

"THE MYSTERY OF THE HEAD'S HAT!"

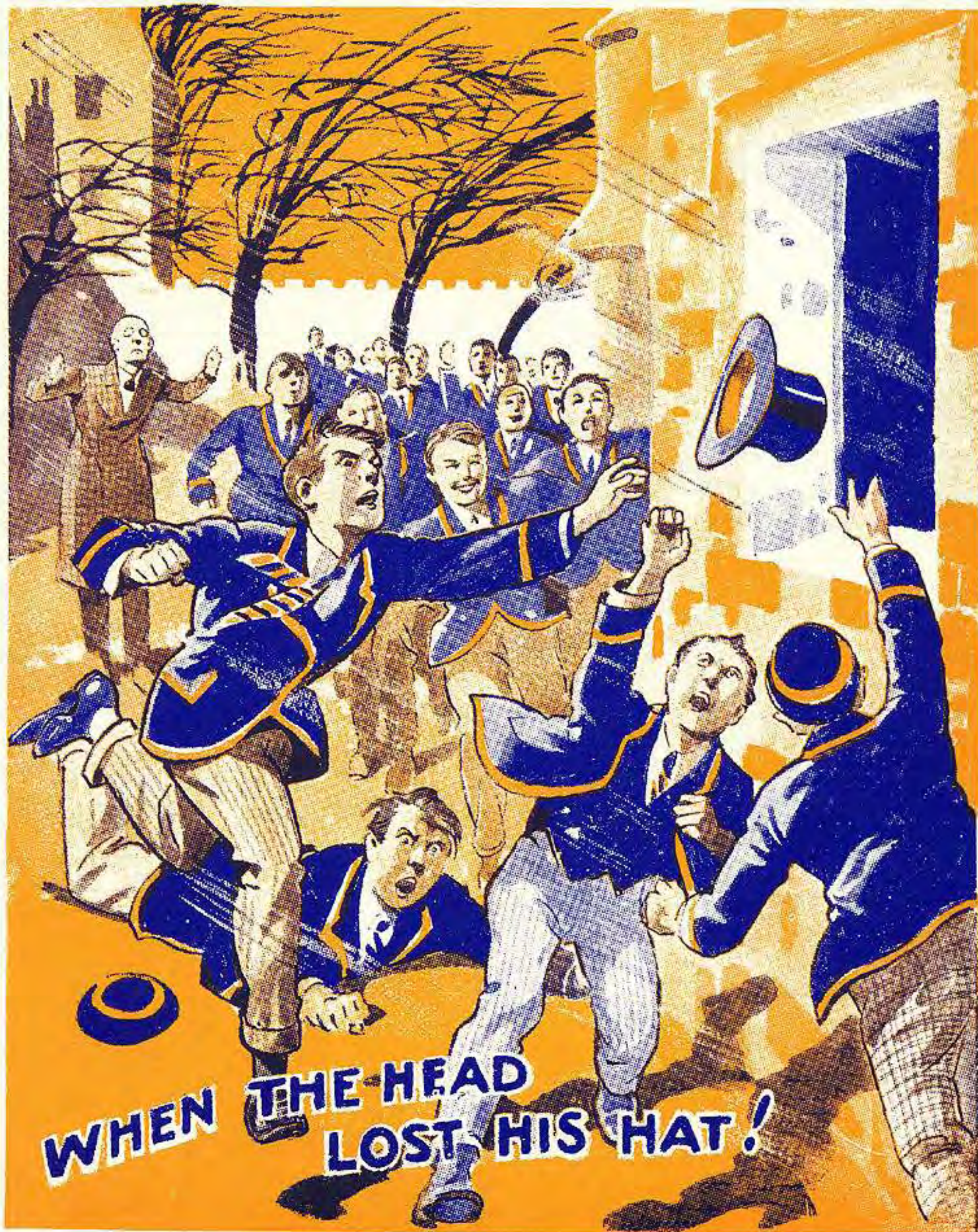
This Week's Amazing Long Complete School Story of HARRY WHARTON & CO.

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—featuring **HARRY WHARTON & CO., the CHUMS of GREYFRIARS.**

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

"All in the Wild March Morning!"

"MY hat!"
It was the first time, probably, that the Head of Greyfriars had been heard to utter that ejaculation.

Greyfriars fellows often expressed their feelings by ejaculating "My hat!" or "My only hat!"

But it was quite new from Dr. Locke, their venerable and respected headmaster.

Harry Wharton, indeed, could hardly believe his ears as he heard it. He spun round in astonishment.

It was morning break at Greyfriars School—a wild and windy March morning. It was so wild and windy that a good many fellows preferred to keep indoors, and there were few in the quad. The old elms, glimmering with the first green of spring, rustled and groaned under the strong wind from the sea; windows rattled and doors slammed. Harry Wharton was navigating the quadrangle, with his head bent, holding his cap on with one hand, otherwise it would have flown from his head. He did not observe Dr. Locke in the offing, and was unaware of him till he heard that surprising ejaculation from his headmaster.

"My hat!" repeated the headmaster.

Wharton stared.

Then he grinned.

His headmaster was hatless! A shining silk hat was whizzing along the quad, the sport of the wind!

Dr. Locke, evidently, was going out
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that morning. He had issued forth clad in coat and hat.

The wind had lifted the hat from his respected head and whirled it away—hence his unexpected and surprising ejaculation.

He stood dismayed, his silver locks blowing out in the wind. Then he sighted the captain of the Remove.

"Wharton—my hat—"

"Oh, yes, sir!" answered Wharton.

