"I shall be only too glad, sir!"

Mr. Quelch nodded, and walked on, with a very thoughtful shade on his face. His confidence and faith in the waif he had taken under his protection

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Dark Doubts!

"TROT in, old fellow! You're late!"

Frank Nugent called out in a very cordial tone—very cordial indeed. He rather emphasised the cordiality, on account of the grim expression on Harry Wharton's face.

It was tea-time, and the two juniors were in Study No. 1. They had started tea, but Valentine had not come up.

So when a footstep stopped at the door of Study No. 1, and the door opened, Frank called out to Valentine, desiring to make it clear that he, at least, was as friendly as ever.

But, as a matter of fact, it was not Jim Valentine who had arrived. Instead of Valentine's handsome face, a fat countenance, adorned by a large

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pair of spectacles, looked into the study. Billy Bunter grinned affably.

He was quite pleased by that cordial greeting, which had not been intended for his fat ears.

"Right-ho, old chap!" said Bunter. And he trotted in.

Nugent stared at him.

"You fat frump!" he ejaculated. "I thought it was Valentine!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Travel!" grunted Nugent.

Billy Bunter snorted. Bunter had a way of arriving at a study at tea-time, but he seldom had a cordial greeting when he arrived. Now he had had one—but it turned out to be a mistake.

Still, Bunter did not mind the mistake, so long as he stayed to tea. That was the really important point.

"I say, you fellows, I thought I'd drop in," said Bunter. "Valentine's gone to tea in Hall, so I thought I'd come."

"Think again!" snapped Nugent, taking up the loaf from the table and taking aim with it. "I give you one second!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. He trotted out faster than he had trotted in, and got on the safe side of the door. "Yah! Think I want a whack in your measly tea! I'm going to tea with Mauly, and—Yoooooop!"

The fat Owl jumped away just in time as Nugent kicked the door shut. His fat little nose had quite a narrow escape.

"Beast!" yelled Bunter through the keyhole.

And he departed in search of a more hospitable study.

Frank Nugent sat down again, with a wrinkle in his brow. He looked fixedly at Wharton, who coloured uncomfortably, but did not speak. There

was a grim silence for a minute or two, and then Nugent broke it.

"Look here, Wharton, this is getting too rotten! Valentine's beginning to steer clear of the study now—and no wonder, as you give him the marble eye every time he comes into his own study! What the thump have you turned against the fellow for? He's done nothing."

The captain of the Remove did not answer.

"If he's done anything, you can give it a name, I suppose!" said Frank, rather warmly. "He seems a decent chap enough to me. We know he was in some sort of a rotten scrape before he came here, but you knew that as well as I did. It was you stood by him at Wharton Lodge when he was running from those rotters, Nosey Clark and the rest; it was you took him up when we found him here at Greyfriars. Bob and Johnny and Inky and I only followed your lead. It's not cricket to turn the chap down again for nothing!"

"Do you think it's for nothing, Frank?" asked Wharton quietly.

"Well, if it's something, what's the something?" asked Frank tartly. "The kid's had bad luck—he was mixed up with crooks—but we all believed that he was square—that he wanted to get shut of them. We knew all about it, and stood by him all the same. What's made the difference?"

"Has he got shut of them?" said Wharton.

Nugent stared at him.

"You jolly well know he has!"

"Well, I don't know it," answered Harry. "That's what's worrying me. I hope he's all right. I'm trying to believe so. But—"

"Do you mean that something's happened?"

"Well, yes. I never meant to mention it—I don't want to speak of it now—but it's been on my mind ever since. Look here, Frank, I'd better tell you, and you can judge yourself. Only no need to say anything outside this study. I—I don't know what to think."

"Blessed if I can imagine—"

"It happened last week—the day of the Highcliffe match. The same night there was a burglary over at Highcliffe—an attempted burglary."

Nugent jumped.

"Are you mad? You don't imagine—you can't imagine that Valentine had anything to do with that?"

"I hope not—I'm trying to believe not. But—but that night Valentine was out of bounds."

"How do you know?"

"That fool Bunter woke me up, and I saw Valentine's bed empty. He was out till later than one in the morning."

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Nugent. "You—you're sure?"

"Yes. He's said nothing about it—not a word. He doesn't know that I know he was out of bounds that night. Where was he, Frank?"

"Anywhere but at Highcliffe!" muttered Nugent. "It's impossible!"

"The burglars were alarmed by the dog barking or something. The porter came out, and nearly got one of them. The one he collared was a boy, not a man. That's known. Who was that boy, Frank?"

Nugent sat silent, his face white.

"You—you think it possible?" he muttered at last.

"What else am I to think?" said Wharton restlessly. "He was out of bounds at night, and a boy was mixed up in an attempted robbery at a place only a few miles away. If he went out for no harm, why is he keeping it secret? It looks as if he's joined up again with that gang of crooks."

"I can't believe it."

"Well, I can't quite," confessed Wharton. "But—but what does it look like? What would Inspector Grimes think if he knew? Haven't you noticed lately that old Grimes always seems to be walking or rambling or mooching somewhere about the school? I've seen him a dozen times at least."

"You mean—he's got an eye on Valentine?" asked Nugent, aghast.

"I'm sure of it."

Frank Nugent pushed his plate away. What the captain of the Remove had said had taken away his appetite.

"He's admitted that he was a year with those rotters," said Harry. "He wasn't doing nothing all that time, Frank. He was—one of them. Goodness knows, I'd make every allowance for a kid who fell into bad hands! But—but if he was really keeping clear of it all, Frank, I'd swallow that much, and stand by him and help him through. But if he isn't keeping clear of them—if he's hand-in-glove with Nosey Clark and Barney and Nutty Nixon again—"

Frank shivered.

"That's why you've turned against him?"

"That's why!"

"I can't believe it. There's some explanation. He could clear it up if he liked. Why not put it to him plain—ask him where he was that night?"

"I can't ask a fellow whether he's a dirty thief or not."

"Well, no; but—"

"I don't know whether he's been out at night since. I—I don't want to know. But—but there was a robbery at a place in Courtfield, a few days later—"

"Don't!" breathed Nugent.

There was a long silence.

"Well, I've told you," said Wharton at last. "It's on my mind—I can't

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speak to the chap—I can't! Thinking what I do, it makes me sick to see him here. He ought not to be here."

"Queleh brought him here—"

"He never knew so much about him as we did. It hasn't ever crossed his mind that the fellow was a crook among crooks."

"You—you think he was?"

"What else?"

"Well, he had hard luck. He was a mere kid in the hands of an awful villain—and if he's straight now—"

"But is he?"

Frank Nugent was silent.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Being Kind to Coker!

HORACE COKER, of the Fifth Form, smiled—one of those sardonic smiles.

Prep being over in Coker's study, Potter and Greene were chatting for a few minutes before going along to the games study.

They were chatting about football—deeply interested, it seemed, in the prospects of the First Eleven in a coming match, and in their own personal prospects of getting into the Eleven for the great occasion.

Football was a favourite topic with Coker; it was, indeed, a subject on which he was an authority. But at the present moment it did not interest him.

Many hours had passed since Coker's warlike visit to Study No. 1 in the Remove; but Coker had a few twinges still. There was no doubt that Valentine had laid on the ruler well and faithfully. But it was Coker's dignity that was chiefly hurt.

He—Coker, of the Fifth Form—had been "whopped" by a Remove kid—whopped just like a fag being whopped by a prefect! At such a happening it was time for the whole universe to sit up and take notice—for Nature to shudder, and the stars to hesitate in their courses, if not to stop still altogether. Instead of which the universe went on the even tenor of its way, and even Potter and Greene, his bosom pals, did not seem to realise that anything of a terrifically extraordinary nature had occurred.

They were chattering about the St. Jude's game, regardless—even forgetful. Nero fiddling while Rome was burning was a jest to it. The burning of Rome was hardly so unparalleled an event as the whopping of Horace Coker! It was quite small beer, in comparison.

That was why Coker smiled sardonically. Smiling sardonically, he fixed a withering eye on Potter and Greene. Deep in the prospects of the St. Jude's match, they did not even notice it.

"Go it!" said Coker at last, with bitter sarcasm. "Talk football!"

"Eh!" Potter glanced round at Coker, whose existence he had unfortunately forgotten. "We're talking football, ain't we?"

Potter seemed unaware that Coker was being bitterly sarcastic.

"I've been whopped on the bags by a fag," said Coker, with chilling, crushing dignity.

"Yes; you told us," said Potter. "But, I say, Greeney, Wingate won't play Loder at St. Jude's. Loder's not really any good—"

"When you've done talking idiotic piffle," said Coker, goaded, "perhaps you'll listen to a chap!"

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance and rose. The dread thought smote

them both at the same moment that Coker was going to talk football.

They had had Coker on football once that day, when he had been fortunately interrupted by some fag banging snow on his head from a Remove window. They did not want Coker on football again. There was a limit to human endurance.

"Well, Blundell will be expecting us in the games study," remarked Potter casually. "Come on, Greene."

"I was going to say something," said Coker. "That fag—"

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene. If Coker was not going to talk football they were willing to give him his head—for a few minutes, at least. "What about it?"

"It's hardly the thing I should take lying down," said Coker.

Potter looked puzzled.

"But you did take it lying down, didn't you?" he asked. "I understood that they had you spread-eagled on the floor—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Greene involuntarily.

"Laugh!" said Coker sardonically. "It's a thing to laugh at, isn't it—a Fifth Form man whopped on his bags by a fag!"

Notwithstanding this permission, Potter and Greene contrived not to laugh. They saw that Coker was taking this thing seriously—very seriously.

"I'm going to give that fag such a whopping," said Coker impressively, "that he won't be able to sit down for weeks and weeks!"

"More power to your elbow!" said Potter. "Go it!"

"I've been keeping an eye open to-day, but there's no chance of getting hold of the young scoundrel, without waking up a regular hornet's nest. I've had to let him off, so far."

Coker paused. Potter and Greene edged towards the door.

"There's only one way," continued Coker. "I shall catch him after lights out—say, about half-past ten."

"There'll be a row if you rag in a junior dormitory after lights out, old chap," said Greene, shaking his head. "And if those young sweeps wake up and bag you alone—"

"I shan't be alone," explained Coker. "You two fellows will come with me."

"Oh!" ejaculated Potter and Greene. "I expect that of you," said Coker.

"Um!" said Potter and Greene.

"I shall take a fives bat and whop him," said Coker. "You'll keep the other young rascals from barging in if they try it on. It won't take long, of course. I shan't give him more than a couple of dozen."

"But—but there'll be a fearful row. —Queleh may butt in—"

"Never mind Queleh."

"Prout may come along—"

"Never mind Prout."

"Or some of the prefects—"

"Never mind the prefects."

Potter and Greene looked at their great chief. Coker told them, quite casually, not to mind Form masters and prefects. But Potter and Greene did mind Form masters and prefects, all the same. They had no desire whatever to be caught ragging in a junior dormitory by Form masters and prefects.

"A difficulty," resumed Coker thoughtfully, "is that a fellow might not wake up. It's no good going too early, while the benches are moorhens about the house. Half-past ten is about the time. But I sleep rather soundly. If I could trust one of you fellows to call me, it would be all right. But, of course you'll be snoring like billy-ho!" Coker sniffed.

"Not much good depending on you for anything."

"Not for ragging the fags in their dorm, you can bet," said Potter. "Cut it out, old man! Forget about it!"

"That's a good idea" concurred Greene. "Wash it right out, old chap."

Coker's eyes gleamed.

"If you think I'm going to be whopped on my fags by a bag—I mean, whopped on my bags by a fag—he roared.

"We've got to see Blundell—"

"Never mind Blundell! I've thought it out," said Coker. "There's a chap in the Shell has an alarm-clock. I'm going to borrow it. I shall stick it under my bed and set it for half-past ten."

"You'll wake the whole dorm."

"What does that matter?"

"Oh! Um!"

"I'm giving you fellows the tip to be ready," explained Coker. "I shall want you both. That's all—you can cut."

Again Potter and Greene exchanged a glance. Then they both spoke together.

"You can want!"

"What?"

"If you think we're going ragging among the fags at night," said Potter deliberately, "it only shows that you're a bigger ass than I ever thought you—"

and that's saying a lot!"

"It shows," said Greene, "that you're a howling idiot than I ever thought you, Coker, and that's saying a heap!"

Having thus delivered their considered opinions, Potter and Greene left the study. They left it rather hastily. Coker was reaching for an Indian club that stood in a corner, and they had no curiosity to inquire what he was going to do with that club when he got hold of it.

Coker, left alone, snorted.

He felt more bitter and sarcastic and sardonic than ever. This was the sort of backing a fellow got from his own pals in his own study. An event at which Nature might have shivered—the whopping of Horace Coker by a cheeky fag—left Potter and Greene absolutely unmoved. They seemed to look on it as a mere trifle—a trifle light as air—as a matter of no more importance than it would have been had one of themselves been whopped instead of Coker!

They even referred to Coker's intention of punishing that cheeky junior as "ragging among the fags."

Coker came very near following Potter and Greene down the passage with the Indian club!

Fortunately, he restrained his wrath and indignation.

It was clear that if Coker visited the Remove dormitory that night, to hand out a just punishment to a cheeky junior, Coker would have to go on his lonely own!

That did not deter Coker, however. His mind—such as it was—was made up!

Shortly before bed-time Coker called on Hobson of the Shell and borrowed his alarm-clock. When the Fifth went to their dormitory Coker had the alarm-clock under his arm.

Prout saw lights-out for his Form at ten. Potter and Greene, glancing at Coker, hoping perhaps that he had given up the idea, saw the alarm-clock under his arm, and knew that he hadn't.

"Turning out early, Coker?" asked Blundell, the captain of the Fifth, as he saw Coker winding the alarm.

"Yes, very early!" said Coker, with a grin. "Oh quite!"

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"Look here, Coker, old man—" said Potter.

"Don't talk to me, George Potter!" interrupted Coker, with chilling dignity.

"But look here, old man!" urged Greene.

"Don't talk to me, Greene, please!"

"You men been having a row?" asked Price.

"Oh, no! When a fellow expects fellows to back a fellow up, and fellows don't, a fellow despises a fellow, and treats him with contempt!" said Coker.

"What a lot of fellows!" ejaculated Hilton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker snorted, and turned in. The alarm-clock, set for half-past ten, was placed under his bed. Coker, as he had said, was a sound sleeper. Generally he was deep in slumber a minute after his head touched the pillow, and did not open his eyes again till the rising-bell clanged out in the morning! But with an alarm-clock buzzing under his bed the soundest sleeper was sure to wake. That the whole dormitory would probably wake at the same time did not matter to Coker. Probably they would not like it. In that case they could lump it!

Coker was hardly likely to let his plans be disarranged by consideration for the comfort of the Fifth. In comparison with Coker they did not matter.

Prout put the light out, and rolled away with his elephantine tread. The Fifth-Formers, after the usual chat from bed to bed, dropped off to sleep. Coker was asleep first of all, as usual.

Potter remained awake. He had been whispering to Greene, and Greene had been indulging in a subdued chuckle. They were waiting till old Horace was fast asleep. They had not long to wait.

At a quarter past ten Potter sat up in bed.

"Asleep, Coker, old bean?" he asked. A rather hefty snore was taken as a reply in the affirmative.

Potter slipped quietly out of bed. Quietly he approached Coker's bed, and reached under it for the alarm-clock.

Having captured the clock he groped over it, and turned off the alarm. Then he replaced it.

Coker, unconscious, slept. Potter crept back to bed with the satisfied feeling of a fellow who had done a pal a good turn.

That night, at least, there would be no hooting and buzzing of an alarm-clock in the Fifth Form dormitory. Coker was saved from himself. There would be no expedition to the Remove dormitory—no ragging among the fags—no row for Coker with the Head in the morning! Potter felt that he had done a really kindly action. He laid his head contentedly on his pillow.

Dozing off peacefully, he heard the chime of the half-hour from afar. It was half-past ten. The alarm-clock was silent. So was Coker—save for his snore! Potter dropped off to sleep with a grin on his face. Uninterrupted slumber reigned in the Fifth Form dormitory!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Prowlers of the Night!

"SAFE as houses!" whispered Nutty Nixon.

Nosey Clark made his companion a gesture to be silent.

His head was bent, and he was listening intently.

It was long past midnight; a black

winter's night. The wind from the sea moaned over the old roofs and among the chimney-pots of Greyfriars School. It was bitterly cold, and a flake or two of snow drifted on the keen wind.

Save for the moan of the wind, the night was silent. But it seemed that some sound had reached the keen ears of the man with the vulture's beak.

Nutty opened his lips again, but his companion gripped him by the arm, and he was silent. Nosey Clark's sharp, black eyes glittered in the gloom.

The two crooks, hardly visible to one another's eyes in the darkness, were standing within the ancient wall of the Cloisters. They had climbed the wall from the lane that ran beside the school precincts—as lonely a place at night as even a crook could have desired. But as they stood in silence, listening, there came a sound from the other side of the wall they had climbed only a few minutes before, and Nutty heard it now, as well as Nosey Clark.

It was a footstep!

Someone was in the lane outside, between the old Cloister wall and the fir-wood. Unless it was the village policeman on his rounds they could not imagine who it was. But Police-constable Tozer, of Friardale, would have had his lantern, and there was no glimmer of light.

The footsteps passed along the outer side of the wall and died away. Nutty caught his breath.

"Who—" he whispered.

"They can't be watching the school!" breathed Clark. "They know nothing of—"

"Unless Jim has been up to something—"

"Rubbish!"

They listened in silence again. The footsteps were audible once more, coming back along the wall.

The sound stopped—outside the wall, but at the same spot where the two crooks stood on the inner side. Nosey Clark gritted his teeth.

Who was it? Who could it be? The life of a crook is full of terrors, but Clark had never dreamed of danger in paying that nocturnal visit to Greyfriars School. But that mysterious footstep in the night spelled danger. Someone was watching, and that someone was obviously suspicious. He might have heard the crooks climbing the wall—he could hardly have seen them.

Clark's heart throbbed as he heard a scraping sound in the silence. He could see nothing but the dim shadow of the wall; but he knew that a man had leaped and caught the coping from outside, and was pulling himself up to look over. Who—who could it be, and why?

Silently, stealthily the two crooks moved from the spot, and took cover behind the massive old stone pillars, a dozen feet from the wall.

They were none too soon.

Above the summit of the wall a dark shadow rose against darkness—the head of a man. Then the shoulders were rested on the top of the wall, and the man, whoever he was, was peering over.

A sudden bright beam of light shot into the blackness. It came from an electric torch on the top of the wall.

The light played on the very pillar behind which Nosey Clark was in cover, with throbbing heart.

Then it moved round in a half-circle, sweeping the dark spaces.

The two crooks stood silent as stones. They were screened from sight, unless the man with the light came down over the wall, and searched. Nutty Nixon's

grasp closed quietly on a jemmy in his pocket as he thought of that.

But the man did not come over the wall. He swept the light round, watching and listening. It gleamed and flickered among the stone pillars of the old Cloisters. Then it was shut off.

It was dark again, and Nosey Clark ventured to peer round his pillar. He could make out the head and shoulders above the wall, black against darkness. That it was some officer of the law, who had been watching the school, and who had heard something that aroused his suspicions, there could be no doubt. But it was too dark for recognition; even had Nosey Clark been acquainted with Inspector Grimes of Courtfield.

The head and shoulders sank out of view at last. Mr. Grimes dropped back from the wall.

Footsteps were heard receding.

Evidently the police-officer had been suspicious—had heard something that had put him on the alert. But he was not suspicious to the extent of entering the school precincts and searching there. He was gone, but neither of the crooks moved or spoke till a quarter of an hour had elapsed. Then Nosey Clark groped his way to his companion, caught his sleeve, and led him away, down the Cloisters, silently from the spot.

"Chuckling it, Nosey?" whispered Nutty.

"No! It's all serene!" Clark gave a low, evil chuckle. "That sportsman isn't watching for anyone entering the premises, Nutty—he's watching for somebody getting out, I reckon!"

"Jim—" breathed Nixon.

"I can't make it out, but it's a cert, I think. They've got their eye on Jim, and the school is watched."

"Lucky we found it out!"

"I—I wonder if Jim knows!" breathed Nosey Clark. "What has he done to get the police watching for him? It must be Jim. There can't be anybody else here that the coppers have an eye on. Jim's not so safe here as he fancies, judging by this."

He was silent a few moments, in thought.

"Get on with it," he said abruptly. And the two crooks crept on towards the silent, sleeping House. For some time they prowled round the building in the dark; silent, stealthy, like evil birds of the night. They stopped at last at the window of the Sixth Form lobby. That little window was locked at night; but a lock was not likely to stop Nutty Nixon.

"Mind—not a sign!" breathed Nosey Clark. "Not a sign that the window was opened from outside, Nutty. A single sign, and the game's up. It's got to be a cert that it was an inside job."

"Leave it to me," answered Nutty.

"It's an easy lock—"

"Easy as pie!"

In a few minutes the little window was open. The slight figure of the pasty-faced crackman disappeared within.

Nosey Clark remained waiting outside, invisible in the darkness had there been any wakeful eyes at that hour. But at one in the morning all Greyfriars was buried in slumber.

Clark waited, a sour, evil grin on his face. This kind of work was "pie" to Nutty; but it was not in Mr. Compton Clark's line. He left it to the practised crackman, and waited.

This was the scheme of which Jim Valentine had a vague fear, but which he never dreamed of guessing. When Nutty's work was done—when it was discovered in the morning, without a sign that the house had been entered from



With Wharton's weight on his arm, and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh sitting on his legs, Horace Coker was pinned helplessly to the floor. "Gerroff, you young villains!" he roared. "I'll smash you—I'll spifficate you, I'll—gug-gug-gug!" He wound up suddenly as Bob Cherry reached for the inkpot and playfully tipped it over his open mouth.

outside—upon whom could suspicion fall? Upon whom but the boy who was known, by the Form master who had befriended him, to have been the associate of crooks? That was the scheme!

How long could Jim Valentine remain at Greyfriars after this? And when he left, or was turned out, what refuge had he but the gang from which he had fled? Dick the Penman would come back—he would have to come back.

It seemed to the plotting crook that his scheme was without a single weak spot. It would work like a charm. Only chance could defeat it. He waited. The interior of Greyfriars School was new and strange ground to Nutty; but he would not be long in finding his way about. The cracksman, creeping in the dark and silent house, would find the dormitory where the boy slept. He had the night before him to work in; there was plenty of time. An hour—two hours—it mattered little—he would find the boy. In that dormitory something of value would be missing in the morning.

It was all cut and dried, and only some unlucky chance could defeat it. And in thinking of possible chances, Nosey Clark certainly did not think of a fellow of whom he had never heard—Horace Coker, of the Fifth Form. Neither had Nutty Nixon ever heard of Coker of the Fifth. But he was destined to learn of his existence that night.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Coker in the Dark!

TWO deep strokes sounded dully through the winter night. Horace Coker stirred, grunted, and opened his eyes and blinked into the darkness of the Fifth Form dormitory. Then he sat up and rubbed his drowsy eyes.

Coker, usually a sound sleeper, had not been sleeping so soundly as usual. Something weighed on Coker's mind, even in slumber, and he had still a few painful twinges left from that whopping in Study No. 1. Instead of snoring on peacefully till rising-bell, Coker woke up in the middle of the night, with a sort of sense of something left undone.

"By gum!" murmured Coker. Blinking into the dimness of the dormitory, and listening to the steady breathing of the sleepers around him, Coker realised that it was late. How late it was, Coker did not know; but he felt that it must be later than half-past ten. The alarm-clock, apparently, had not gone off, for which reason neither had Coker gone off. Now that he was awake, however, he was ready to go.

He rubbed his eyes, grunted, yawned, and turned out of bed.

He had heard some sound as he awoke, but did not know that it had been the sound of two o'clock striking. But he had a feeling that it was late, and he groped in the pocket of his coat for his electric torch, to make the happy discovery that he must have left it in his study. He groped next for his match-box and found it, only to find, further, that there were no matches in it. Little inadvertencies like these often happened to Coker. Next he glared at his watch to try to see the time in the dark. Not being a cat Coker did not get away with this.

Anyhow, late or not, Coker was going. Had he realised that it was two in the morning, even Coker might have chuckled it. But he fancied that it was about eleven or half-past. He dressed in the dark, groped for the fives he had placed in readiness, and clutched it, and proceeded to navigate through the gloom towards the door.

Coker was cautious. He did not want to wake the House.

Coker, of course, was fully justified in whopping a cheeky fag, at the only time that the fag was, so to speak, whopable. He would have preferred to visit Study No. 1 in the daytime, and give Valentine what he had asked for. But he had had enough of visiting Study No. 1 in the daytime. The results of such a visit were altogether too painful! After lights-out in the dormitory, on the other hand, the thing was feasible—indeed, easy. But, justified as he was, Coker did not want to wake up masters or prefects. He did not expect them, with their limited intelligence, to approve. They would simply call it a "rag," and Coker would get into a row. So he trod softly when he left the Fifth Form dormitory, and even Coker's extensive feet made little noise in their socks.

The House was silent and still—almost creepy in its silence and stillness. Not a light, not a sound, and Coker dimly realised that it was, perhaps, later than he had fancied. However, that mattered little. What mattered was to whop the cheeky fag who had whopped Coker.

Silent in his socks, Coker crept away in the darkness. He had no nerves to speak of, and he did not even think of burglars or ghosts, as he threaded gloomy passages.

Groping his way in dense gloom, Coker reached the junior quarters, and trod softly down the long corridor to the door of the Remove dormitory.

Suddenly he stopped. A beam of light played for an instant in the darkness ahead of him. Taken utterly by surprise, Coker stopped, stared, and blinked.

The light was gone in a moment. But Coker knew that it must have been the flash of an electric torch, turned on by someone ahead of him in the passage.

"By gum!" murmured Coker.

He stood, staring.

The light flashed again for another moment.

"By gum!" repeated Coker.

A faint sound came from the darkness ahead. It was the sound of a door that opened softly under a stealthy hand.

Coker suppressed a whistle.

He knew that it must have been the door of the Remove dormitory that had opened. Who the dickens had opened it?

That for an hour or more a stealthy figure had been creeping silently about the House, searching for that dormitory, was not likely to occur to Coker.

Neither was he likely to suppose that it was a burglar, as a gentleman in that profession would naturally have been interested in the Head's safe, not in the sleeping quarters of junior schoolboys.

"Young rotter!" murmured Coker.

Some young rascal in the Remove had been out of bounds, and was getting back to his dormitory; that was Coker's conclusion. Indeed, that seemed the only possible explanation.

Coker paused, thinking it over. This meant that at least one fellow in the Remove would be awake. It could not be helped. Anyhow, there would be plenty of them awake when he started on Jim Valentine with the fives bat. He decided to wait a minute or two, to give the young rascal, whoever he was, time to get into bed. He did not want to run into him in the dark.

Having waited a minute or two, Coker trod on softly to the Remove dormitory.

To his surprise, he found the door half open. Apparently that young rascal had carelessly forgotten to close it.

Coker peered in.

All was silent within. But, to his amazement, there came a flicker of light in the gloom. It played for a moment on a bed, and was shut off.

Coker stood still.

If it was some reckless young rascal returning after an excursion out of bounds, it seemed that he could not find his own bed in the dark.

The light gleamed again—on another bed.

Then it gleamed again and again—each time only for a second, and each time on a different bed.

Coker was more and more amazed.

Whoever held that electric torch was going along the dormitory, looking at bed after bed, or at sleeper after sleeper.

Coker might almost have fancied that it was some stranger in the place who desired to pick out some particular person in the dormitory.

He did not fancy that, but he did wonder what on earth the fellow could possibly be up to.

He waited impatiently for the fellow to finish and get to bed. He did not want to enter the dormitory while a fellow was up with an electric torch in his hand. He had come there to whop a fag, not to be set on by a mob of fags and whopped himself.

It was a bitterly cold night, and there was an icy draught in the passage, and Coker was only half-dressed and in his socks. Standing there at the open doorway was distinctly unpleasant.

The light gleamed again, and as it gleamed Coker suddenly and involuntarily sneezed.

Instantly the light was shut off. Coker could not see who held it in the gloom, but he knew that the unseen person had whirled round towards the door and was staring towards him in the dark. That sneeze had startled the unseen who held the light.

"Ateheoooooop-oop!" repeated Coker.

He expected to see the light flash on again and to hear a shout, awakening the Remove—still not doubting that it was some Remove fellow who was up. Instead of which, there came a patter of sudden footsteps, and a dark figure rushed at the doorway. Coker was striding in. There was no more time to lose if he was going to whop Valentine before the whole mob were round him like a nest of buzzing hornets. He strode in as the dark figure rushed out, and met the unseen man in full career.

There was a crash as they met.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Coker.

Stupefied with astonishment, he felt a fierce and powerful grip on him—a grip that could not possibly have been that of a Remove junior.

It was not a boy, it was a man who was there—and Coker realised that startling fact as he was hurled spinning to the floor.

Crash!

Horace Coker went sprawling headlong. He hit the floor hard and roared. There was a patter of swift feet in the passage, and silence outside the dormitory. Within there was not silence. Coker was scrambling and roaring, and the Remove were all awakening.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Coker's Burglar!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Who's that?"

"What the thump—"

"I say, you fellows, it's burglars!"

"What the dickens—"

Harry Wharton leaped out of bed. A dozen other fellows were hardly a moment later. Billy Bunter plunged under his bedclothes, squeaking with terror. But most of the fellows turned out.

"Oh crumbs!" came Coker's gasping roar. "Whoooooh! Ow! Wow! Oh!" Coker was sitting up in the darkness dazedly, rubbing the back of his head, which had smitten the floor of the dormitory with a mighty smite. Coker was dazed and dizzy and damaged.

"That sounds like old Coker!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Get a light!"

Harry Wharton ran across to turn on the switch by the door. Coker was in his path, and he stumbled over Coker and came down with a bump.

"Yooooop!" roared Coker, as Wharton sprawled over him and flattened him down again. "Ooooooh! Gerroff! Oooooop!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wharton.

"It's Coker! Collar him!"

"Gerroff! Ooooooh!"

Bob Cherry reached the switch and turned it on. The Remove dormitory was flooded with light.

"Lend a hand!" shouted Wharton, grasping the sprawling, breathless Horace.

"Ow! Leggo!" roared Coker. "I'll—I'll—Yarooop!"

"Collar him!"

"Bag the potty ass!"

A dozen fellows rushed at Coker of the Fifth and grasped him. Coker struggled and roared.

"Leggo! I tell you—Yarooop!"

"My hat! Coker will wake the House at this rate!" said Bob. "What is the potty duffer doing here at this time of night—walking in his sleep, or what?"

"Here's a fives bat; Coker must have brought it," said Frank Nugent, picking it up. "Let's give him some!"

"Good egg!"

"Shut the door; we don't want the beaks here!"

"We shall have them here if they're not deaf," chuckled Vernon-Smith. "Let's give Coker a few before they come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But what is the silly fathead's game?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "It must be past midnight—"

"Past two o'clock," said Johnny Bull. "Fancy the silly owl ragging at two in the morning!"

"Leggo!" roared Coker, struggling wildly. "He'll get away—"

"Eh? Who?"

"That man—"

"What man?"

"The burglar—"

"The what?" gasped Wharton.

"There was a man here—a burglar, I suppose! He knocked me over! He's getting away while you're playing the goat!" gasped Coker. "Leggo, and let's go after him—"

"Mad as a hatter," said the Bounder—"or madder!"

"I tell you—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Wharton. "We're not letting you go as easily as all that, Coker!"

"I tell you there was a man—a burglar—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Is your rolled-gold watch safe, Bunter?" asked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you there was a man—"

shrieked Coker. "And I tell you you're going to have a dozen with your own fives bat!" chuckled the captain of the Remove, "Turn him over!"

"I'll smash you! I—I—I'll—"

roared Coker. "Buck up! Half the House must be awake by this time!" said the Bounder.

"Get going with that fives bat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Coker struggled and howled.

Matters had not gone according to plan. Matters seldom did when Horace Coker made the plans. According to plan, Coker should have whopped the cheeky fag Valentine and departed before the Remove could gather for a counter-attack. Instead of which, Coker was collared by half the Remove, and Frank Nugent was whopping him with his own fives bat. The affair should have been over in a couple of minutes, and Coker safe back in his dormitory. Instead of which, Coker was still there; and footsteps in the passage showed that somebody was coming—inevitably to discover Coker out of his dormitory! The whole thing was very unfortunate for Coker!

Whack, whack, whack!

The door reopened. Mr. Quelch, in dressing-gown and slippers, stared into the dormitory with amazed wrath in his face.

"Boys!" hooted Quelch.

The fives bat ceased to smite. Coker was released. He lay sprawling and spluttering at the feet of the Remove master.

"What does this mean?" roared Mr. Quelch.

"Hem!"

"Is this a Fifth Form boy? Is this Coker? Coker, what are you doing here?"

Coker sat up, gasping.

"Speak!"

"Ooooooh!" said Coker. That was all he could say for the moment.

"Will you answer me!"

"Ooooooh!"

There was another footstep in the passage—the floor-shaking footstep of Mr. Prout, master of the Fifth. Prout also had been awakened, and Prout was coming. His voice preceded him in tones of wrath.

"Upon my word! This is outrageous—unparalleled! Quelch—is that you, Mr. Quelch? Quelch, this is outrageous! This is not to be borne! Such an uproar from your Form at such an hour of the night! Quelch, I am bound to say that this is intolerable!"

"I agree with you, sir!" hooted Mr. Quelch. "It is absolutely intolerable, Mr. Prout, that a boy of your Form should visit this dormitory at such an hour and create a disturbance!"