He charged after the hat. The wind was bowling it along at a great rate, and the Head had simply no chance of retrieving it. Indeed, it was no easy task even for an active and agile junior, accustomed to pursuing the elusive leather on the football field. Wharton's own headgear flew from his head unheeded, and his hair blew out like quills upon the fretful porcupine as he sprinted in chase. He was only a yard from the flying hat when a sudden gust caught it and whirled it high in the air on a different tack.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came a shout from Bob Cherry. He had seen the disaster from a distance and came charging up. "On the ball, you men!"

"Bless my soul!" murmured the Head, watching the chase with an anxious eye.

He had an appointment to keep that morning, and, obviously, he could not go without his hat. Greyfriars fellows sometimes went out hatless, but the headmaster had to be more circumspect.

"After it!" shouted Johnny Bull, joining in the chase.

"Stop it, Franky!" shouted Harry Wharton, as Frank Nugent appeared, ahead of him and the hat.

Nugent made a clutch at the topper. But the playful breeze whirled it past his finger-tips, and it flew on. Then a gust caught it and blew it back over the heads of the pursuers. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh rushed up, grabbed, and missed. The topper flew on.

"Dear me!" murmured the Head.

Other fellows joined in the chase. Wingate of the Sixth, and Coker of the Fifth, rushed up from different directions. Both of them missed the hat, but did not, unfortunately, miss one another! If there was any possibility of blundering, Horace Coker of the Fifth Form could always be relied upon to make the most of it. Missing the hat, Coker charged into Wingate and sent the captain of Greyfriars sprawling on his back.

"Ow!" gasped Wingate, as he crashed. "You clumsy ass! Wow!"

"Oooogh!" gasped Coker, as he reeled from the shock. "Wharrer you get in the way for? Urrrrgh!"

"You silly chump!"

"You blithering fathead!"

"On the ball!" roared Bob Cherry.

Price of the Fifth cut after the hat and grabbed. Perhaps it was by accident that Bob Cherry charged him as he grabbed—perhaps it wasn't; for Price of the Fifth was not popular among the Removites. Anyhow, he got the charge, and was strewn headlong in the quad, while the hat sailed merrily on.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the open window of the Rag, where Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bouncer of Greyfriars, stood watching the thrilling chase.

"Go it, you fellows!" gasped Harry Wharton.

Had the usual crowd been in the quad in break, no doubt that elusive hat would soon have been captured. But there were hardly a dozen fellows out of doors. And the wind was blowing what a sailorman would have called half a gale. Three or four times that hat was almost caught when it filled on another tack and shot away.

Not that the juniors minded. It was quite a game—as good as punting a footer! They were going to oblige their respected headmaster by recapturing his hat for him, but they did not mind how long the game lasted!

"Got it!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Right on the hat, which rested for a moment on the earth, Bob plunged forward and grabbed. As if possessed by a mocking demon, the silk topper skimmed away just out of his reach, and Bob, losing his balance, landed on his hand and knees, his nose tapping on the quad.

"Yoooop!" roared Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! My nose! Wow!" gasped Bob Cherry. "My hat! My nose! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A whirling blast lifted the Head's hat high in the air, and it looked as if it would lodge in the branches of an elm. But it whirled past, and flew away towards the House.

"Come on!" gasped Harry Wharton, scudding after it.

The hat alighted, like a seagull taking a rest for a moment or two, and three or four juniors fairly jumped at it. Perhaps it was just as well—for the hat—that the wind lifted it again in time and blew it on; for had they landed on it, Dr. Locke certainly could not have walked out in it that morning!

As it was, they landed a yard from the hat, which flew off once more, and shot towards the window of the Rag, where the Bounder stood grinning.

Lifted high in the air, full of the breeze, the silk hat sailed right at the window, and landed with a smack right on the Bounder's grinning face.

"Ow!" gasped Vernon-Smith, taken by surprise.

He staggered back from the window and disappeared from view, the hat falling in after him.

"That's done it!" gasped Harry Wharton, coming to a halt under the window. "All right now! Pass that hat, Smithy!"

And the Head, having seen his hat thus sail merrily home—into harbour, as it were—was relieved. The hat was out of sight, but it was safe now—at least, the Head thought that it was.

He did not know what was happening to the hat!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Just Like Smithy!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH rubbed his nose, which had had rather a smart tap from the hat-brim, and then picked up the hat from the floor.

His first thought was to hand it out of the window to one of the fellows below, to be taken back to its owner. But he stopped—and grinned. Second thoughts are proverbially said to be best, but it would have been as well for all concerned if the Bounder had not stopped for second thoughts. With the hat in his hand, Smithy stepped quickly towards the long table, on which were pens and inkpots.

As he did so he cast a quick glance

round; no one else was to be seen in the Rag. There were several big arm chairs round the fire, and a fellow might have been sitting in one of them, hidden by the high back. But that did not for the moment occur to Smithy. He was thinking of the "jape" that had flashed into his active—rather too active—brain. He caught up an inkpot, half-full of red ink, from the table, and turned back the inside lining of the hat.

Nobody but the Bounder—in all Greyfriars, probably—would have thought of playing such a trick on the Head.

Other masters were sometimes "ragged"; even Mr. Quolch, he master of the Remove, had been ragged in his time, tough customer as he was. But the Head was above and beyond the thought of such things.

That made no difference to the Bounder. He had nerve enough for anything, and he had not forgotten a recent spot of trouble with the Head.

Smithy had been sentenced to the "sack," and only by wonderful luck had he pulled through—the Bounder's luck was a proverb in the Remove.