Prout jumped.
"What?" he gasped.
He arrived in the doorway; he blinked at Coker.

"Upon my word! Coker!" gasped Prout, amazed. "Coker! What are you doing here, Coker?"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Coker.
"Get up, sir!" roared Prout, in great wrath. "Get up, sir, and explain yourself. What are you doing here?"

"I—I—I came—"
"This is not to be borne," said Mr. Quelch, in parody of Prout's remarks. "This is intolerable! This—"

"Coker," shrieked Prout, "why are you here? Answer me!"

"I—I—I came here to whop Valentine," gasped Coker. "He's cheeky, and I was going to whop him."
"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Jim Valentine.

"You—you—you utterly absurd and unruly boy!" gasped Prout. "You have dared to make this disturbance at such an hour—"

"That wasn't my fault, sir," gasped the unhappy Coker. "I was going to give him a few with a fives bat. But there wouldn't have been any disturbance, only there was a burglar—"

"What?"

"A man, at least. There was a man here, sneaking about with an electric torch, and—he ran into me and knocked me down!" gasped Coker.

The Removites looked at one another, grinning. That there had been a burglar in a junior dormitory was so hopelessly improbable that nobody was likely to believe Coker's statement. The two masters gazed at him as if petrified.

"Is this boy of your Form in his right senses, Mr. Prout?" asked the Remove master acidly.

"I begin to doubt it," gasped Prout. "Coker, what do you mean by making such an absurd statement?"

"It's true, sir. There was a man—"

"Nonsense!" boomed Prout.

"He knocked me over—"

"Rubbish!"

"A burglar—"

"Silence, you foolish boy! You have been frightened by some shadow in the dark. Perhaps one of these boys—"

"It was a man. He floored me—"

"Silence! Go back to your dormitory at once, Coker! I shall deal with you to-morrow. I shall deal with you with the utmost severity. I will take you back to your dormitory. Come!"

"But—but that burglar, sir—"

"Silence!" roared Prout. And he grasped Horace Coker's shoulder and led him away.

"Go back to bed at once!" rapped Mr. Quelch to his Form. And the Removites obeyed, and Mr. Quelch turned off the light and left them. The juniors went back to bed, but not to sleep. For a long time there was chuckling and chortling in the Remove dormitory.

Prout, with a face like a gorgon, led

Coker back to his quarters. He saw him turn in, and left him, with a promise that he would hear further about the matter on the morrow. When Prout was gone, a dozen voices in the Fifth wanted to know what the row was.

"You—you—you went, after all, Coker?" gasped Potter. "You went—at half-past two in the morning?"

"I didn't know it was so late. You see, that rotten alarm-clock never went off—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter, Potter. For some reason or other that beastly alarm-clock never went off—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up, Potter! What is there to cackle at, you silly ass? Still, I'm not really sorry, as I scared off a burglar."

"A which?" yelled Greene.

"There was a burglar in the Remove dormitory—"

"Oh, holy smoke!"

"There would be!" gurgled Blundell.

"Just the place for a burglar! Was he after Bunter's postal order, do you think?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He rushed into me and knocked me down," said Coker, unheeding. "I

rolled up to them, with his podgy face wreathed in grins.

"I say, you fellows—"

"What's the jolly old joke?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I say! He, he, he!" chortled Bunter. "That ass Coker— He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled the Famous Five. The mere mention of Coker was enough.

All Greyfriars was chortling that morning over Coker of the Fifth, and especially over his burglar.

Except, of course, Coker.

Coker had a painful interview with Prout coming, and was not in a chortling humour. There was nothing, so far as Coker knew, at which to chortle.

Coker was aware, if nobody else was, that some person unknown actually had rushed into him in the Remove dormitory that wild night. If it wasn't a burglar, who, Coker wanted to know, was it?

It was nobody at all, in the opinion of the rest of Greyfriars. Coker had fancied something, and that was that!

"What's the jolly old Horace up to now, fatty?" asked Nugent.

"He—he's— He, he, he! He's rooting after that burglar!" chuckled Bunter. "Looking for a sign. He, he, he!"

"Oh, great Christopher Columbus!" roared Bob Cherry. "Where is he? Lead on, Macduff!"

Bunter, chuckling, led on, and they came on Coker of the Fifth. Coker's look was very serious. His occupation, indeed, was serious. Nobody believed that Coker had seen a mysterious intruder in the House the previous night. It was up to Coker to prove that there had been a burglar if he could. Now he was hunting for proof.

In the depths of his powerful intellect Coker had worked it out. There had been a burglar. He had got in and got out. That was clear. Either a door or a window must have served his turn. Burglars could not, like ghosts, pass through solid walls. It was improbable that he had come down a chimney. Coker deduced a door or a window. But the burglar could not have got through either without opening it. As he came from outside, he must have opened it from outside. Sherlock Holmes could not have worked all this out more clearly than Coker did. All Coker had to do, therefore, was to spot the door or the window that the burglar had opened from outside. That was Coker's job now.

There were dozens of doors and hundreds of windows in the building, so it looked as if Coker had set himself "some" job. But Coker was a stickler. He was going to root out the door or the window by which his burglar had penetrated. Not only did Coker want to prove that he was not the howling ass that all Greyfriars believed him to be, but he wanted to have this proof ready for Prout when the interview came along. What Prout was going to do Coker did not yet know, but he guessed that it was something disagreeable. But Prout would, of course, hold his hand if it was proved to him that there really had been a burglar, and that Coker had scared him off.

Coker had been busy before breakfast, and immediately brokeker was over he got busy again. Door after door, window after window, Coker examined and scanned for signs of a jummy or a forced fastening. He found no signs whatever. He was engaged upon the window of the Sixth Form lobby when Bunter brought the Famous Five to

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don't know what he was after, but he was there. Prout doesn't believe it—"

"Go hon!"

"Quelch doesn't believe it either—"

"Well, it wants some believing,"

chortled Price. "Does anybody here believe it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You shouldn't play these games, Coker," gasped Potter. "You get frightened by a shadow!"

"He rushed into me!" roared Coker.

"A shadow couldn't!" argued Potter.

"It wasn't a shadow, it was a burglar!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he's got away!" added Coker bitterly. "He won't be caught now."

"I'll bet a hat on that!" said Hilton.

"He certainly won't be caught!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" snorted Coker. And he laid his weary head on his pillow, leaving the Fifth to cackle, which they did for quite a long time before they went to sleep again.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Catching Coker!

"I SAY, you fellows! He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter cackinnated.

In the morning, after breakfast, the Famous Five of the Remove strolled in the quad, and the fat Owl

observe his operations. That, in point of fact, was the very window by which Nutty Nixon had entered and left. But Nutty had left not a single sign, and Coker, having examined the window with an eagle eye, decided that he had to search farther. It was Coker's twenty-seventh window, and he was a little tired. But he was sticking to his task.

Coker had pushed up the sash of that little window and put his head in and made a keen examination. Result, nil. He was about to move on when Harry Wharton & Co. arrived on the scene.

Coker glanced round at them with a lowering eye.

"You fags can cut off!" he stated briefly.

"Mustn't we watch?" asked Bob Cherry meekly. "Sherlock Holmes always let Dr. Watson watch him when he was at work on a case, Coker."

"Let us be your esteemed and ridiculous Dr. Watsons, my absurd Coker!" suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Cut off!" roared Coker.

Bob Cherry glanced in at the little lobby window, which Coker had left open.

"Did you notice cigarette-ash here, Coker?" he asked.

Coker, about to go, spun round.

"Cigarette-ash!" he repeated eagerly.

"Look!"

In all the detective novels that Horace Coker had read, cigarette-ash loomed large. Mysterious crooks would leave cigarette-ash in the most unexpected places, apparently from sheer good-nature, to assist their pursuers. If there was cigarette-ash on this spot, Coker's case, Coker considered, was as good as proved! He bounded back to the window.

"Gerront of the way!" he snapped, ungratefully shoving Bob Cherry aside.

Taking Bob's place, Coker put his head and shoulders into the lobby window, and eagerly scanned the window-shelf inside in search of cigarette-ash.

Bob winked at his comrades.

He had not told Coker there was any cigarette-ash! As a matter of fact, there wasn't! He had only told Coker to look! Coker was looking! While he was looking, Bob suddenly grasped the sash and pulled it down across Coker's back.

Coker gave a convulsive jump.

His head and shoulders and arms were inside the window. His brawny chest rested on the sill; his broad back was suddenly jammed by the descending sash. Outside, his long legs thrashed like flails.

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

Coker roared.

He was pinned in the window. The sash across his burly back pinned him down helplessly.

"What the thump—" roared Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Caught!" said Bob cheerily.

"The catchfulness is terrific!"

"You young villain!" roared Coker.

"My hat! I'll—I'll—" He made a terrific effort to heave up the sash.

Bob, keeping carefully clear of Coker's thrashing legs, held it fast. So long as he held it, Coker could not shove it up. He heaved like the mighty ocean—but he heaved in vain.

"Lemme loose!" shrieked Coker. "I'll smash you! I'll pulverise you! The minute I get out I'll mop you up!"

"What an inducement to let him out!" remarked Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, if we can jam this window, it will keep Coker out of mischief," said

Bob thoughtfully. "A wedge or something—"

"You young scoundrel!" raved Coker.

"I've got an old penknife with a broken blade," said Johnny Bull.

"Just the thing!"

The old penknife with the broken blade was jammed between the sash and the window-frame hard and tight. The sash was immovable after that. Bob Cherry dodged Coker's legs and rejoined his chums, and they stood in a happy group watching Coker.

Coker heaved and heaved. But the sash remained unmoved. Coker was a prisoner; indeed, unless somebody came along and unjammed the sash, it looked as if Coker would have to remain there for the term of his natural life.

"He, he, he!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"I say, you fellows, let's wallop him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll smash you!" raved Coker. "Oh, my hat! Ooooh!" Heaving his back against the immovable sash above did not damage the sash, but it seemed to damage Coker's back considerably. He ceased to heave, and roared instead.

"I say, you fellows, get a fives bat or something and wallop him while we've got the chance!" squeaked Bunter. "I'll give him a smack, anyhow!"

Bunter approached warily and delivered a terrific smite with his open palm on Coker's trousers.

Smack!

"Yaroooh!"

Coker kicked out frantically with his long legs. Bunter dodged—but unluckily did not dodge quickly enough. One of Coker's feet smote him on the waistcoat: just where he had packed away the largest breakfast at Greyfriars. "Ooooooh!" gurgled Billy Bunter, sitting down suddenly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

"Ooooh-whoocoo! I'm winded!"

Whoooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth's this game?" Vernon-Smith and Redwing came up, staring.

"Special performance by Coker of the Fifth!" explained Bob Cherry. "No charge! Walk up, gents! Coker of the Fifth in his celebrated acrobatic act, positively for one occasion only."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer as he came up. "Is that Coker? What the deuce is Coker doing that for?"

"Just to amuse the natives," said Bob. "Coker's enjoying this—ain't you, Coker?"

"I'll smash you—I'll spifficate you!" shrieked Coker. "Will you lemme out of this, you young demon?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

More and more fellows gathered round. The sight of Coker's long legs thrashing the air drew sightseers from far and wide. Fellows of all Forms gathered, till half Greyfriars seemed to be swarming under the Sixth Form windows. Yells of laughter woke all the echoes of the quad.

"But what's he doin' it for?" gasped Temple of the Fourth.

"Just Coker's fun!" said Bob. "Clean, wholesome fun—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The funfulness is terrific!"

"Look out!" murmured Valentine.

"Here comes the Head!"

"Oh, my hat!"

The uproarious crowd melted away as Dr. Locke approached the spot. Dr. Locke, taking a little walk in the quad before classes, had been drawn to the scene by the roars of merriment, wondering what could possibly be happening. He jumped, at the sight of Coker's

whirling legs. He gazed at Coker—what there was to be seen of him.

"Bless my soul!" murmured the Head astounded.

"You cheeky rotter!" shrieked Coker, who, of course, could not see the Head, having no eyes in his back. "You gabbling sweep—"

"Eh?"

"Let me out of this, you tick!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"You gabbling, babbling, sniggering dummy—"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head faintly. "Who—who—who is it? What—what is it? Boy! Who are you?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Coker. He recognised the Head's voice. "Oh dear! I—I'm Coker, sir! Oh lor!"

"What are you doing this for, Coker? What is the meaning of this extraordinary prank?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the distance.

"Coker!" said the Head severely. "This is utterly absurd! It is ridiculous! It is unworthy of a small boy in the Second Form, Coker! Have you no sense of the dignity of a senior Form? Coker, I am surprised—shocked—"

"I—I—I—"

"Cease these antics—these foolish and undignified antics—at once, Coker!" said the Head, and he walked away frowning.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker would have been only too glad to cease those foolish and undignified antics! But Coker couldn't! The Head had not noticed that the window-sash was fastened on Coker. Coker was painfully aware of it. The Head, shocked and offended, walked away—and the hapless Coker continued to wriggle and squirm.

Fortunately for Coker, Wingate of the Sixth came along to the lobby from the Sixth Form passage. Wingate jumped at the sight of Coker's head and shoulders and infuriated, crimson face. "What the dickens—" ejaculated Wingate.

"Let me out!" gasped Coker. "For goodness' sake, let me out! I'm jammed in—those young scoundrels—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wingate.

"Will you let me out?" shrieked Coker.

Wingate, almost in tears, released Coker at last. Coker rushed away, forgetful of burglars and his hunt for sign, in search of the Famous Five and vengeance. The bell rang for First School; and it was too late. Which was, perhaps, fortunate for the Famous Five; or, still more probably, fortunate for Horace Coker.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Long Wait for Bunter!

"MAULY, old chap—"

"Go away!"

"I say, Mauly, your door's locked!"

"Yaas!"

"What have you got your door locked for, Mauly?"

"You!"

"Beast!" roared Billy Bunter.

There was a chuckle within Study No. 12 in the Remove passage. Billy Bunter was haunting Lord Mauleverer's door like a fat Peri at the gate of paradise. His lordship was "sporting his oak." He had heard Bunter's fat grunt as he approached, and turned the key just in time.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry came up the passage.

Billy Bunter turned his spectacles on the cheery Bob.



Above the summit of the wall a dark shadow arose—the head of Inspector Grimes. The next moment a sudden bright beam of light shot into the blackness, and played on the very pillar behind which Nosey Clark and Nutty Nixon were in cover. The two crooks stood as silent as stones!

"Here, you sheer off!" he exclaimed.
"You're not wanted here, Cherry."

"You fat chump—"
"You can keep off the grass, see?" said Bunter. "Sickening, I call it! Mauly can't have a remittance without fellows running him down—"

"Why, you—you—" gasped Bob.
"You leave Mauly alone!" said Bunter. "Besides, he hasn't had a remittance—I never saw him taking the banknotes out of the letter, if you want to know! Just clear off!"

"You fat owl!" roared Bob. "I'm going into that study!"
"You're not!" contradicted Bunter. "You're jolly well going to leave old Mauly alone! Sticking a fellow for his money—"

Jim Valentine came up the passage, and he also stopped at Mauly's door. Bunter waved a fat hand at him.

"You, too!" he exclaimed scornfully. "Look here, you sheer off, Valentine, see?"

"But I'm going into Mauly's study," said Valentine.

"You're not!" hooted Bunter. "Leave Mauly alone, I tell you! I call it sickening—just because the chap's had a remittance—"

"You piffling, pie-faced, pernicious porker!" roared Bob Cherry. "Do you think we care twopence whether Mauly's had a remittance or not?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Let us in, Mauly!" called out Valentine, laughing. "That is, if you haven't forgotten asking a fellow to tea."

"Oh! Yaas! Is that you, old bean?" came Lord Mauleverer's voice from Study No. 12. "Is Bunter still there?"

"As large as life!"
"Kick him down the passage before I open the door, will you?"

"Yes, rather!"
"I say, Mauly—I say, you fellows— Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, as both Valentine and Bob Cherry proceeded to do as requested by his lordship.

The Owl of the Remove flew along the passage. He roared as he flew. Lord Mauleverer unlocked his study door and glanced out, grinning.

"Stagger in, old beans!" he said, and the old beans "staggered" in. Johnny Bull and Hurrey Jamset Ram Singh came along to Study No. 12 and joined the tea-party therein.

Billy Bunter eyed them from afar with a morose blink. Lord Mauleverer had had a remittance that day—one of his lordship's munificent remittances—and the fat Owl was deeply, intensely interested in that remittance. Since he had spotted the banknotes Bunter had haunted Mauly like a fat ghost.

"Beasts!" grunted Bunter, and he rolled along to Study No. 1 and blinked in at Wharton and Nugent.

"I say, you fellows—"
"Cut off!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! As your pals are going to tea with Mauly, I suppose you're going," said Bunter. "The other beasts are there already—I—I mean the other dear old fellows! I—I say, Harry, old chap— look here, I've done a lot for you, you know, in one way and another! You can take a friend with you when you go to tea with a pal like Mauly. Can't you?"

Harry Wharton nodded.
"Well, take me along with you this time, old chap!" urged Bunter. "I'm

not the fellow to butt in at tea-time, as you know, as a rule—"

"Oh crumbs!"
"But I've been disappointed about a postal order to-day," said Bunter sorrowfully. "I'm actually stony! Hard-up, you know! Mauly's had a big remittance—banknotes, you know—I saw the notes! I say, take me along as a pal, when you go to tea with Mauly!"

"Right-ho!" said Wharton. "Wait in the passage."

Billy Bunter's fat visage brightened wonderfully.

"Oh, good!" he gasped, scarcely believing in his good luck. "You—you mean it, old fellow?"

"Of course! I'll take you with me when I go to tea with Mauly, if you'll wait in the passage till I go!"

"Dear old chap!" said Bunter affectionately.

He rolled out, to wait in the passage with joyful anticipation. Harry Wharton shut the door after him.

Nugent chuckled.
"How long do you think Bunter will wait?" he asked.

"Till we've finished tea, I hope."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was rather a frugal tea in Study No. 1—quite a contrast to the gorgeous spread going on in Study No. 12, which Wharton and Nugent could have joined if they had liked.

But they did not like.

Lord Mauleverer, unconscious of any rift in the lute in Study No. 1, had asked Jim Valentine, for which reason Wharton had politely excused himself.

(Continued on page 16.)

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(Continued from page 13.)

And since their talk on the subject, Nugent fully shared his chum's feelings towards the new fellow. Both of them hoped that matters were not so bad as they looked, and neither intended to "turn him down" publicly; but they wanted to keep clear of him personally.

They sat down to their frugal tea in Study No. 1, funds being rather short in that study. In the passage Billy Bunter waited—rather impatiently.

On his own the fat Owl did not care to venture into Mauly's study. His good-tempered and good-natured lordship could be imposed on to almost any extent; but his guests were made of sterner stuff. Having sampled Bob Cherry's boot, Bunter did not want another sample.

But if Wharton took him in as a friend, it was all right. So the fat Owl waited hopefully.

As the Famous Five generally "went about" together, and as they were all on pally terms with old Mauly, Bunter took it for granted that Wharton and Nugent were going to the tea-party in Study No. 12. He was unaware, so far, that he had taken a little too much for granted.

He "mooched" about the passage for several long minutes, waiting for Wharton to come out. But Wharton did not come out.

He rolled back to Study No. 1 at last and blinked in. To his surprise, he saw Wharton and Nugent sitting at the table at tea.

"I say, you fellows!" exclaimed Bunter.

Wharton glanced round.

"You're having tea here!" exclaimed the fat Owl. "Think Mauly won't have enough, or what? Why, he's got tons!"

"That's all right," said Harry. "I've told you I'll take you with me when I go to tea with Mauly, and I'm a man of my word, I hope. Wait in the passage till I go—that's the arrangement."

"But there's no need to scoff those measly sardines—I tell you Mauly's got tons—"

"Buzz off! If you don't keep the arrangement, it falls through. Shut that door—there's a draught!"

Bunter grunted and drew the door shut. He resumed his vigil, puzzled and impatient and annoyed. Why the two juniors were "scoffing" sardines and bread-and-butter just before going to a gorgeous spread was a mystery to Billy Bunter. But he had to wait; and he waited.

Five minutes later the door of Study No. 1 opened, and Frank Nugent and Harry Wharton came out, with smiling faces.

"Oh, here you are!" gasped Bunter, in great relief. "I say, you fellows, you've wasted a lot of time! Mauly's got tons of stuff; but with all those fellows there, you know—I say, where are you going?"

Wharton and Nugent turned towards

the stairs. Mauly's study was in the opposite direction.

"I say, you fellows!" roared Bunter.

"Hold on!"

"What for?" asked Wharton.

"Where are you going, you silly ass? Tea will be finished in Mauly's study at this rate! A lot of greedy fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Look here, Wharton, you said you'd take me to tea with you in Mauly's study—"

"If you waited in the passage till I went!" said Harry.

"Well, I've waited, haven't I?"

"Go on waiting!"

"Look here, when are you going to tea with Mauly, then?"

"Next week perhaps—"

"What?" shrieked Bunter.

"Or the week after—"

"You—you—you—silly idiot!" gurgled Bunter. "Ain't you going to tea with Mauly to-day?"

"Not at all!"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"My dear man, rely on me to keep the arrangement," said Wharton. "I'll take you to tea with me in Mauly's study when I go, if you wait in the passage till I go—which may be next week, or the week after, or the week after that! If you don't wait in the passage till then, of course, it's all off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Nugent, quite entertained by the expression on Billy Bunter's face.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Wharton and Nugent went down the Remove staircase smiling. Billy Bunter was left in the Remove passage—far from smiling! Indeed, to judge by his expression, Bunter was taking a leaf out of the book of that ancient king who never smiled again.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

By Whose Hand?

"WHAT silly ass—"
"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"
"What's the row, Mauly?"

The rising-bell had ceased to clang, and the Remove were turning out in the frosty winter morning.

Billy Bunter was still snatching a last few precious moments in bed; but the other fellows were all up, and Lord Mauleverer seemed to be disturbed about something.

"Some potty ass has been larkin' with my clobber," complained Mauly.

"Rotten trick, larkin' with a fellow's clobber."

Two or three fellows came over to Mauly. Mauly was a very careful man with his clothes, and they were always folded up very neatly when his lordship went to bed. At home, at Mauleverer Towers, Mauly's "man" did this important duty of looking after Mauly's beautiful and expensive clothes; and Mauly, though he bore it uncomplainingly, felt that it was rather hard that a fellow couldn't have his "man" at school! However, he couldn't, so he looked after his clothes himself, giving that matter much more careful attention than he gave to Mr. Quelch's instructions in class.

It was not easy to irritate his easy-going lordship; but if anything could perturb his cheerful placidity, it was damage to his clobber. There was quite a frown on Mauly's face.

"Look at that jacket!" said Mauly. "Rumpled all over! Look at my bags—crumpled! I call this the limit! What silly ass got out of bed to lark with my clobber?" Skinner, your fearful rotter, did—"

"Not guilty, my lord!" grinned Skinner.

"I'll jolly well punch your nose—"

"You silly ass, I haven't touched your silly clobber!" hooted Skinner.

"Well, you're always playin' some rotten trick. You put gum in my Sunday hat once, as you jolly well know!" growled Lord Mauleverer. "I'm jolly well goin' to punch your head, Skinner, and chance it!"

"I've told you—" yelled Skinner.

"Yaas; but that makes no difference. You're such a fearful fibber, you know. You can't expect me to guess when you happen to be tellin' the truth. I'm not a magician!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, this is jolly queer!" said Bob Cherry. "Somebody must have turned out of bed in the night and fooled about with Mauly's clobber."

"Looks as if somebody's been through the pockets," said Vernon-Smith. "The lining's turned out of your jacket pocket, Mauly."

Lord Mauleverer gave a violent start. There was an inside pocket to his elegant jacket, and the lining of that pocket was pulled out, showing the pocket, of course, to be empty.

Mauly gazed at it, dumbfounded.

"Look here! If this is a joke, it's a bit too thick!" he said quietly. "The silly ass who has shifted my notecase had better hand it over."

"Your notecase?" repeated Wharton.

"I kept it in that pocket!"

"Oh, my hat!"

More fellows gathered round Lord Mauleverer now, and faces were rather serious. A "lark" with a fellow's clothes was one thing; but a "lark" with a fellow's money was quite another thing.

"Look in the other pockets," suggested Jim Valentine. "The silly ass may have put it there!"

"Yaas, I shouldn't wonder."

Lord Mauleverer ran his hands through all his pockets in turn. But the notecase did not come to light.

All the Remove knew Mauly's handsome Russia-leather notecase, which was itself worth several guineas, apart from the contents. Most of the fellows knew that Mauly had had a big remittance lately, and that there were banknotes as well as currency notes in that notecase. The Removites looked at one another, with startled faces.

"This isn't a lark," said Harry Wharton, "this is sheer, fatheaded foolishness. The fellow who has shifted Mauly's cash had better own up at once!"

There was silence.

"For goodness' sake cough it up!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove. "If this isn't cleared up at once, we shall have fellows saying that there's a thief in the Form!"

Even as the words passed his lips Wharton gave a start, and his glance shot involuntarily to Jim Valentine.

Valentine did not observe it; he was looking at Mauly. But Nugent saw it, and he started, too, and his face paled.

A thief in the Form! There was a fellow in the Form who had been the associate of thieves—whose actions since had looked as if he was still in association with them!

Frank Nugent turned away, sick at heart.

"I never touched your clobber, Mauleverer, I swear that!" said Skinner, with rather a scared look.

Mauleverer nodded.

"That's all right, Skinner, old bean. You wouldn't be fool enough to lark with a fellow's notecase."

"Bunter was jolly interested in

Mauly's banknotes," said the Bounder, with a grin.

"Don't be a silly ass, Smithy," said Lord Mauleverer. "Bunter's a blithering idiot, but he's no more a thief than I am."

"Does any fellow here know anything about it?" asked Squiff, looking round at the circle of startled faces.

Nobody did, apparently. At all events, there was no answer.

"It—it must have been a lark—a silly lark!" said Mark Linsley haltingly.

"If it was a lark, the fellow concerned can say so," said the Bounder, "and he'd better say so at once!"

There was a tense silence.

"I—I— I say, this is pretty rotten," said Bob Cherry at last. "If this gets out—"

"It will get out soon enough, if Mauly's notecase isn't found before we go down!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Sure it was in that pocket, Mauleverer?" asked Valentine.

"Yaas."

"Well, you're rather a forgetful ass, you know," said Valentine. "You might have left it somewhere—in your study, perhaps."

"That wouldn't account for Mauly's pockets having been turned out overnight!" said Hazeldene. "Somebody's been through his pockets."

Harry Wharton was silent. A hideous conviction was forcing itself into his mind, but he could not utter it.

"I say, you fellows"—Billy Bunter sat up in bed at last—"I say, is anything up?"

"Time you were," said the Bounder. "Did you burgle Mauly's pockets last night, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Shut up, Smithy, I tell you!" snapped Lord Mauleverer.

"I say, is anything gone?" asked Bunter, rolling out of bed. "Have you lost your banknotes, Mauly?"

"Yaas."

"Well, serve you jolly well right!" said Bunter. "You might as well have cashed that postal order for me yesterday, as it turns out."

"You howlin' ass!"

Harry Wharton spoke at last.

"If this is a lark on Mauly, the fellow had better own up before we go down."

(Continued on next page.)

WHO'S THE BEST "GOALIE" ?

IT is always a pleasure to me to answer questions from readers if I can possibly do so. I have to confess, however, that from time to time I receive queries which leave me "stumped." Here is one from H. L., which comes under that heading. "Will you tell me who is the best goalkeeper playing in English League football at the present time?"

Needless to say, I have my own views as to the man whom I should name myself as the best goalkeeper in English football, but on a question like this it is merely a matter of opinion. Probably I should get myself into hot water with football enthusiasts up and down the country if I said definitely that this or that goalkeeper was better than the rest.

The selectors of English International teams say that Harry Hibbs, of Birmingham, is the best of the goalkeepers of the present generation who are qualified to play for England. They have said that by choosing Hibbs for the recent representative matches. And I don't suppose anybody would quarrel with me very seriously if I suggested that Hibbs is as good as any man in the game to-day as a goalkeeper.

There are other "keepers," however, who demand attention, and who might be considered just as good as Hibbs. I have often talked to well-known forwards on this question of who is the best goalkeeper, and I should say that the answer I have received, on the greatest number of occasions, is Elisha Scott. As you know, he is the Liverpool goalkeeper who has played so often for Ireland, and who, incidentally, has played so long for Liverpool that he is now in the course of qualifying for his fourth benefit.

Up and down the country, however, and in match after match, we come against good goalkeepers, and while I would not be so bold as to say which is the best, I would go so far as to say that there are a greater number of really good goalkeepers than there are really good players for any other position on the field.

CO-OPERATION IS ESSENTIAL!

VERY seldom do we hear of a big transfer fee being paid for a goalkeeper, and I know many managers who are of opinion that it is a waste of money to pay a transfer fee at all for a "keeper." "I can always lay my hands on a good goalkeeper," said one manager to me the other day.

If it is true that there are more good goalkeepers than good players for any other position, how is that fact accounted

SOCCER QUERIES ANSWERED HERE.

"LINESMAN CALLING!"



Don't argue with your pals, it's a waste of time. Let "Linesman" settle your Soccer problems. He's a walking encyclopedia where the great winter game's concerned.

for? I can answer that question to my own satisfaction, anyway.

No matter in what class of football a goalkeeper plays he has, roughly speaking, the same sort of work to do. In a junior eleven the goalkeeper gets high shots and low ones, swerves and curlers. In other words, there is not the same difference in shooting, between the various grades of football as there is in some other departments.

Again, it is easier, perhaps, to be a good goalkeeper because the goalkeeper does, to such a large extent, play on his own, no matter what class of football he plays in. Thus, from his very earliest days the goalkeeper learns to rely on himself, and thus steered, he has confidence in himself when he is promoted from one class of football to another.

When I say that a goalkeeper plays "on his own" to a very large extent, I am not suggesting for a moment that a goalkeeper should not have a clear and real understanding with his full-backs. Co-operation in defence is just as essential as co-operation in attack. Watching football matches, and listening to the remarks of the spectators, I have never been able to understand why the pass back by a defender to the goalkeeper, should bring forth sarcastic remarks, such as "windy."

It is not a sign of weakness for the full-back to leave the ball to his goalkeeper or to pass it back to him when in a tight corner. It is a sign of strength. I would much sooner see a full-back slip the ball to his goalkeeper than bang it out of play.

ENGLISH CLUBS & SCOTTISH CLUBS.

A FINE point regarding the correct ruling is raised by another thoughtful correspondent. The goalkeeper is not allowed to handle the ball outside the penalty area.

Suppose the goalkeeper is standing just inside the penalty area and stretches out to handle the ball, should a free kick be given against him? The answer is in the affirmative.

The decision on matters of this kind depends upon the position of the ball; not on the position of the feet or body of the player. The same ruling would apply to a case of hands by a full-back. If the ball was in the penalty area when the full-back handled, then it would be a penalty kick although the legs and body of the full-back were outside the penalty area.

There has been much talk in recent times about the possibility of the big League clubs of Scotland joining with English clubs in the playing of either League matches or Cup-ties. You will remember that not long ago, Newcastle United suggested that their reserve side should play in the Second Division of the Scottish League. Perhaps the day will come when the leading clubs of England and Scotland will participate in the same League, but that day is not yet.

Mention of this matter, however, reminds me that in the very olden days, Scottish clubs did compete for the "English" Cup. The Queen's Park Club, of Glasgow, entered the Cup competition in the first season in which this competition was run. Queen's Park were excused until the semi-final. Then they played a London club, known as the Wanderers. The match was staged in Scotland, and ended in a draw. Thereupon, the Queen's Park Club withdrew from the competition because they could not afford to travel all the way to London for a replay. Fancy a team withdrawing from the Cup at the semi-final stage! Sounds funny, doesn't it? Yet it actually happened.

"LINESMAN,"

(Address your Soccer queries to "Linesman," c/o THE MAGNET, The Electricity House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,301.

Otherwise, Mauly will have to report it to Quelch."

"That it was not a lark was clear, from the fact that nobody had anything to say by the time the Removites were ready to go down. Some unknown hand, in the night, had abstracted Mauleverer's notecase from his pocket—and was keeping it! In grim and glum silence the Remove went down.

At the foot of the stairs Wharton tapped Mauleverer on the shoulder.

"You'll have to see Quelch after brekker, Mauly."

"You think—" muttered Mauly.

"Isn't it clear?"

"Well, Valentine suggested that I—I might have left the notecase somewhere," murmured his lordship feebly. "I—I own up to bein' a rather forgetful chap in some things."

"Your pockets were turned out, tat-head."

"Yaas; but that might have been only a lark. We thought it was a lark at first, you know."

"Nobody's owned up to it—"

"Might not like to, now the cash is missin'—see? I—I rather fancy it's a coincidence—"

"Don't be an ass!"

"Well, look at it," urged the unhappy Mauly. "Say I left the notecase somewhere an' forgot it. Fellow larks with my clobber—doesn't like to say so when it seems that money's missin'—see?"

"Do you really believe that, Mauly?"

Mauleverer was silent. Apparently he was trying to believe it, but could not quite succeed.

"Look here, Mauly—"

"Anyhow, there's no hurry," muttered Mauleverer. "I'll have a jolly good hunt for that notecase—see? Leave it at that."

Wharton set his lips.

"Your money was taken out of your pocket, in our dormitory, during the night," he said. "You know it, as well as I do."

Mauleverer gave a little shudder.

"That means that there's a thief in the Form," he said.

"Yes."

"Well, there isn't!"

"What?"

"Don't I know every fellow in the Remove? There isn't a thief in the Remove! That's rot!"

"What are you going to do, Mauly?"