It had been a bad time for the Bounder, and it had led to a rather grim and unpleasant interview with his father—all of which Smithy put down to his headmaster's account. And Smithy was not the fellow to leave a score unpaid if he could help it.

Partly for that reason, no doubt, but chiefly from his usual spirit of reckless mischief, the Bounder went ahead.

Who put ink in the headmaster's hat? That's the burning question at Greyfriars this week.

Swiftly he poured red ink under the lining of the hat, turned down the lining again, and replaced the inkpot on the table.

It occupied him hardly a few moments. Harry Wharton's voice was calling from under the high sill of the window.

"Give us that hat, Smithy!"

But Vernon-Smith had no intention of letting it be known that he had been the last fellow to handle the hat. He was not yearning for a flogging.

He ran across the Rag to the door, threw it wide open, and tossed the hat into the passage. With the door open as well as the window, the wind came in a gust through the room, and bowled the hat down the passage.

Smithy ran back to the window.

"Oh!" he ejaculated suddenly.

From one of the armchairs by the fire a fat figure had risen into view. A pair of little, round eyes, behind a pair of big, round spectacles, were fixed on the Bounder.

Billy Bunter was fairly gaping at him.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "You ass, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith snapped his teeth.

Had he been aware that eyes were upon him, he certainly never would have played that trick with the Head's topper. But it was too late to think of that now. The ink was in the topper, and the topper was gone.

"You fat rotter!" hissed the Bounder.

He had supposed that he was alone in the Rag, as he had seen no one there when he came in; though, really, he might have guessed that the fat and lazy Owl of the Remove was "frowsting" over a fire somewhere.

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Shut up, you fat fool!"

The Bounder ran to the window. Three or four voices were calling to him for the Head's hat.

"Chuck it out, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as Vernon-Smith put his head out.

"Can't!" answered the Bounder coolly. "It's not here! It's gone bowling down the passage! I'll get after it!"

And he disappeared from the window again.

But he was in no hurry to get after the hat. Considering the state its interior was in, and what was likely to happen to the Head when he wore it, Smithy did not want to be the fellow who captured that hat, he preferred to leave it unknown that the article had been in his hands at all.

"All right, if it's in the House!" he heard Bob Cherry say; and the juniors under the window left the spot.

"I say, Smithy——" gasped Bunter.

"Shut up!"

"I say, that was the Head's hat! You've put ink in it!"

Vernon-Smith came closer to the fat Owl of the Remove, with a glitter in his eyes that made Billy Bunter jump back.

"Here, keep off, you beast!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'm not going to tell anybody! I—I say, Smithy——"

"You fat rotter!" said the Bounder in a low, distinct voice. "That hat blew through the room into the passage, and I never touched it! Understand?"

"Oh, really, Smithy, as the door was shut——"

"The door was open!" said Smithy.

"It jolly well wasn't——"

"You'd better remember that it was!" said Smithy in the same low tone of menace. "And if you say a single word otherwise, Bunter, I'll give you such a hammering that you'll never know your own face again! See?"

"I—I say, Smithy," stuttered Bunter. "I—I'm not going to say anything, of course! I—I wouldn't give a fellow away!"

"You'd better not!" said the Bounder, between his teeth; and he went to the door of the Rag, leaving Billy Bunter blinking.

He looked into the passage. A strong draught blew down the corridor, and the hat had rolled to the farther end. But at the corner three or four fellows spotted it, and Temple of the Fourth picked it up. Quite surprised to capture a lost topper in the passages, Cecil Reginald Temple stared at it, and held it up for general inspection.

"Whose tile?" inquired Temple.

"Where the dickens did it come from?" asked Fry of the Fourth.

"Blew down the passage——"

"Well, let's kick it back again!" suggested Fry.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney of the Fourth.

"Hold on, though! This is a beak's topper!" said Temple. "What the dooce—some beak been walking round the House with his hat on, or what?" He stared up the passage to the doorway of the Rag, where the Bounder was now glancing out. "Seen where this came from, Smithy?"

"It's the Head's hat. I think," answered Vernon-Smith. "It blew into the window and right across the room, and——"

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Temple, exceedingly glad that he had not adopted Fry's suggestion and kicked it back along the passage. "The Head's?"

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"Yes. It blew off in the quad, I believe."

"I'll take it back to him, then."

Temple of the Fourth headed for the door, hat in hand. Dr. Locke had just come in, and Temple held out the captured topper to him.

"Your hat, sir!" said Temple politely.

"Thank you, my boy!" said Dr. Locke, taking it. "Thank you very much indeed, Temple!"

He scanned the hat, and was glad to see that it did not look damaged after its adventures with the wild March wind. It was considerably ruffled; but Trotter came up at once to brush it, and it was handed to the Head once more, brightly shining and in all its glory. It was set on the venerable locks of the headmaster—jammed down more securely than before—and Dr. Locke sallied forth again and started for the gates.

The Bounder, from the window of the Rag, watched him curiously. He knew that it would take some time for the ink to soak through the leather lining inside the hat. Probably the headmaster would have worn it for some little time before he became aware of the ink. By that time, the Bounder hoped, he would be well away from the school and under the public eye. Smithy's only regret was that he had to go to the Remove-room for third lesson, and could not follow his headmaster, and watch him when the ink began to trickle down his face.

The bell rang for third school, and the Remove went in. They had Latin prose in the Remove-room with Mr. Quelch, and soon forgot all about the chase of the headmaster's hat—except two of them. The Bounder and Billy Bunter were not likely to forget, and they were both wondering how Dr. Locke was getting on with his inky topper.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Inky!

"My eye!" said Mr. Tozer.