"Hunt for that jolly old notecase."

"And if—or rather, when—you don't find it?"

"Perhaps I shall."

"You know you won't," said Wharton quietly. "But leave it at that, for the present, if you like. As you say, there's no hurry."

And it was left at that—for the present. But there were two fellows at least, who felt, with a shuddering certainty, that they knew, they could not help knowing, that there was a thief in the Remove, and who he was.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Startling Discovery!

WHAT about Coker?" Billy Bunter asked that question, addressing it to a group of Remove fellows in the Rag after class.

"Oh, dry up, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry.

Generally, the mention of Coker would have made the fellows smile. But nobody in the Remove was feeling like smiling now.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,301.

What had happened in the dormitory had cast a cloud over the whole Form.

During the day nothing had been learned of the missing notecase. Lord Mauleverer was supposed to be hunting for it. But probably his efforts were not very great. For at the bottom of his heart Mauly knew very well that that notecase had been taken from his pocket while he slept. However, his lordship looked in his study, and up and down, and round about, in a rather perfunctory manner. Nobody expected him to find it—and he did not.

The conclusion that had to be drawn was clear. Mauly's notecase was in some other fellow's keeping. There had been a theft.

Mr. Quelch had heard nothing yet. But he was certain to hear before long. The juniors could not discuss such a matter without it getting known. Already fellows in other Forms had heard something about it.

It would have to go before the Form master, and then the Head. And then—Wharton and Nugent felt that they, at least, knew what would happen—what must happen. Valentine, the boy who had once associated with crooks, would be called before the headmaster. It was a certainty.

They wondered whether Valentine himself had thought of that. If so, there was nothing to be read in his face.

He was quiet and serious, like most of the fellows since that appalling discovery. But there was certainly no trace of uneasiness to be read in his looks or manner.

The Famous Five were in the Rag, with half a dozen other fellows, and the talk turned on the missing notecase. Lord Mauleverer, questioned by two or three fellows, admitted that he had not found it—yet. And Vernon-Smith, with a shrug of the shoulders, asked who the dickens could have snaffed it. It was then that Billy Bunter weighed in. Bunter had been thinking—quite an unusual proceeding on Bunter's part. Now he was going to give the other fellows the wonderful results of his unusual mental exertions.

"You needn't say dry up, Bob Cherry!" said the fat Owl severely. "I've been thinking this out, about Mauly's notecase, and I can jolly well tell you, I've got it!"

"You've got it?" exclaimed Mauleverer.

"Yes, I fancy so."

"Then hand it over, you howling ass!"

"Eh?" Billy Bunter jumped. "Wharrer you mean, you dummy? Hand over what?"

"My notecase—"

"You—you silly idiot!" gasped Bunter. "I haven't got your notecase, have I?"

"You said you had got it, a minute ago."

"You silly chump!" howled Bunter. "I didn't mean I'd got the notecase, you burbling fathead. I meant I'd got it—I mean, I'd got who pinched it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mauly's little misunderstanding had the effect of banishing the serious looks of the Removites for a moment.

"I've got it!" repeated Bunter. "I say, you fellows, what about Coker?"

"Well, what about him, ass?" asked Frank Nugent impatiently. "Don't jaw about Coker now. Keep your head shut."

"I mean Coker's got it!"

"What?"

"Well, what does it look like?" demanded Bunter, as the whole group of

juniors turned astounded eyes on him. The fat Owl felt that he had made a sensation, at least—as, indeed, he had. "A few nights ago Coker of the Fifth came sneaking into our dorm at one or two in the morning. Now somebody's pinched a lot of money in our dorm! What does it look like? I ask you!"

"Well, my only hat!" said Bob Cherry blankly. "Is that what you've got, you frabjous, foolzing, fatheaded frump?"

"That's it!" answered Bunter. "Mauly says there isn't a pincher in the Remove—"

"Yaas," said Mauleverer. "I say that again."

"Well, I fancy he's right," said Bunter. "Mauly's a silly fathead, of course; but I fancy he's right this time. Nobody in the Remove pinched that notecase. It was a fellow from another dormitory."

"Dash it all, it's possible!" said the Bouncer. "There's a thief somewhere; but, after all, a fellow could get into the dorm at night—and everybody at Greyfriars knows that Mauly's thick with money."

There was a general nodding of heads. It did seem probable; but it was, as Smithy said, possible. And it was a rather more agreeable idea than that there was a thief in the Remove.

"Well," continued Bunter, "a fellow comes butting into our dorm at night. He makes out that he came to whop Valentine. That's all very well. Being seen there, he had to say something—see?"

"You silly ass!" said Harry Wharton. "Chuck it!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I tell you I've got it! The other night Coker was after it, and he fooled it. Last night he tried again, and got away with it. What do you fellows think?"

Bunter blinked inquiringly at the juniors. There was no doubt that most of the fellows were rather inclined to jump at the theory that the thief had come from another dormitory. But nobody except Bunter was likely to suppose that Horace Coker of the Fifth Form was a "pincher." It was not only because Coker had plenty of money of his own—too much, in fact. Coker was every known kind of an ass, but he was straight as a die, as every fellow knew, excepting the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove.

"What do we think?" repeated Johnny Bull. "Well, I, for one, think you're a blithering idiot, and I think I'm going to kick you!"

And Johnny Bull did. There was an indignant yell from Bunter.

"I think the same," remarked Bob Cherry, and he followed suit.

"Yarook!"

"The thankfulness of my esteemed self is also terrific," observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and he shot out a foot.

"Whoop!"

Billy Bunter departed from the Rag in a great hurry. His masterly suggestion, which, Bunter considered, cleared up the mystery, did not seem to have made him popular. Two or three more kicks reached him as he fled, and Billy Bunter roared and vanished.

"The fat ass!" said Jim Valentine. "But what that fat duffer's said has put something into my mind, you fellows."

"What's that?" asked Bob.

"That yarn of Coker's about a burglar in the dorm—"

"That was all bunkum!"

"I know; but all the same, there may be a pincher in the House—one of the servants, perhaps—and there may have been somebody in the dorm the night



"Queleh," said Mr. Prout, "this is outrageous—unparalleled! Such an uproar from your Form—at such an hour of the night—is intolerable!" "It is absolutely intolerable, sir," hooted Mr. Queleh, "that a boy of your Form should create such a disturbance!" "What!" gasped Prout. "A boy of my form?" "Yes," said Mr. Queleh. "This boy here—Coker!"

Coker butted in. It looks like it now, for it's just impossible to believe that there's a pincher in our Form. I agree with Mauleverer there."

Harry Wharton looked fixedly at Valentine. Believing as he did—as he could not help believing—he felt sickened by what seemed like the hypocrisy of the new junior. He turned away, and walked out of the Rag, and Frank Nugent followed him. The other fellows remained discussing the affair, except Mauly, who drifted away to his study, for another desultory look for the missing notecase there.

Wharton and Nugent went to their study. It was nearly tea-time, though they were not thinking of tea. In Study No. 1 they looked at one another.

"This can't go on, Harry," muttered Nugent.

Wharton shook his head. "It can't," he agreed. "You heard what the fellow said; it made me sick. I—I don't know whether we ought to feel so sick with him, considering how the poor wretch was trained—in a gang of vile thieves—but—but—but it won't do for Greyfriars, Frank."

"Well, it can't last," said Nugent. "Queleh will be getting hold of the story soon, and then all the fat will be in the fire."

Wharton moved about the study restlessly.

"If a fellow could only be sure," he muttered. "It looks—it looks—What was he doing that night out of bounds, Frank? It looks—And now there's a thief here. There wasn't before he came. What's a fellow to think? And yet—yet somehow I can't get it down."

"Same here," said Frank. "Anyhow, we can't say anything. It's for the beaks to find the man out."

"But it's rotten, it's awful suspecting a chap of such a fearful thing, and—and— If a fellow only knew."

"Queleh will take it in hand as soon as he hears. The sooner the better. Fellows will be suspecting this and that. That howling ass Bunter has started on poor old Coker already."

"I—I suppose there can't be anything in what Valentine said—that there's a pincher about? And Coker ran into him that night—"

"There was no pincher here before Valentine came."

"Yes; that seems to settle it, and yet—and yet— It seemed to settle it. Yet Valentine's handsome, frank face seemed to rise before Wharton's eyes, and give a silent denial. "If a fellow could only be sure—"

Wharton broke off with a shudder. "If they suspect Valentine, Frank—and they must—they'll search this study. It's his study as well as ours."

Nugent started. "I—I hadn't thought of that." He stared round the study. "You think that—that—" His voice trailed off.

"Where else? He wouldn't dare to carry it about with him. If—if he had it, it's parked here somewhere."

Nugent's face was white. "It's too thick," he said. "If it's found here, of course, that will settle it. Look here, Harry, he won't be coming up to tea. He never comes here to tea now. If it's here, we can find it. And—and give the poor brute a chance. Give him a chance to clear out of the school, and nothing said."

Wharton stood silent, looking at his chum for a full minute. Then he nodded his head slowly. That was a way out. If only certainty could be

arrived at the fellow could be given a chance—to go.

"Let's!" said Wharton briefly.

It was five minutes later that Wharton, rooting behind the lumber in the bottom of the study cupboard, while Nugent looked elsewhere, suddenly gave a cry. He turned from the cupboard, his face like chalk, with something in his hand. Nugent spun round towards him.

"What—" he began.

He did not need to finish.

It was Lord Mauleverer's notecase, with its crest and monogram, that was in Harry Wharton's hand. And it was empty!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Way Out!

LORD MAULEVERER sighed. His lordship was extended on the expensive sofa in his lordship's study with a cloud on his noble brow.

That apparently was how his lordship was hunting for the lost notecase.

But really it was not much use to look round the study for that notecase. Lord Mauleverer hoped that it was there; but he knew very well, at the back of his mind, that it was not there.

He sighed deeply.

He did not believe that there was a thief in the Remove, or in the school at all. It was not easy for a fellow like Mauly to believe anything of that kind. But he was puzzled and worried and miserable. Unless he had laid that notecase somewhere and forgotten all about it—and he knew that he hadn't—it had

been taken from his pocket in the dormitory. If that did not spell theft, it was rather difficult to say what it did mean. The whole thing was horribly dismaying and disconcerting, and it made Lord Mauleverer feel thoroughly wretched and miserable.

There was a tap at the door, and it opened, to admit Wharton and Nugent. Lord Mauleverer started up rather guiltily.

"I—I'm not slackin', old beans!" he stammered. "I—I was just goin' to have a—jolly good look—"

"No need now, Mauly," said Harry Wharton quietly. "It's found."

He shut the study door.

"Found!" ejaculated Mauleverer.

"Here it is!"

"Oh, what luck!" gasped Mauly. His face was irradiated. "I told you men that it hadn't been pinched—what?"

"It's empty!"

"Oh!"

Lord Mauleverer looked into the notecase. There were some stamps in it, but nothing in the shape of notes. The brightness faded out of his face again.

"Oh gad!" he said dismally.

"Did you have much in it, Mauly?" asked Nugent.

"Nunno! There were a couple of fivers, and—and some currency notes. I forget how many."

"And there's nothing now," said Harry.

"Nothin'!"

Lord Mauleverer groaned. He had clung to his fixed belief that there was no thief within the walls of Greyfriars School. But even Mauly found it difficult to cling to that now.

"Where did you find it?" he asked.

"In our study."

"Y-your study!" stuttered Mauleverer.

"It was hidden behind some lumber at the bottom of the study cupboard."

"Good gad! Some sweep must have chucked it there to get rid of it after baggin' the notes. Is—is that what you think?"

"I suppose the rotter hid it there till he could get rid of it," said Harry. "It was out of sight, of course; but if the studies were searched, it would have

turned up. I suppose the notes are hidden somewhere else. He may have those in his pockets."

"But who?" groaned Mauly.

"You've no idea?" asked Wharton, looking curiously at his lordship.

Mauleverer shook his head hopelessly.

"Not the foggiest."

"It was found in Study No. 1—hidden out of sight. What is anybody to think of that?" asked Harry.

"Blessed if I know!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Well, the thief wouldn't be likely to hide it in any study but his own."

Lord Mauleverer smiled faintly.

"I don't fancy anybody would suspect you, old bean!"

"Me!" gasped Wharton.

"Or Nugent."

"Or—or me." Nugent stared at Mauleverer.

"How could anybody?" said Mauleverer. "It wouldn't be sense. And that new chap in your study—what's his name?"

"Valentine; he's square."

"You think he's square?"

"I know he is," said Lord Mauleverer calmly. "Somebody pitched this notecase where you found it to get shut of it."

Might have picked your study, simply because it's above suspicion. You see, he'd think it was safe there till he had time to get shut of it. But who the dooce was it?"

Wharton and Nugent gazed at his noble lordship in silence.

"Not a Remove man," went on Mauleverer thoughtfully. "That's a cert to begin with. No, of course, I don't know every man at Greyfriars, and there may be some awful rotter I've never noticed."

I can't believe it, though," Mauleverer shook his noble head. "Look here, suppose it was like this—"

"Like what?"

"Suppose I put the money somewhere else, and not in the notecase at all, and—and I forgot all about it."

"You didn't!"

"I might have—I've an awful memory for trifles. Well, then, some silly ass, larking, took this notecase—with nothin' in it, you know—and—and parked it in your study cupboard—rotten silly joke, you know—"

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"Do you think we're going to take that seriously, Mauleverer?"

"Yaas!"

Wharton and Nugent looked at one another. How much faith Mauly himself was able to put in his extraordinary theory, they could not tell; but they were not likely to put any in it themselves.

"Leave it at that!" said Mauleverer quietly. "A notecase was missin'—and a notecase has been found! That's the lot!"

"You can't lose your money!"

"I'm always losing somethin'. Leave it at that, I tell you!"

"You mean you're willing to lose the money, rather than have a disgraceful row in the school?"

"I mean that the matter's closed, and that's that!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"I don't pretend to understand it all—I'm not one of those bright fellows—"

but I know there isn't a thief in the Remove, and I'm not goin' to have fellows sayin' that there is! Leave it at that."

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"If you mean that, Mauly, we'll leave it at that—for a certain reason. You want us to keep it dark?"

"Exactly! I've found my notecase—here it is! Nobody's bizney to ask for further particulars. You fellows needn't come into the picture at all! I've found my notecase!"

"Leave it at that, then," said Harry.

The two juniors left the study and went back to Study No. 1. Wharton closed the door.

"It's clear now, Frank! No need to disgrace the poor rotter—no need of a scandal in the school! We've got to speak to him quietly—when he comes up for prep will do—and—and he's got to go! So long as he goes, we can hold our tongues."

And Nugent nodded assent.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Knows All!

HORACE COKER gave a dismal groan.

Coker was seated at his study table with a pen in his hand, a sheaf of imput paper before him, ink on his fingers, and a blob of ink on his nose.

Coker was writing lines.

In all Coker's leisure hours since his adventure in the Remove dormitory, Coker had been writing lines.

Coker was making quite a close acquaintance with the works of that great poet P. Vergilius Maro.

Really, Coker was lucky! In any Form under the Fifth, Coker would have been "whopped" by his indignant Form master—and the whopping would have been a record. Indeed, Prout had been strongly tempted to whop Coker, senior as he was.

But he had made it lines! Coker had been ordered, as a punishment, to write out the whole of the first book of the *Æneid*.

Now, in the first book of the *Æneid* there are seven hundred and fifty-five lines! And Coker was a slow worker! Long, long before Coker was half through that tremendous imposition, he repented him that he had ever gone to the Remove dormitory to whop Jim Valentine. Prout refused to believe in his burglar! Nobody believed in his burglar. The burglar, if believed in, might have been taken as an extenuating circumstance! But only Coker believed in him. Prout was merciless. Seven hundred and fifty-five lines had to be written out, and handed in by Horace Coker as a reward for his

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The PHANTOM FIGHTER!

WAR THRILLS in the AIR!

Baldy's Angels were the crack flying squadron on the Western Front during the Great War. John Henry Dent was their star fighting pilot—and no task was too perilous for this dare-devil airman to tackle. John Henry it was who set out to solve the mystery of the Phantom Fighter, a ruthless German pilot who caused havoc among Britain's Air Force. How he did it—the unique and utterly reckless way in which he did it—makes thrilling reading in "THE PHANTOM FIGHTER!" an amazing complete War flying story which appears in this week's splendid issue of

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nocturnal stunts; and for days Coker had lived and moved and had his being in endless lines!

Never before had Coker realised what a long-winded ass Virgil was! Any decent chap, Coker thought bitterly, would have cut it shorter! Of course, Virgil, in the ancient days when he wrote his deathless verse, never foresaw that that deathless verse would be used in later ages to torment school-boys! Still, the silly ass needn't have been so frightfully long-winded! It seemed to Coker that he never, never would get to the end of that awful impot. A whole book of Virgil—tosh from beginning to end, too, in Coker's valuable opinion! But there was no help for it—and Coker had to scrawl the lot, from "Arma virumque cano" to "fluctibus aestas." He longed for "fluctibus aestas" as a shipwrecked mariner longs for the sight of land.

It was tea-time, and Potter and Greene looked into the study with hopes of tea. But Coker was not thinking of tea. Prout, after several days, had grown impatient; and hinted that if those lines were not handed in pretty soon, the second book of Virgil might be added thereunto.

That terrifying possibility drove Coker to hard work.

A fellow might grind through the first book of the *Æneid*, and live to tell the tale. But Coker felt that the second book in addition would be the death of him.

He groaned and scribbled.

"What about tea?" asked Potter, casually.

"I've got to get through this," groaned Coker. "Look here, do you think Prout would notice if you men put in a hundred lines each?"

"'Fraid so!" said Potter.

"Sure of it!" said Greene.

And Potter and Greene departed in haste, to seek tea elsewhere.

Coker snorted, and resumed scribbling. Virgil and blots ran from his active pen. Never had the "pius *Æneas*" bored him so terribly. He really wished that the ancient Greeks had copped that Trojan hero when he was making his celebrated get-away from burning Troy. A hundred or more lines remained to be written, after all Coker's herculean labours. He groaned and scrawled.

Potter and Greene had left the study door open. In the open doorway a fat figure and a fatuous face appeared, and two little round eyes blinked at Coker through a large round pair of spectacles.

Billy Bunter eyed Coker for a few moments with a severe blink. The expression on his fat face was stern.

"I say, Coker—" he began at last.

The weary Horace looked up.

"Get out, blow you!" he grunted.

Coker was not in a mood to be bothered by fags.

Bunter did not get out. But he did not get in. He remained in the doorway, apparently ready to dodge. He had come there with something to say to Coker—but he preferred to keep his retreat open. Nearly filling the doorway with his ample form, Bunter blinked at the irritated Horace.

"Look here, Coker—"

"If I get up to you," said Coker, "you'll know it! Bunk while you're safe!"

"If you prefer to have it out before the beaks, all right!" said Bunter.

"But I can tell you it will pay you to keep it quiet, Coker."

Coker gave Virgil a rest, and stared at Bunter. He was surprised. He was still more surprised when Bunter raised his fat arm and pointed an accusing

fat forefinger at the astounded senior.

"I know all!" said Bunter dramatically.

Coker only gazed. He did not know that Bunter, who was a great patron of the films, was being dramatic. He thought he was potty.

"I know all!" repeated Bunter. "Got that? I'm giving you a chance, Coker, to hand it over—before you're denounced!"

"Did-dud-dod-denounced?" stuttered Coker.

"No good pretending not to understand!" sneered Bunter. "You see, I know all! I know where you were last night!"

"Last night? I was in the dorm!" said Coker blankly.

"Yes—and I know which dorm!" grinned Bunter.

"Which dorm?" repeated Coker dazedly.

A LAUGH A DAY KEEPS THE DOCTOR AWAY!

Herewith, a sample for which Cyril Osborne, of 9, Casseo Bridge Road, Watford, Herts, has been awarded a

USEFUL POCKET-KNIFE.



Merchant (to office-boy): "How is it, Clark, that whenever I enter the office you are idling?"

Clark: "I don't know, sir, unless it be them soft shoes you wear that don't make no noise!"

You turn in the laugh, and I'll supply the prize!

gets his banknotes back for him. That's neither here nor there. I'm going—"

Coker gurgled.

Coker's brain was not one of those keen, swift, brilliant ones. It was not quick on the uptake. But Coker began to realise that Bunter was not, as he had naturally supposed at first, insane. He realised that somebody had "pinched" something in the Remove dormitory overnight, and that Bunter, for some inexplicable and unimaginable reason, was accusing him of it.

Coker made a jump at Bunter.

Bunter made a jump back into the passage.

"Keep off, you beast!" squeaked Bunter. "Mind, I'll go to Quelch! I'll jolly well go to Quelch and say—whooooop! Yarooooop! Yow-ow-ow!"

Coker's grasp was upon him.

Bang!

Bunter's head smote the passage wall.

"Oh crikey! Oh crumbs! Leggo!" shrieked Bunter. "I'll go to Quelch—"

"You jolly well will!" roared Coker. "I'll take you to him! Come on!"

Red with wrath, Horace Coker yanked the fat Owl along the passage, with a grip of iron on his collar.

Billy Bunter wriggled and squirmed in that powerful grip.

"Ow! Leggo! Beast! I say—Wow-wow-wow-wow!"

He whirled along in Coker's grasp. Convinced, in the fatuous depths of his fat mind, that it was Coker who had "pinched" the notecase, Billy Bunter could not believe that Horace really intended to take him to Quelch. But as he whirled into Master's Passage he realised that the indignant Horace was in deadly earnest. A dismaying doubt smote him, then, whether his masterly reasoning had led him, after all, to the right conclusion.

"I—I say, Coker—" he gurgled.

"Come on, you fat scoundrel!" roared Coker.

"I—I say, I—I'd rather not see Quelch—" gasped Bunter.

Coker yanked him on. He reached Mr. Quelch's door, knocked on it with his left, opened it, and, with his right, swung Bunter into the study.

With a yell, the Owl of the Remove staggered in, and sprawled headlong under the astonished eyes of his Form master.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Shock for Mr. Quelch!

MR. QUELCH jumped from his chair.

A junior who was standing by his table stared round blankly. It was Jim Valentine.

The Remove master was going through a Latin exercise with Valentino when Coker and Bunter arrived so suddenly and unexpectedly.

"What—what—what does this mean?" stuttered Mr. Quelch. "Bunter—Coker—what—what—what—"

"Yarooooh!"

"Coker—what—"

Coker of the Fifth glared in at the doorway, his face crimson, breathless with wrath and indignation.

"That fat scoundrel—" he roared.

"Coker!"

"They've been pinching in the Remove!" shrieked Coker. "That fat villain came to my study and accused me—"

"What?"

"Accused me of pinching in the Remove dormitory!" raved Coker.

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"I've brought him to you, sir! It's up to you!"

"Calm yourself, Coker!" said Mr. Quelch. "If Bunter has made any such absurd accusation, you did right in bringing him to me; but not in this manner, sir! Bunter!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Get up at once! How dare you sprawl on my floor!"

"Oh lor!"

Bunter crawled to his feet. He blinked dismally at Coker's flaming face and then at the stern countenance of his Form master. It was borne in on Bunter's fat mind that he had put his foot in it.

"Have you accused Coker—"

"Oh! No, sir!" gasped Bunter. "It—it was only a jig-jig-jig—"

"A what?"

"A jig-jig-jig-joke, sir!" gasped the fat Owl. "Just—just my fun, sir! I—I thought Coker would be amused, sir."

"He says that Mauleverer's notecase has been pinched!" roared Coker. "And he said it—"

"Be silent, Coker! Bunter, answer me at once! Has Mauleverer missed his notecase?"

"Oh dear! Yes, sir!" groaned Bunter. "It was pinched out of his pocket last night, sir, in the dorm! Oh dear!"

"If that is true, Mauleverer should have reported the matter to me at once!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch angrily. "Valentine, is Bunter's statement true?"

"Mauleverer's missed his notecase, sir," answered Valentine. "But I don't think he believes that it has been stolen."

"Bunter! For what reason have you dared to make such an accusation against a Fifth Form boy?"

"Well, Coker came butting into our dorm the other night, sir!" groaned Bunter. "So I thought—"

"You fat scoundrel!" hooted Coker.

"Silence, Coker! You have yourself to blame for this! If you had not acted in such a ridiculous manner a few days ago—"

"Look here, sir—"

"That will do, Coker! You may go! I shall cane Bunter. Valentine, hand me my cane."

"Oh lor!"

Coker of the Fifth, snorting, tramped away. Billy Bunter eyed his Form master and the cane apprehensively.

"I—I say, sir, I—I never meant to— to accuse Coker!" he groaned. "It was only my fuf-fuf-fun, sir! Besides, he did it, and I found him out! I—I dare say he's got it in his pocket now, sir! Make him turn out his pockets."

"You absurd boy! Bend over that chair! I shall cane you. Bunter—"

"Wow!"

"If you dare to repeat such an accusation, I shall send you to the Head for a flogging."

"Oh crikey!"

"Bend over that chair!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter groaned and bent over the chair. Mr. Quelch laid on six with a heavy hand, and every one of the six elicited a fearful yell from the fat Owl. He almost crawled from the study when Mr. Quelch had finished.

Mr. Quelch laid down the cane.

His brow was dark and thunderous. This was his first news of the happening in his Form, and it had a deeply disturbing effect on him. He fixed his eyes on Valentine.

"Valentine, tell me exactly what has occurred!" he said curtly.

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Valentine did so, quietly and succinctly.

Mr. Quelch listened, his gimlet eyes fixed on the boy's face, with a penetrating stare that was a little disconcerting.

The Remove master's thoughts were almost chaotic.

A theft in the Remove—that was bad enough in itself! But that was not all—that was not the worst! If there had been a theft, there was a thief—and who was the thief? There was a boy in the Remove who had been an associate, though no doubt the unwilling associate, of law-breakers! Only a short time ago he had seen that boy in talk with men, plainly bad characters, whom he had admitted to be former associates. And now—

Nosoy Clark had schemed well. The terrible doubt that rose in Mr. Quelch's mind now was unavoidable.

What had he done?

Believing in the boy, trusting him, making himself responsible for him, in spite of his dubious past, had he brought a thief into the school?

Mr. Quelch sat down heavily.

Valentine did not understand the expression on his face. But slowly it dawned on him what was passing—what must be passing—in the mind of his friend and protector.

His face whitened.

He stood staring at Mr. Quelch, the colour ebbing from his face, and a haggard, worn, old look coming over it. He spoke at last, his voice sunken and husky:

"Mr. Quelch, you don't think—you can't think— Oh, heavens, why shouldn't you? You—you think that—that I—"

He choked.

"No!" Mr. Quelch's voice came firm and clear. "No, Valentine. I do not, and I cannot, think anything of the kind! I trust you."

He drove away that hideous doubt. He was determined to drive it away. He rose from the chair and dropped his hand kindly on the shoulder of the pale and trembling junior.

"I trust you, Valentine!" he repeated, in the same firm tone. "I am sure that I have not been deceived in you. I trust you implicitly. This matter must be cleared up at once—I shall investigate it immediately. But, remember, my boy, that I do not and cannot doubt you!"

He made the boy a gesture to go, and Valentine left the study.

Mr. Quelch remained long in thought—deep and painful thought—after he was gone. A weight like lead was on his mind and his heart. A theft in the Remove—only a few weeks since he had brought Valentine to the school! He could not, and he would not, doubt the boy, but the matter had to come before the Head, and what would the Head think? What could he think? Upon whom was suspicion to fall, unless upon the boy with a doubtful past? Whom else?

Mr. Quelch left his study at last, and made his way to the Remove passage. Immediate investigation was necessary, whatever the outcome. And he clung to something that Valentine had said—that Mauleverer himself did not believe that there had been a theft! If it was possible, that, after all, it was all a mistake—that there had been no theft—

He threw open the door of Study No. 12. Lord Mauleverer jumped to his feet.

The look on Mr. Quelch's face startled him. But he guessed at once that his Form master had now heard of what had happened in the Remove dormitory. On the table lay the empty

notecase that Wharton had brought back to him half an hour ago. Mauleverer was deeply thankful that it was there.

"Mauleverer!"—Mr. Quelch's voice was hard and icy—"I am informed that your notecase was missing this morning, and—"

"Yaas, sir. But—"

"You should have reported the matter immediately you came down, Mauleverer, if a theft had been committed."

"I didn't think so, sir," said Lord Mauleverer. "I don't think so now. There isn't a thief in the school, sir. That's rot!"

"But your notecase was missing—"

"Yaas, sir. But I fancied it would turn up—and it has!"

"What?"

"Here it is, sir," said Mauleverer, touching the Russia-leather notecase that lay on the table. "We've found it, sir."

Mr. Quelch stared at it. He was conscious of a feeling of deep, deep relief. His trust in Valentine had not, after all, been misplaced.

"That—that is your notecase, Mauleverer?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yaas, sir! It turned up all right," said Mauleverer cheerfully. "I rather thought it would. I said all along it hadn't been pinched."

Mr. Quelch drew a deep breath.

"I am glad you have found it, Mauleverer! You should be more careful! That foolish boy Bunter has been making ridiculous accusations. You will tell the other boys at once, Mauleverer, that your notecase has been found, and there has been no theft?"

"Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Quelch left the study, immensely relieved. Lord Mauleverer winked into space after he had gone. He wondered what Quelch would have said had he mentioned that the contents of the notecase were still missing! Mauly had been very careful not to mention that. The sooner the unpleasant matter was buried in oblivion the better, in Mauly's opinion.

Jim Valentine was called to his Form master's study a few minutes later. To his surprise, he found Mr. Quelch wearing his most benign expression.

"Valentine," said the Remove master, "I told you that I trusted you. I repeat it, Valentine. But I am thankful to say that it transpires that no theft has occurred, after all. Mauleverer has found the missing notecase."

"He's found it, sir?" exclaimed Valentine.

"Yes. He has it in his study now. But even had it not been found, my boy, my faith in you would not have faltered."

But Jim Valentine, as he went down the passage, wondered. Could his protector have continued to trust him if there had been a theft?

He heard Billy Bunter's voice as he went into the Rag.

"I say, you fellows, I've had six—wow!—all because I found out that Coker had pinched that notecase!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Johnny Bull.

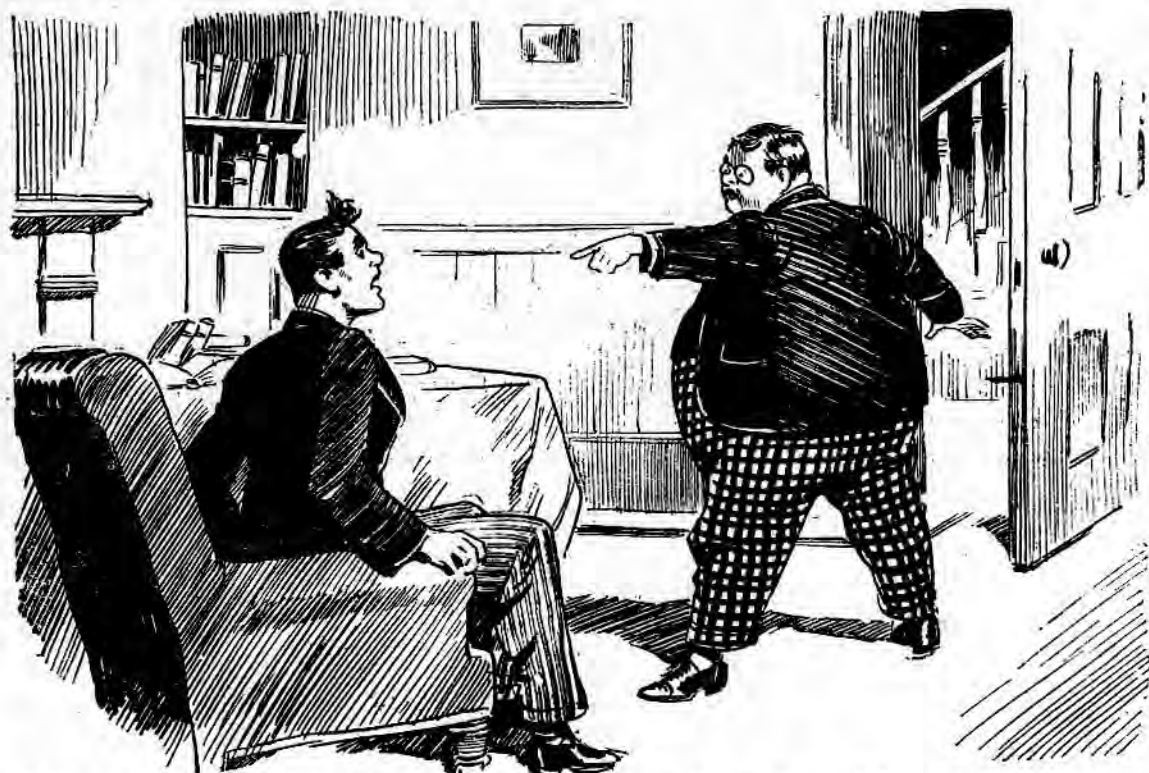
"Beast! I jolly well knew it was Coker!"

"You fat owl!" exclaimed Valentine. "Mauly's found his notecase! Quelch has just told me so!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated the Bounder. "Mauly said all along that it hadn't been pinched!"

"He—he's found it!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crumbs! I say, where is he? Where's Mauly? Is he in his



Bunter pointed an accusing fat forefinger at Coker. "I know all!" he said dramatically. "Got that? But I'm giving you a chance before you're denounced. You nipped into the Remove dorm last night, and pinched Mauly's oof. Hand it over, and I'll take it back!" "Wha-a-what?" gasped Coker in amazement.

study? I say, you fellows, where's old Mauly?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Billy Bunter rolled out of the Rag in haste. He fairly flew to Study No. 12 in the Remove. If Mauly was in funds again, Mauly was a man that Bunter wanted to see!