Police constable Tozer, who was the whole police force of the village of Friardale, was coming up Friardale Lane when he met the Head of Greyfriars. At the sight of the headmaster in the distance, Mr. Tozer prepared to touch his helmet with the respect due to Dr. Locke. But, on a closer view, Mr. Tozer stood stock-still, staring blankly at the headmaster, and forgetting his respectful salute. Seldom, or never, had Mr. Tozer been so surprised.

Dr. Locke was always an exceedingly well-dressed old gentleman. From the crown of his shining hat to the tips of his polished shoes, he was well tailored and groomed. Now he presented his usual well-groomed aspect—with one exception. Down his face, on either side, was a streak of crimson.

At a casual glance, it might have been supposed that he was damaged, and that the "claret" had been tapped. But it was obvious that he was unhurt. On either side of his grave and kindly face was that streak of red—ink!

Police-constable Tozer gazed at his countenance. He gazed and gazed. The larkiest fag at Greyfriars School would hardly have walked out under the public eye with his face decorated with red ink! It was absolutely amazing for the headmaster to do so.

"My eye!" repeated Mr. Tozer, wondering whether he was dreaming.

Dr. Locke, as he came along, gave the

village constable a kindly nod. Mr. Tozer only stared.

He seemed petrified.

The Head's usual kindly expression changed to a frown. It came into his mind that Mr. Tozer must have been sampling the ale at the Cross Keys, not wisely, but too well. Otherwise, why was he standing like a graven image in the middle of the lane, staring at the headmaster of Greyfriars as if he had been some strange animal escaped from the Zoo?

"Good-morning, Mr. Tozer!" said the Head stiffly.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Tozer. "G-g-good-morning, sir!"

He remembered, and touched his helmet. All the while, however, his eyes remained glued on the headmaster's face, as if he could not tear his gaze away.

Dr. Locke knitted his brows slightly and walked on. Police-constable Tozer revolved slowly on his axis, and stared after him.

"My eye!" said Mr. Tozer again. "Mad! Balmy! Hink on his face—streaks of hink! My eye! Orf his blooming onion, if you ask me!"

With his usual slow and steady motion, the Head progressed on his way. It was only a short walk from the school to the vicarage, where he had to see Mr. Lambe, the vicar of Friardale. It was not only windy that March morning, but cold; and Dr. Locke was rather surprised to find his brow damp with—as he supposed—perspiration, after a short distance had been covered.

As a matter of fact, the ink was now working through the lining of the hat, staining the silvery locks red, and oozing out in a thin trickle.

Utterly unconscious of the fact that two streaks of crimson adorned his cheeks, and that fresh trickles were coming out on his forehead, Dr. Locke walked onward. There was a rattle of wheels in the lane, and he stepped aside as old Joyce, the wood-cutter, drove by. Old Joyce touched his hat—and as he did so, he gave a sudden, convulsive jump in his seat, his eyes almost popping out of his head at the sight of the red ink.

Unintentionally, he jerked the reins, and the horse started and shied.

"Oh crikey!" the Head heard Mr. Joyce exclaim; but the old wood-cutter was unable to give him further attention, as the horse claimed his care. He drove on, leaving the Head frowning.

"Really——" said Dr. Locke, addressing space.

This was the second person who, generally very civil and deferential, had stared at him rudely during that short walk. Dr. Locke could not help feeling annoyed and offended.

He walked on. His way lay past that rather disreputable public-house, the Cross Keys, which stood back from the lane, outside the village.

At the doorway of the Cross Keys stood Mr. Cobb, the greasy, red-faced proprietor, talking to a horsey-looking fat man whom the Bounder of Greyfriars could have told his headmaster was Mr. Banks, the bookmaker. Both of them glanced at the tall, well-groomed figure of the headmaster as he came along—both of them stared—and then both of them suddenly burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Cobb.

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared Mr. Banks.

Dr. Locke glanced round at them. He could scarcely believe, for a moment, that these two disreputable characters dared to direct their raucous,

unmannerly mirth at him! It was really unbelievable!

Unbelievable as it was it was so! They were staring at him and yelling with laughter. A potman came out of the doorway and stared at him also, and then fairly doubled up with mirth.

The Head's face flushed as crimson as the ink that was oozing out under his hat!

"Upon my word!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Cobb. "Drunk, I fancy! What? Ha, ha, ha!"

"I believe you!" gurgled Mr. Banks.

"Oh, my eye!" gasped the potman. "Oh, my eye! My aunt Maria! Ha, ha!"

Dr. Locke paused, and gave the three disreputable persons a cold, steady stare which ought to have had a withering effect on them.

Possibly it might have produced that effect, but for the oozing ink!

But, really, the sternest look must have failed to wither from a countenance that was streaked with red ink, and was assuming a zebra-like appearance.

"Haw, haw, haw!" came in another yell.

"Wot's he doin' it for?" gasped the potman.

"Drunk!" gasped Mr. Cobb. "Haw, haw, haw!"

Dr. Locke walked on, with crimson cheeks. Once or twice he had had some trouble with Mr. Cobb, whose place was strictly out of bounds for Greyfriars fellows, and who was more than suspected of supplying cigarettes to certain reckless fellows who had been caned for being in possession of the same.

But Mr. Cobb, hitherto, had been very respectful, not to say fawning, when he came into contact with the Head. Why he had suddenly allowed himself to burst into rude laughter in his very face the Head could not imagine—but it naturally made him very angry.

"Hi, hi!" came a sudden yell from a little urchin at the end of the village street.

Dr. Locke started and glanced at him.

"Why don't yer wash yer face?" demanded the small, impertinent villager—and he cut off round a corner before the astounded headmaster could answer.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head faintly.

He was feeling greatly perturbed. Generally, in his walks abroad, he was treated with the greatest respect by all inhabitants. What was the cause of this sudden change was a mystery to him—as he had no looking-glass at hand! First, the village policeman, then old Joyce, then Cobb and Banks and the potman—now this tattered little rascal—what did it all mean?

With a heightened colour, the Head of Greyfriars turned into the path that led up to the vicarage gates. A gardener at work among the flower-beds, with a hoe in his hand, made a movement to come along and open the gate for him—instead of which the man stood suddenly transfixed, staring, leaning weakly on his hoe.

By this time there were five or six crimson streaks down the Head's face, and his aspect was growing really remarkable.

He compressed his lips, opened the gate himself, and walked up the gravel path to the house, the gardener's eyes following him as if the man were mesmerised.

He knocked at the door.

It was opened by a trim parlour-maid. As her eyes fell on Dr. Locke she started back and gave a little shriek.

Dr. Locke gazed at her. That trim maid had admitted him to the vicarage times without number, and knew him perfectly well. Now she shrieked and backed away, as if he had been a dangerous-looking tramp!

"What—" began the Head.

The maid faded away through a doorway that opened on the hall. The next moment the plump figure of Mr. Lambe, the vicar, emerged from that doorway.

"Dr. Locke! Good-morning, sir! I have been expecting you!" said Mr. Lambe, in his usual honeyed and

Mr. Lambe. "The—the mattah!" He almost forgot his Oxford accent in his surprise and alarm. "Goodness gracious, sir, are you ill?"

"I am not ill!"
"Then what—what—what—" stammered Mr. Lambe.

Dr. Locke knitted his brows darkly. This was the climax. Even the vicar of Friardale was staring at him, blankly, dumbfoundedly, as Mr. Tozer had done. It was too much!

"Sir!" said the Head, with dignity. "I fail to understand you! If this is my reception here, sir, I will return to the school at once—"

"Not at all, sir!" gasped Mr. Lambe. "But why—why—why—"
"Why—" repeated the Head.

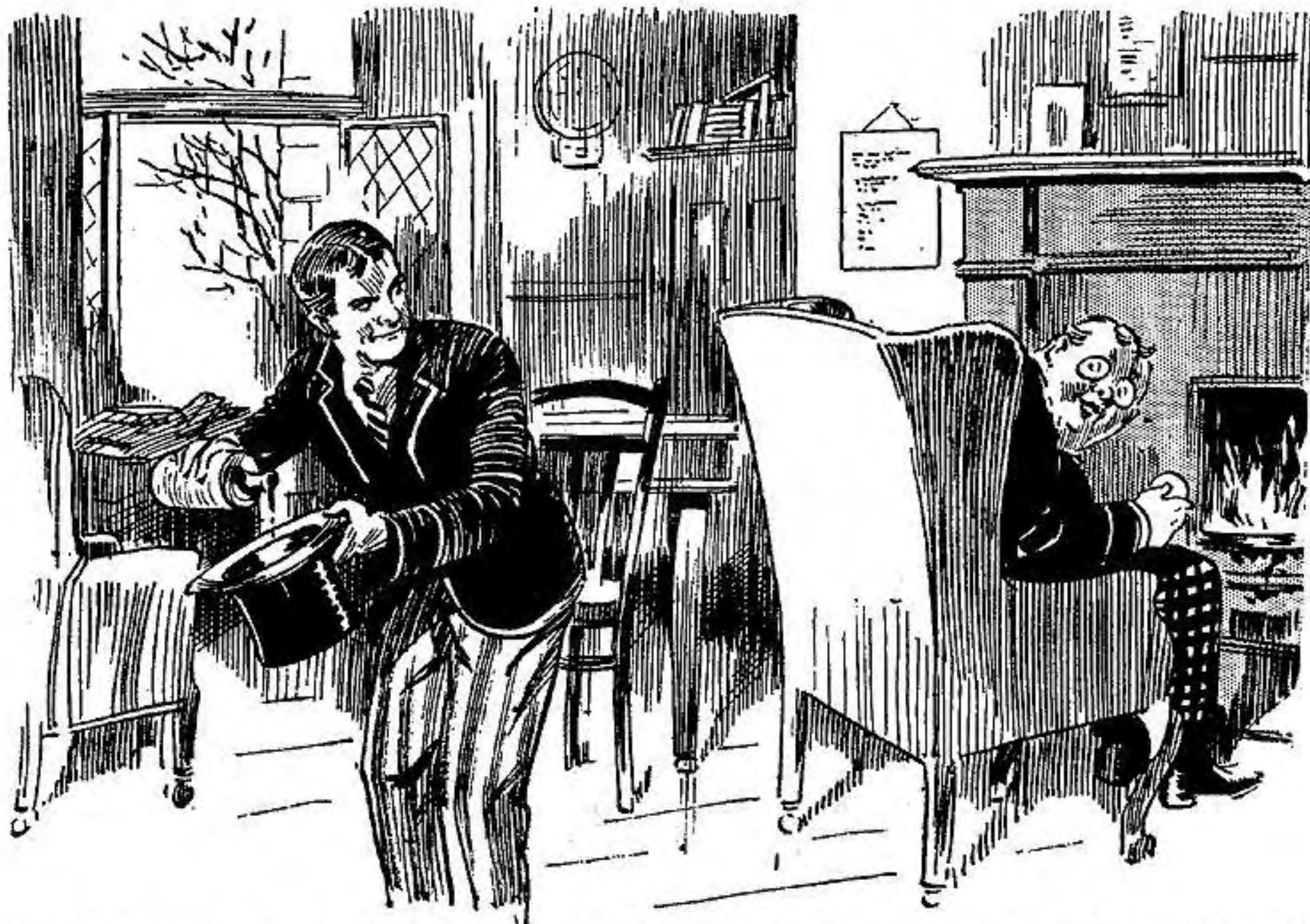
you not—not awah, sir, that your face—goodness gracious—that your face is—is streaked with ink—"

"Ink!"
"Red ink, sir!" gasped Mr. Lambe. "Were you not awah—"

Dr. Locke gazed at him, gazed at his reddened hand, and then almost jumped at the mirror over the hat stand in the hall.