On the other hand, it appeared that Mauly did not want to see Bunter. As the fat Owl appeared in his study doorway, Mauly grasped the poker and made a jump for Bunter. And Bunter, too, jumped—just in time!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Innocent, or Guilty?

HARRY WHARTON and Frank Nugent were sorting out their books for prep when Jim Valentine came into Study No. 1 in the Remove.

Valentine's handsome face was bright and cheery.

He was aware that he had had a narrow escape—that he had been within an ace of overwhelming disaster. But the danger had passed, and all was well, so far as he knew.

But his cheery face clouded a little as he glanced at his study-mates.

He had been accustomed of late to a rather chilly atmosphere in Study No. 1. He seldom came to that study now except for prep in the evening. But there was rather more than a chill in the atmosphere now. He realised that at once, and his face set a little.

Neither Wharton nor Nugent glanced at him or spoke. They gave him plenty of room on the study table when he took out his books. It looked as if they wanted to keep as far from him as possible.

He sat down quietly to work.

Once Wharton looked up, and opened his lips as if to speak. But he closed them again, and resumed prep.

Valentine knew that something was coming. His perceptions were keen; his strange life had made them so.

He wondered what it was. He had read a terrible doubt in Mr. Quelch's face, and it was likely enough that the same doubt had occurred to these fellows who knew of his past. But since the missing notecase had been found—

Prep was ended at last in grim silence. Valentine rose, put away his books, and moved to the door.

Then Wharton spoke. It had to come now!

"Hold on, Valentine!"

Jim turned back.

"Well, what?" His tone was curt; there was a touch of contempt in it.

"Look here, you fellows, we may as well have this out! I'm not blaming you for turning me down—that's natural. But it's hardly fair play! You knew all about me and what I'd been through when you found me here at the beginning of the term. I'd have kept my distance willingly. But you stood by me of your own accord—I never asked you. I was grateful, but it was your own doing. What have I done to make you think worse of me since then?"

Wharton looked at him steadily.

"We never knew at first that you'd been a crook among crooks," he said quietly. "But if that was all, if you'd chucked it, if you'd kept clear of that vile gang, we'd have stood by you through thick and thin."

"Haven't I?" said Valentine.

"Have you?" said the captain of the Remove. "I've got to speak out now! This can't go on! You were out of bounds the night of the Highcliffe

burglary! Where were you? And what were you doing?"

Valentine started violently.

"You—you knew?"

"Yes."

"You never told me—"

"Will you answer my question? There were two thieves at Highcliffe that night—one of them a boy, who was nearly caught by the porter. Who was that boy?"

"So that—that's the reason—"

"Will you answer me?"

"I'll answer you," said Valentine quietly. "That day I was playing football with you at Highcliffe. I saw a man there; a man I had known long ago. Nugent saw him speak to me—"

Frank nodded.

"You noticed that I fumbled in the second half—played rottenly. You never knew that it was because Nutty Nixon let me know that he was cracking the crib at Highcliffe that night, and it was on my mind."

"And you went out of bounds at night to—to—"

Jim Valentine's lip curled.

"I went out of bounds at night to Highcliffe," he said. "I waited and watched there till Nutty came and tried it on. I stopped him; I scrappered with him; I prevented him from doing what he had come to do. You won't believe me, I suppose, but that's the truth."

There was a deep silence in Study No. 1.

"I suppose you know that that burglary never came off," Jim broke the silence. "It would have come off if I had not gone there. I stopped it! I had to stop it somehow, as I knew what Nutty was doing, and that was the only way."

"Oh!" said Wharton.

"If I'd known you had seen me getting out that night I'd have told you. But I never knew—"

There was another silence.

"You don't believe me?" asked Jim at last.

"If that was all I'd believe you," said Harry. "I—I never thought of it in that light. But—but what's happened since—"

"What's happened since? What, then? I know of nothing."

"What happened last night in the Remove dormitory?" said Harry.

"I don't understand you. Mauleverer's found his notecase. There was no theft, as it turned out. If there was, I suppose I couldn't blame you for thinking of me." Valentine's voice faltered. "I—I think you might have come to know me better by this time, but I shouldn't blame you. But the notecase has been found—"

"Empty!" said Wharton.

"Empty?" repeated Valentine. "You mean to say that Mauleverer's money is lost?"

"Yes."

"He never told Quelch so."

"He's keeping it dark, and we're keeping it dark," said the captain of the Remove. "Nobody wants a disgraceful row in the school; Mauly would rather lose the money. Poor old Mauly is trying to believe that there is no thief here, and we're willing to let him believe it if he can. But—a thief can't stay here."

Valentine clenched his hands, and his eyes blazed.

"You dare to say—" he broke out fiercely.

But his anger passed in a moment, and he laughed, a hard and bitter laugh.

"Why shouldn't you? I was among those crooks for a year or more. You know what I did—what they made me do. You know that I dare not hand Nosey Clark over to the police, because

he could play the same game on me. Why shouldn't you think me a thief?"

"It's not a matter of thinking," said Harry Wharton quietly. "It's a matter of certainty. Nobody wants to be hard on you, but you can't stay at Greyfriars after this. You must know that."

"You must see that, Valentine," said Frank.

Valentine looked at them.

"Even an old offender is entitled to justice," he said bitterly. "If the money was taken, I did not take it! If there's a thief in the school it is not I. I know no more about it than you fellows do. Mauleverer is bound to report his loss to his Form master. If there's a thief here, he will be found."

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"It was I who found Mauleverer's notecase, Valentine," he said. "I found it empty; hidden behind the lumber in that cupboard!"

"In this study?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"Whoever pinched Mauly's notecase last night, took the notes from it and hid the case in that cupboard; I suppose, till he could destroy it in safety. If Quelch took the matter up, and there had been a search, it would have been found there—by Quelch! Do you think he would have fancied that either Nugent or I put it there?" asked the captain of the Remove scornfully.

"I—I—of course not. But I—I can't understand it! You—you found the notecase in that cupboard?" Valentine's voice was hoarse and husky.

"Yes."

Jim Valentine leaned heavily against the wall. His face was like chalk, and perspiration beaded his forehead. Wharton and Nugent looked at him in silence. They could pity him, but he had to go. A thief could not stay at Greyfriars.

Valentine passed his hand across his brow.

ing districts are conveyed to it by means of buggies, motor-cars, and even hand-driven railway trolleys. Then off it goes to the next rail-head, leaving behind a quantity of "home work" which must be completed by the time the travelling school calls again.

Wireless is also extensively used in Canada for broadcasting school lessons to areas where the population is widely scattered.

Here are some

RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

which, for lack of space, I have been forced to hold over for some time:

Time in Rio de Janeiro. ("Magneto," of Stoke-on-Trent.) Time in Rio de Janeiro is two hours fifty-two minutes behind Greenwich time. Therefore, at noon in Greenwich it is still eight minutes past nine in the morning at Rio de Janeiro.

A Shaving Query. ("Anxious." No address.) The more one shaves the stronger the growth becomes. There is no possible method of doing without shaving—except by growing a beard! Shaving is not injurious to the skin.

The Population of London. (H. Burton, of Chatham.) The population of Greater London is, roughly, eight millions.

How Long is the Cresta Run? ("Winter Sport," of Norwich.) This famous toboggan run is three-quarters of a mile long, made of smooth ice, with banked snow sides. The average time taken for a toboggan to "run" it is about a minute, which gives a speed of about forty-five m.p.h. The riders of the toboggans wear crash helmets, leather gauntlets, kneepads, and steel-raked boots. Only skilled

"I don't understand it." His voice was a husky whisper. "Who could have hidden the thing there except a fellow in the study? No wonder you believe. No wonder—" He choked.

"Goodness knows, I'm sorry," muttered Wharton. "But—you see yourself—"

Valentine pulled himself together.

"If I were the rotter you fancy, I'd get out of Greyfriars; but I'm not! I can't understand it all. But I never touched Mauly's notecase! You can't believe me—it seems like proof to you, I suppose—but—but it's true! I'd have cut off my hand sooner! Can't you believe me?"

In spite of themselves, in spite of conviction, the ring of wild earnestness in the boy's voice went to the hearts of the juniors. Was it possible, somehow, that after all he was innocent? How could it be? Yet as they looked at his earnest face and heard the passionate sincerity in his voice, they had to doubt.

"If—if you stick to that—" said Wharton haltingly.

"It's true!"

"But who—if it was not you, who—" stammered Nugent.

"I don't know! How should I know? I know what it looks like! But I'm telling you the truth! Can't you try to believe me?" muttered Jim Valentine huskily.

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"Goodness knows, I'd be glad to believe you! I—I—I'll try."

Nosey Clark had failed. But what was to happen when the next blow came from the treacherous hand of the crook? Only the future could tell!

THE END.

(The next yarn in this stirring series is entitled: "**COKE, THE DETECTIVE**." It's one of Frank Richards' extra-specials, too! You can only make sure of reading it, chums, by ordering your MAGNET in good time!)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

WELL, chums, I need hardly ask if you've seen the competition on page 27 of this issue. It doesn't necessitate a lot of hard work to carry off the first prize of

ONE SHILLING A WEEK FOR A YEAR, does it? Get out your paints or crayons right now and get busy! If the first prize does not come your way, there's still a chance of winning

SIXPENCE A WEEK FOR A YEAR, or one of the **FIFTY CONSOLATION PRIZES OF WATCHES, MODEL PLANES, TORCHES, POCKET WALLET, PEN-KNIVES, etc.** All these handsome prizes

MUST BE WON!

IDARE say you have all heard about the barge school which travels about England for the benefit of children who live on barges. But have you heard about

THE SCHOOL ON WHEELS?

Some of my Canadian readers might have done, because this novel school is found in that country. It is a big saloon railway carriage, fitted with desks and a blackboard. It is hitched on to the end of a train, taken to its destination, and then shunted into a siding. There it remains for a fortnight, during which period all the children from the surround-

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toboggan runners are allowed to use the Cresta Run.

Who First Tried to Cross the Atlantic by Air? ("Aviator," of Birmingham.) The first attempt was made in 1910, when the airship America set out from Atlantic City, U.S.A., intending to make its first stop at Newfoundland. On the third day wireless messages stopped, for the airship came down in the sea and the crew put off in a small boat. The crew were picked up by a passing steamer, but the airship, relieved of their weight, ascended from the water and was never seen again!

THERE'S another first-rate yarn by Frank Richards in store for you next week. The title tells you what to expect. It is:

"COKE, THE DETECTIVE!"

and, as usual, it will be packed full of thrills and fun! This year is going to be a "super" year for the MAGNET, I can assure you, and Frank R. fully intends to keep up the standard of the Greyfriars yarns and, if possible, to make them even greater than they have been in the past—which certainly wants some doing!

Hedley Scott's fine serial, "Nobby, the 'Shooting Star,'" is going "great guns," judging by the many congratulatory letters which I have received. You'll enjoy next week's magnificent instalment, I can promise you! The combination of 'tee and football adventure seems to be just what my readers want!

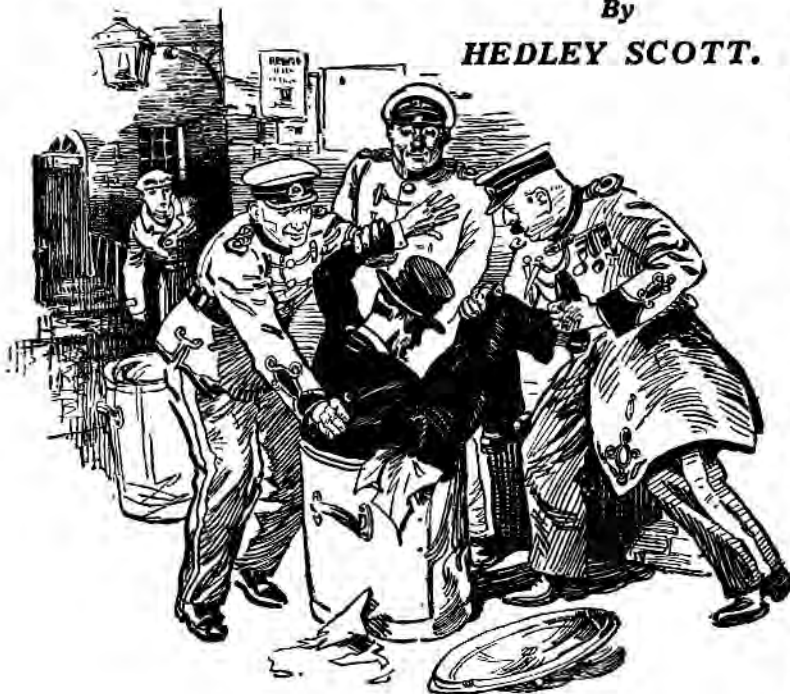
There'll be another "Greyfriars Herald" supplement and our shorter features, as usual.

Au revoir until next week, chums.

YOUR EDITOR.

NOBBY, the 'Shooting Star'!

By
HEDLEY SCOTT.



A SHOCK FOR TWO!

THUNDERSLEY was white with rage, which spoiled the comeliness of his features and betrayed the weaknesses in his character. For a youth just turned nineteen years of age he "knew too much" of the world's vicious habits, if lines in a face are anything by which to judge.

"Get up, you dirty little urchin," he challenged, "and I'll drub the hide off you!"

Nobby needed no second bidding. He was about four inches shorter than Thundersley, and not quite so robustly built. But a challenge like that—

He leapt to his feet and flew at his now mocking adversary. Neither of them noticed, in the heat of the moment, the approach of a tall, elderly gentleman who walked with the aid of a stick. It was Lord Douglas Weatherstone—and he chose an unfortunate moment to arrive. His steps quickened as he identified the combatants, and his brows came-together sharply. The fight seemed to savour of bullying, whatever the provocation. Thundersley was older, bigger, and ought to know better, Lord Douglas told himself, than to indulge in common brawling.

"Stop!" he commanded querulously. "Stop—at once!"

The combatants paid no heed—if they heard. Each was busy warding off the furious attack of the other. Nobby's right eye was fast closing, whilst a stream of crimson was trickling from Thundersley's nose.

"Take that!"

Swoosh!

The displacement of the air itself could be heard as Nobby summoned all his strength in one final effort and let loose a wild swing. It missed Thundersley's head by inches, and, meeting with

no resistance, swept on in a blind circle, Nobby being forced, willy-nilly, to go with it.

Thud!

Nobby's one sound eye caught a glimpse of Lord Douglas Weatherstone right in his path—saw him just that fraction of a second too late which made all the difference between hitting and missing him. The clenched fist jammed against his lordship's shoulder, and sent him staggering backwards in a gasping heap, to land fair and square on Thundersley's felt hat which was still nestling in the rain puddle!

"Good gad! My hat!" gasped Thundersley involuntarily, horrified at what had happened.

Nobby didn't remember what he said as he dashed forward and seized one of the old nobleman's hands. It was a babbled-out form of apology, mostly incoherent. Thundersley seized the other hand, and between them they dragged Lord Weatherstone to his feet.

There was a lurking sneer of triumph on Thundersley's face. He fancied that things would go hardly with the unknown youngster who had refused him admittance. But Daniel Willoughby Thundersley was hooked for a shock. It was upon him that the old nobleman vented his wrath.

"What the deuce do you mean by it, Daniel?" croaked the old man. "Fighting—and with a boy! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Thundersley was completely taken aback.

"But, uncle, I—"

His lordship, red in the face, glared at him ferociously. Of the youngster who had knocked him down he seemed oblivious.

"Common brawling! Ugh! Coming to something when a nephew of mine brawls with a ground-boy! You ought

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

NOBBY, a red-headed youngster of sixteen, who has worked in a football booth belonging to

DON CARLOS' circus for as many years as he can remember, decides to run away to London. By his presence of mind he succeeds in saving

FERRERS LOCKE, the detective, and Jack Drake, his boy assistant, from serious loss. In consequence of this Nobby is introduced to

LORD DOUGLAS WEATHERSTONE, chairman of the Perriton Rovers F.C., who gives him a "job" as ground-boy. Later, while on duty at the gate, Nobby falls foul of

DANIEL WILLOUGHBY THUNDERSLEY, a complete stranger to him, who "floors" Nobby with a straight left.

(Now read on.)

to be downright ashamed of yourself, sir!" He turned on the crestfallen Nobby now. "And you, my young man, do you think I employ you to fight with my players?"

Nobby jumped—for the second time. The first had been when he had heard Thundersley address the old man as "uncle."

"Is—is—is he a p-p-player, milord?" His lordship glared.

"Durn me, young fellow! You have been with us three days, and you don't know who is on the playing list yet? Bless me, I'm beginning to doubt the wisdom of giving you a chance!"

"I'm sorry, sir!" said Nobby. "There's only one player I haven't seen since I started work here. He's a Mr. Thundersley, the amateur!"

"What?" Lord Douglas took a step towards Thundersley, who was now looking black. "Does that mean, you young scamp, that you haven't been to practice for three days?"

It was on the tip of Thundersley's tongue to refute Nobby's statement, but his courage failed him.

"I've been busy swotting, uncle," he said uncomfortably. "Couldn't—couldn't get along, you know."

"Fiddlesticks!" snapped his lordship, and turned again to young Nobby, who was still dazed at the turn events had taken. "You will know Mr. Thundersley in the future, my lad. Now, tell me, what was the trouble about?"

"He tried to throw me out of the ground, uncle!" complained Thundersley, with an evil glance at Nobby. "Didn't give me a chance to say who I was—"

Nobby's eyes blazed with righteous indignation.

"That's a lie—" he began hotly, when his lordship broke in.

"I know it is, my lad," he said shrewdly. "Daniel, you'll never make a barrister if you tell the truth like that! Unless I'm mightily mistaken, you tried to swagger in, and this young fellow, not knowing you, refused you admittance. After that, if I know you aright, you—ahem—asserted yourself. Result—a swollen nose, a cut lip, a black eye and a ruined hat between you! Pah! A little more reasonableness, Daniel, and the whole thing would not have happened! Go back to your door, Nobby—"

"Yes, sir!"

"And don't let any unauthorised person inside!"

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From Ground Boy to Professional!

NOBBY, squinting out of one eye, went back to his job, what time Lord Douglas took his scowling nephew by the arm and walked him towards the dressing-rooms.

"I want you to be decent to that new fellow on the gate, Daniel," said his lordship. "He's been with us only a few days, but I like him. Funny"—half to himself—"strange likeness between you two. Very strange."

Daniel Willoughby Thundersley scowled blacker still. That comparison between him and the "urchin" at the gate should reach the stage of likenesses was galling to him. He said as much, only in conciliatory language, and received a hearty thump on the back in response.

"Don't let little things like that irritate you, Daniel," said his lordship. "Good lor, you must be much more tolerant if ever you hope to be anything in the world. And don't forget, these days, my boy, Jack's as good as his master. None of that heavy snobbish stuff, you know. I believe some of the players would like to tell you the same thing, but they refrain from motives of kindness towards me."

"But, uncle—" began Daniel lamely. "No buts," said Lord Douglas severely. "I'm giving you a friendly tip or two. Just pipe down some of the side and be yourself. Play the rest of life like you play football, and you'll go in a long way."

Thundersley cheered up considerably. He was susceptible to flattery in any form. True, he could play football—could play it better than any paid professional, when it suited him. For Thundersley was a born footballer, fleet of foot, and master of that co-ordination of brain and muscle, and quick-thinking necessary to the star performer of the grand winter game. In the inside-left position there was no one to touch him in all England—not even Alex James of the Arsenal. But outside football Thundersley was anything but an exemplary character. Of this, however, his uncle and guardian knew nothing, for it was not the practice of Lord Douglas to pay attention to gossip. He was genuinely fond of his dead brother's son—as fond of him, almost, as he was of his own son and heir.

Right from the age of three his lordship had given shelter to his orphaned nephew, educated him, and generally spoiled him. Now five thousand pounds per annum went out of Lord Douglas Weatherstone's account to pay for Daniel Thundersley's ambition to become a successful barrister. His lordship imagined that his nephew spent the major portion of his days—and nights—swotting in his chambers in the Temple. How those hours were spent, and the five thousand pounds per annum were "blows" the good-natured old nobleman had yet to receive.

"That boy"—the old man broke the somewhat lengthy silence—"that boy is a natural sharp-shooter, Daniel. One of these days we shall see him in the Rovers' colours, mark my words."

Daniel scowled, and promised himself that this wouldn't happen if he could do anything to prevent it!

"I've left him in Sandy Macfarland's hands. Sandy's a rare fellow for bringing out talent."

"He's very young—this red-headed er—er—" began Daniel lamely.

"Don't know his age," came the reply. "The poor kid doesn't know it

himself. Looks about sixteen. Had a rough time of it, Daniel. Doesn't even know his own name. Terrible thing, what?"

Daniel smugly agreed that it was. Inwardly he gloated, sensing in the information he had just gleaned a weapon he could always wield against the fellow who had dared to knock him down.

They parted at the dressing-room, his lordship making for the board-room, and intimating he would give the boys a look in when he had finished his letters.

Sandy Macfarland turned a sour face on Daniel Thundersley as he stalked into the room.

"Ye're late? Yes! Ye've been fightin'? I can see you have! Get changed!"

That was all, but Daniel Thundersley coloured to the roots of his hair. He scented strong disapproval in Sandy's laconic utterances, and resented the power the sour-faced trainer wielded in the Rovers club. He choked down the hot words that rose to his lips and proceeded to change into running kit. The rest of the players were waiting, and without more ado Sandy led them on to the cinder-track which skirted the ground and set them at it.

Daniel Thundersley arrived ten minutes later. Sandy scowled at him.

"Altogether ye're fifteen minutes late! You look out of condition! Get started, Mr. Thundersley!"

And Mr. Thundersley, the only amateur in the famous First Division side, started.

The old trainer kept his men at it for half an hour before he called a halt, by which time the amateur was showing some signs of distress. Sandy noted it with a gloomy eye.

"Ye've been swotting? I know! Don't do so much of it, mon! We must be fit for Saturday, ye ken?"

The paleness of Thundersley's face became suffused with a further glow of embarrassment. He felt that Sandy Macfarland didn't believe in his oft-repeated tale of swotting—and in that he did Sandy no injustice.

While the players were briskly towelling themselves, Nobby presented himself.

"You told me to report to you at ten o'clock—when I had closed the gate, sir."

Sandy looked at his watch, grimaced his pleasure at the youngster's punctuality, and told him to change into shorts and sweater.

"Ye'll find a wee pair of boots in locker thirteen," he added.

Sure enough, in locker thirteen Nobby found a brand new pair of Soccer-boots, which fitted him perfectly. By the side of them also lay a pair of shorts and a sweater. Rapidly the youngster changed.

"Now ye'll come along with me, Nobby, an' do everythin' I tell ye."

And "everything" consisted of dribbling round stakes stuck in the ground at intervals, and shooting at imaginary goals; heading a ball and bringing it down to full control, of shooting off at top speed at tangent angles, beating an imaginary opponent, and slamming the leather straight and hard for the net.

Sandy's sour face never altered throughout that performance, although inwardly his heart was afire. Nobby, the unknown youngster was a gift from the gods! Football—why, he couldn't help playing football. He wanted little teaching, it was there already to be tapped, as it were.

"Another Boy Bastin," Sandy told himself, when he called a halt. "An' I'm snappin' him before any nosey scout catches even a sight o' him."

And accordingly, Nobby, the ground boy, became Nobby, the professional, in the space of a few days—just that time elapsing which the formalities and the Football Association demanded.

"Never mind the lad's age," Sandy told Lord Douglas emphatically. "He'll no go stale, I tell ye! He's a born footballer. We'll use him gently, till he shakes down; leave that to me. You are in agreement? Yes! I thought so!"

Which was Sandy's way of doing things.

As for Nobby, he could hardly believe in his good luck.

Straightway he visited Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake and told them the good news.

"It's all your doing, Drake," cried Nobby gratefully, "and yours, sir!" he added to the great detective. "If you hadn't taken me away from that wretched circus—and the Don"—his face clouded for a moment—"this would never have happened."

"It's great news," exclaimed Drake heartily. "I said you'd be an international inside two years."

Nobby's eyes glowed. An international—that surely was too much to hope for in such a time. But, at least, it could always be his goal.

Then, for the first time since that memorable occasion when the Don had beaten him into unconsciousness and carted him off, he told someone about it. Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake listened in amazement.

"Good gad!" exclaimed the detective. "Why didn't you tell me about it before?"

Nobby crimsoned.

"Didn't like to worry you, sir. After all, nothing came of it. And besides, I don't care a twopenny hang for the Don now. Something in me seems to have changed. I used to be afraid of him once. But now I wouldn't budge an inch if he came into this very room."

Locke's brows knitted. He was calling to mind the picturesque Spaniard who displayed such an interest in the nameless waif. Instinctively he felt there was some deep mystery behind it all, for it was obvious that there was no kinship between the boy and the dark-skinned Spaniard, Don Carlos. Why, then, did the Don desire to have the youngster back?

It was a problem which defied solution. Certainly no sane theory would fit it.

"I'll keep my eye on this Don," said Locke at length. "We are busy these days, Jack and I, but between times a watch on the Don might prove highly interesting. But in any case, youngster, if ever you are in trouble, or if you should need either of us at any time, don't hesitate to let us know."

Drake's hands were delving into his pockets in search of something. He drew to light at last a quaint little charm of a two-headed cat in shimmering jade. It was of Oriental workmanship, and of such beauty as to draw an involuntary cry from Nobby's lips.

"Take it, Nobby!" grinned Drake. "Accept it as a lucky mascot from me. And should you at any time need me, or the guv'nor, and are unable to do the necessary yourself, send me or him the charm."

"But, I say—"

"Say nothing, old scout!" chuckled Drake. "Take it, and do as I say!"

(Continued on page 28.)

FREE COLOURING CONTEST!

1st Prize:

**ONE SHILLING
A WEEK
FOR A YEAR!**

**MUST
be
WON!**

2nd Prize:

**SIXPENCE
A WEEK
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50 OTHER PRIZES

**WATCHES, MODEL PLANES, TORCHES,
POCKET WALLETS, PENKNIVES, ETC.**



The above colouring is all my own work.

Signed Age.....

Address

M

BOYS! Here's the opportunity of a lifetime for YOU! Think of it—free pocket-money for a year! To try to win any of the fine prizes we are offering above, you simply have to colour the picture given here, which is taken from the cover of

This Week's Issue of The RANGER."

You may use paints or crayons, and don't think for a moment that you need to be a clever artist to win a prize, because neatness and originality of colouring will be taken into account, as well as your age. If you like, *you may copy the colours and treatment used by the "Ranger's" special artist.* If, however, you fancy you can improve on the general colour design, by all means do so! In any case, a glance at this week's cover of the "RANGER" (issue dated January 21st), is bound to assist you. So get busy and try your hardest to win that great pocket-money prize!

You will find it best for colouring if you paste the picture on to stiff paper or card, and allow it to dry first.

When you have coloured the picture to your satisfaction, fill in the coupon attached, **IN INK**, with your name, age, and address. Then cut out the *whole* tablet (i.e., the coupon and picture together) and post it to

MAGNET "Painting"
5, Carncliffe Street,
London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

so as to reach that address not later than Friday, January 27th, 1933. Any efforts arriving after this closing date cannot be accepted.

NOTE.—If you have pasted the picture on to card, you can address it on the other side and send it as a post-card under a 1d. stamp.

RULES: The First Prize of **ONE SHILLING A WEEK FOR ONE YEAR** will be awarded for what the Editor considers the best all-round colouring received. The Second Prize of Sixpence a Week for One Year will be given for the *next-best* effort, and the 50 Consolation Prizes will follow in order of merit.

Competitors may send in as many attempts as they like, provided that *each* is accompanied by the signed coupon. Age will be taken into account in the adjudication, and the Editor's decision must be accepted as final and binding. No correspondence will be allowed.

NOBBY the 'SHOOTING STAR'!

(Continued from page 26.)

Nobby took it, little dreaming then of the use to which that quaint, jade charm was to be put in the days that lay ahead, and stowed it away in his waistcoat pocket.

The Mysterious Stranger!

THE dusk was fast setting in when Nobby said farewell to Locke and Drake, and started at a brisk walk for home.

En route he tried his hand at short cuts, for he was keen to know his way about the Metropolis, and all unknowingly came to a halt outside one of those clubs that shelter within the law, but which in reality are hotbeds of vice.

It was the stalwart, uniformed commissioner that arrested Nobby's glance at first, for he carried more gold braid on his one jacket than Nobby had been accustomed to seeing on a dozen such worn by the employees of Don Carlos's Circus. And while Nobby eyed him with mixed wonder and admiration, there came a commotion from the shadowed foyer behind him, and the tramp of many feet.

Wonderingly Nobby drew aside. He knew what the scene meant now. He had witnessed many similar in the days gone by. Somebody was being thrown out. And thrown out that somebody was! A man with a beard, he stood but a few inches taller than Nobby himself, the youngster reckoned, suddenly shot away from the powerful arms of two thick-set attendants, and clumped down to the pavement in a gasping, swearing heap, almost at Nobby's feet.

"You dirty hooligans!"

Nobby started at the voice, for it sounded vaguely familiar, stared at the dishevelled speaker, and told himself that he was mistaken.

"You rotten bullies! Chuck me out! By Jove, I'll smash you for this!"

The voice was thick with rage—thick too, Nobby reckoned, with alcohol. The commissioner's next words proved him right.

"You clear off!" he ordered peremptorily. "We don't want your sort down here! You're drunk! 'Op it!"

But instead of hopping it, the man with the beard leered unsteadily on his feet, squared his shoulders, and flew back at the threefold "army" of commissioners, with flying fists.

A bunched set of knuckles landed fairly in the bearded gentleman's face, stopping his wild, headlong charge, and reversing it with painful suddenness.

He would have fallen to the pavement again, but Nobby stepped forward, and his outstretched arm steadied and balanced him.

Paying no heed to the friendliness of the action, the bearded gentleman roared out a challenge, dashed forward again, and this time managed to disappear into the darkened foyer again.

Nobby, rather excited now, lingered. He heard the tinkle of breaking glass, heard the tramp of feet and excited voices, and once again saw the "procession" arrive with the struggling, bearded man in their midst.

This time the three commissioners did not throw the offending client on to the pavement. They carted him round a side street, dark and evil-smelling, along the wall of which were ranged several refuse cans awaiting collection. Into one of these they dumped the struggling, gasping man with the beard.

Nobby, who had been an interested witness of the proceedings, waited until the gaudy jacketed trio turned into the foyer again, and then scudded to the victim's aid.

The man was cursing, singing, threatening in turn. He heaved up at the youngster in the half light, and saw that which made him clutch convulsively at his chin. His hand encountered his sandy-coloured beard, which seemed to comfort him, but the violence of the action served to tilt the large refuse can into which he had been jammed so that it finally rolled over.

Nobby, stifling his laughter, for the incident struck him as being decidedly funny, stooped to help the stranger out of his unhappy prison. His strong hands jerked hard at the handles of the rank-smelling refuse tin, and pulled it free of the stranger's body. Whereupon Nobby jumped with surprise. For the bearded stranger, without turning a further glance in the youngster's direction, without even offering a word of thanks, scrambled with dizzy haste to an upright position, and lurched off down the street with alarming haste.

While Nobby automatically righted the refuse can, and replaced it against the wall, he saw something on the pavement which made him jump.

It was the stranger's beard!

Nobby picked it up wonderingly. Then, his curiosity thoroughly aroused, he started off in the direction the stranger had taken.

At a run he dashed along the street, and was just in time to see the man stop a taxi and sprawl inside it. As Nobby drew nearer he thought he caught sight of an evil face peer at him for the minutest fraction of a second before it was withdrawn into the darkness.

Hardly knowing why he did so, Nobby searched about him for a taxi, found one, and jumped inside.

"Follow that taxi!" he yelled, in the driver's ear, leaning out of the window, and indicating the cab his quarry had taken.

"Very good, sir!"

The taxi developed speed, and soon was within thirty yards of the cab which contained the mysterious stranger. Brighter London, that part which blazes with electric signs and illuminated decorations in the West End, began to fade out. The dusk deepened with winter's rapidity into the darkness of night. The cab in front twisted in and out of dark and tortuous streets at the back of Cambridge Circus, and Nobby, flurried to the backbone now with the strangeness of it all, was for ever cautioning his taxi-driver to get closer to the cab in front.

That was easier said than done, for the cab in the lead knew the route its fare had detailed.

"Chap you're following don't want you to get too close!" bawled back Nobby's driver. "Lumme"—as they pulled round a corner, and saw a dark, deserted street ahead, out of which branched three others—"now we have lost 'im!"

Fuming with impatience as the taxi came to a halt, Nobby jumped down hurriedly, paid his driver, and set off at a run to the nearest street. Nothing was in sight along it, nor did any sign of life show in the second. In the third forked turning, however, Nobby saw the cab he had followed come to a halt; heard the click of the taximeter as the driver reset his "clock," and saw a dim figure alight.

Still with the beard in his hand, Nobby raced towards the owner of it. En route the taxi passed him empty. Just ahead of him now, turning into a low arch, ill-lit by a flickering incandescent light, he saw his quarry moving hurriedly.

"Hi!" yelled Nobby. "This belongs to you!"

He waved the beard, but the tall stranger disappeared round the archway, not even the sound of his feet on the cobblestones echoing back to the excited Nobby.

"It's him all right," grunted Nobby ungrammatically, but emphatically. "I can see it now. The awful rotter doesn't want me to know who he is."

(Nobby's already made an enemy of Thursday, and now that he's pierced his guilty secret he'll certainly have to look out. More thrilling chapters of this fine yarn next week, chums!)

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