There he gazed at his reflection. He almost fell down as he saw it. He removed the silk topper. The silvery locks beneath were streaked with red. His forehead was oozing red. His cheeks were streaked with red. He was of the ink, inky. Red ink oozed from the hat in his hand.

Petrified, Dr. Locke gazed at that



After casting a quick glance round the Rag, Vernon-Smith picked up the pot of red ink and poured its contents into the Head's hat. Little did he realise that in the armchair by the fire sat Billy Bunter, watching his every movement!

unctuous tones. He was not only expecting to see Dr. Locke that morning, but expecting to bag a subscription from him. But his tone, and his look, changed, as he saw the headmaster's face, and he gave quite a jump. "Dr. Locke! What—what—what—"

"Mr. Lambe—"

"My dear sir—" gasped Mr. Lambe.

"Really, sir—" said the Head sharply.

Mr. Lambe gazed at his zebra-like face. The maid had supposed that the headmaster of Greyfriars had gone mad! Mr. Lambe feared it, as he gazed at the streaky countenance.

"Pray come in, sir!" gasped Mr. Lambe. "Pray—pray come in! Has—has anything happened, sir! An accident—"

"Certainly not!" said the Head testily. "What is the matter, Mr. Lambe?"

"The—the—the mattah!" stammered

"What—what—what—" gurgled the vicar of Friardale. "What—what does it mean, sir?"

"What does what mean?" hooted Dr. Locke.

"Is—is—is it possible that you do not know, sir—"

"Know? Know what?"

"Your—your face—" gasped Mr. Lambe.

"My face? What do you mean?"

"Upon my word! If you are not aware, sir, of the—the—the extraordinary state of your—your face—"

The Head, in amazement, passed his hand over his face. The vertical streaks of red ink were smeared sideways making the Head look as much like a Red Indian as a zebra. Mr. Lambe's eyes almost popped out of his plump visage. Dr. Locke gave a jump as he saw a stain of red on his hand as it came away from his face.

"What—what—" he ejaculated.

He stared at his reddened hand.

"Sir!" gurgled Mr. Lambe. "Are

awful reflection. Mr. Lambe gazed at Dr. Locke. For a long, long moment there was an awful silence.

"Bless my soul!" said the Head at last.

"My dear, dear sir—" gurgled Mr. Lambe.

"It is—is—is—is ink!" said the Head of Greyfriars. He gazed into his hat. "There is ink in my hat! In the name of goodness, how came ink in my hat?"

"You were not awah—" murmured Mr. Lambe.

"Do you think, sir, that I should have walked out in this hat if I had been aware that ink was trickling from it over my face?" hooted Dr. Locke.

"Oh! Ah, no! Assuredly not!" gasped Mr. Lambe. "Not at all!"

"It is a—a—a trick!" gasped the Head. "I cannot imagine how the ink was introduced into my hat. It is kept in the hat-box in my own house, and— and— Ah, I remember! It was blown off as I came out, and some

juniors—"Black as a thundercloud grow the Head's brow—a study in black and red. "It—it—it is a trick—a wretched trick! Some boy— Bless my soul! I am the victim of a practical joke! I—I—I— It is not a laughing matter, Mr. Lambe!"

A grin was dawning on the vicar's plump face as he realised how the matter stood. But he became grave again at once.

"Certainly not, sir! Fah from a laughing mattah!" said Mr. Lambe hurriedly. "Pray let me take you to the bath-room, sir! A wash—a wash, sir! And I will lend you another hat, sir. Pray come this way, sir!"

Dr. Locke's feelings as he laid down the inky hat, and followed Mr. Lambe, could not have been expressed in words. But they were likely to be expressed in actions as soon as he discovered the perpetrator of that extraordinary practical joke.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Secret to Keep.

TOM REDWING tapped his chum, the Bounder, on the arm as the Remove came out after third school.

The Bounder was looking very thoughtful with a darkly knitted brow, while Redwing's face was very cheery. There was a Form match on that afternoon, which was a half-holiday, and Tom was down to play; and he was keen on Soccer. Fellows who showed up well in the match with the Fourth had a chance of being picked for the fixture with Highcliffe School, which was soon coming along, and Redwing had a hope of getting a place in the team for Highcliffe.

The Bounder, of course, was certain of his place; he was in the happy position of being a man who could not be spared. But it was clear from Smithy's looks now that there was a worry on his mind.

"Anything up, Smithy?" Redwing asked.

And he looked rather less bright as he asked the question. Smithy was a fellow who was born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward. His restless nature, his constitutional opposition to authority, never left him long in calm waters. Redwing wondered uneasily whether some prefect had spotted him smoking in the study, or dropping over the wall of the Three Fishers, or sneaking in at the back way of the Cross Keys, or something of that kind.

"No," said Vernon-Smith abruptly. "It's all right. I've got a letter in my pocket from my father. That's all."

"No trouble at home?" asked Tom anxiously.

The Bounder gave a sneering laugh. "Lots. The pater got quite a turn when I was sacked. He came down like a ton of bricks. Goodness knows what would have happened if the Head hadn't given me another chance and let me stay on."

"But he did, Smithy, and if you're careful—"

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm careful enough. I'm going to be all this term. But they're watching me like cats. The Head doesn't trust me. Oh, don't say I can't expect him to! I know all that. Quelch has a down on me. But thank goodness he's going away for the rest of the term, and his eye won't be on me again till after the Easter hols! But I hadn't read the pater's letter when I was in the Rag in break. If I had—" Smithy paused.

"What difference does that make?"

"The pater's coming down to see me this afternoon. Looks as if he's always goin' to barge in now. And if there's any trouble going on—" The Bounder paused again.

"Why should there be? You'll be playing in the Form match, I suppose. But if you want to cut it to see your father, it will be all right. You're not needed to beat Temple & Co. Small fry like me can manage that," added Tom, with a smile.

"If there's any trouble—" muttered the Bounder again. "I tell you the pater's got his back fairly up. It put the wind up him when I nearly got bunked. He says I'm wilful, headstrong, selfish, self-indulgent, reckless—quite a list of engagin' qualities." The Bounder laughed mockingly. "If I am, I'd like to know who made me so."

Tom was silent. It was true that Smithy was as his father described him. But it was also true that Mr. Vernon-Smith's careless indulgence of his only son had been one of the prime causes. Now that the Bounder had so nearly come an irreparable "mucker," his father had taken the alarm, and seemed to have adopted the stern attitude of a Roman parent for a change, which the Bounder, not unnaturally, resented. But there was nothing for Tom to say. He could not intervene in a dispute between father and son.

"What do you think is his latest?" went on the Bounder. "He's warned me that if I get bunked from Greyfriars, he's goin' to take that as a proof that I'm unfit to handle his millions when the time comes. That is, he's goin' to disinherit me. I'm to be cut off with a jolly old shillin', and the money goes where it will be taken care of—some spongin' poor relation, I fancy, that he's got his eye on, and who's probably been pullin' his leg."

"Your father's hardly the man to have his leg pulled, Smithy. For goodness' sake, old man, take care this term."

"If I'd known he was comin'—" muttered the Bounder. "But I hadn't read the letter then when—"

"When what?"

"Oh, nothin'!"

The Bounder was moodily silent. If he had known that his father was coming to Greyfriars that afternoon, he would not have played that trick on the Head. Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith at present seemed to be in a state of rooted annoyance with his son. If he found Smithy up before the Head when he came— Certainly that absurd practical joke with the Head's hat was not a matter for "sacking." But it meant a flogging if the offender was discovered. The Bounder was tough as hickory, and he could stand a flogging.

But he did not want the angry father on the scene when it happened. Mr. Vernon-Smith was coming along, hoping, but doubting, that his son was doing better, and making good. The effect on him would be deplorable. Certainly it would give the finishing touch to his wrath.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Smithy looked round at the sound of Bob Cherry's voice. "What's up with the Beak?"

Dr. Locke was coming in at the gates. There was no trace of the red ink about the headmaster now. Ink, and inky hat, had been left at the vicarage. And the Head was wearing a hat kindly lent him by Mr. Lambe. But every fellow who saw him noticed that he was deeply disturbed. His face was set, his brows knitted, and his eyes had a very unusual glint in them.

THE WIZARD OF ST. FRANK'S!

by Edwy
Searles
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"Something's up," said Johnny Bull. "The upfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed and ridiculous Head is infuriated."

Redwing gave Smithy a glance.

"Smithy, have you—"

"Better ask no questions, and I'll tell you no lies," answered the Bounder curtly.

Dr. Locke walked quickly to the House, and disappeared from sight. A good many fellows were left discussing what was "up" with the Beak.

"Lost his jolly old hat again, perhaps," said Bob Cherry. "That tile's not the topper he went out in."

"That wouldn't make him look as if he was going to bite," remarked Skinner of the Remove. "Take my word for it, my beloved 'earers, somebody's for it, and there's going to be fireworks!"

"He, he, he!" from Billy Bunter. "No wonder he's changed his hat. He, he, he! I say, you fellows, did he look inky?"

"Inky!" repeated Harry Wharton.

"Yes. I'm rather short-sighted, you know. Did you fellows notice whether he looked inky?" asked the Owl of the Remove.

"No, you ass! Why the thump should he look inky?" demanded Frank Nugent.

"He, he, he!" echinnated Bunter.

Vernon-Smith's brows lowered as he heard. He had warned Billy Bunter what to expect if he did not keep the secret. Bunter assuredly did not want to be hammered. But keeping anything dark was a matter of great difficulty for William George Bunter. His fat chin was not to be kept in restraint. Indeed, Remove fellows declared that Bunter had discovered the secret of perpetual motion, and demonstrated it with his chin.

"What do you know about it, Bunter?" asked Peter Todd.

"Oh! Nothing! He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, the Head was going to the vicarage this morning! I heard him mention it to Quelch. I say, fancy his arriving there all inky! He, he, he! Fancy old fat Lamb's face when he saw him! He, he, he!"

"You blithering bandersnatch!" said Bob Cherry. "Why should the Head be inky?"

"Well, it must have run down out of his hat!" said Bunter. "Stands to reason, you know."

"What must have?" shrieked Bob.

"The ink! He, he, he!"

"Ink—in his hat?" said Harry Wharton blankly. "Are you potty, you podgy owl? How could there be ink in the Head's hat?"

"He, he, he!"

"He's changed his hat," said Skinner. "He went out in a gorgeous topper, and he's come back in an old tile. I noticed that."

"Well, he would!" grinned Bunter. "Must have been pretty sticky by the time he got to the vicar's. He, he, he!"

"Have you been playing any trick on the Head, Bunter?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

Bunter jumped.

"Me? No! You beast, if you make out that it was me—"

"You seem to know something about it, and nobody else does!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Something's happened, and Bunter knows what it is, at any rate," said Wibley. "What is it, Bunter?"

Vernon-Smith left Tom Redwing, and moved into the group of Removites. He touched Bunter on the shoulder. About another minute was all that was required for the fat Owl to blurt out the whole story.

"Lookin' for you, Bunter," said the Bounder, in an agreeable tone, which was far from indicating his feelings.

"I've got some tarts—"

"Oh, good!" said Bunter unsuspiciously, and he rolled away with the Bounder, leaving the Remove fellows staring.

RHYMES OF THE REMOVE.

No. 6.



This week's poem by the Greyfriars Rhymester, entitled: "YE ARISTOCRAT!" deals with Lord Mauleverer, the "lazybones" of the Remove.

At ease on the sofa
Mauleverer lay,
An elegant loafer
Was sleeping away!
The building was shaken
With calls known as "cat"
They could not awaken
Ye aristocrat!

Removites were crying
And making a din;
Delarey was trying
To push the door in;
There seemed quite a riot
Outside on the mat!
It did not disquiet
Ye aristocrat!

The study adjoining
Was like an earthquake,
For Bunter, purloining
Bob Cherry's plum cake,
Was caught with his plunder
And given the bat!
Who slept through the thunder?
Ye aristocrat!

While some chaps were calling
For Wharton and Todd,
And others were bawling
Outside in the quad,
One fellow lay limply
And lazily flat!
Not dead! It was simply
Ye aristocrat!

When Bob, gay and ruddy,
Tramped into the room,
He shook the whole study
With Bashan-like boom!
And then, his voice lifting,
He bellowed: "My hat!"
'Twas no use in shifting
Ye aristocrat!

Bob took out a bottle
Of raspberry squash.
He opened the throttle
And gave him a wash!
A jolly good dousing
With liquid, and that
Succeeded in rousing
Ye aristocrat!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Beaks on the Warpath!

MR. QUELCH, the master of the Remove, was in his study. He was sorting out books and papers, making neat little piles on the table.

Quelch, usually as hard as nails, was not in his usual health—he had never quite got over the attack of influenza he had had in the Christmas holidays, and since then he had had a troubled term.

Unwilling to leave his duties to other hands, the Remove master had hoped to carry on till the Easter holidays, when he would get a rest. But his chief had kindly urged him to take the change and repose that he needed, and it was settled now that Mr. Quelch was to leave Greyfriars a few weeks ahead of break-up for Easter. He was making his preparations carefully and methodically, being an extremely careful and methodical gentleman by nature.

Footsteps came along Masters' Passage, and there was a tap at his door. It opened to reveal the headmaster.

Dr. Locke entered rather hurriedly. Mr. Quelch raised his eyebrows ever so slightly. Seldom had he seen the Head so deeply disturbed as he looked at present. Something, evidently, had happened.

"Pray be seated, sir!" said Mr. Quelch, and the headmaster sank into a chair, and Mr. Quelch noted, with surprise, that there was a faint pink tinge on his silvery hair. A trace of the red ink yet remained.

"Mr. Quelch, I have been the victim of a trick—a prank—a most disrespectful and disconcerting practical joke!" said the Head, in an agitated voice.

"Surely not, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"A most extraordinary occurrence, sir! My hat blew off when I was going out this morning, and a number of boys ran after it—"

"I saw the occurrence from my window, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "The hat blew in at an open window, I think."

"Precisely, precisely! It was returned to me by a boy who picked it up in the House—a Fourth Form boy, named Temple. But, in the meantime, Mr. Quelch—in the meantime—the Head gasped—"in the meantime, someone had introduced ink into it, Mr. Quelch—"

"Ink?" gasped the Remove master.

"Red ink, sir!"

"Is it possible?"

"Unaware of this, sir, quite unaware of it," said the agitated headmaster, "I walked to the vicarage, sir! A number of persons whom I passed, regarded me with—with great curiosity—in one instance with rude and disrespectful laughter! I was unaware that the ink was trickling down my face—"

"Dr. Locke!"

"Arrived, sir, at the vicarage, I made the discovery that my face was—was streaked with red ink, sir, causing me to look—to look—I can hardly describe it, sir—" The Head's voice seemed to fail him. His cheeks became as red as the ink at the remembrance of that awful reflection staring from him in the mirror at the vicarage. "Mr. Quelch, I have been made to look an object of ridicule—in public, sir!"

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Some boy—some young rascal, in whose hands my hat was for a few moments—"

"Not a boy of my Form, I hope!" There was a touch of acid in Mr. Quelch's voice. "I trust, not a Remove boy?"

"I cannot say, sir! A number of Remove boys ran after the hat, but it

was a Fourth Form boy who returned it to me. What boys may have handled it in the meantime, I cannot, of course, say. But one of them, sir, must have introduced the ink into the hat!"

"That boy, sir, must be discovered without delay, and flogged with the utmost severity, I should suggest, sir!"

"Undoubtedly! The severest punishment—indeed, such an offence merits expulsion from the school! A very severe flogging, at least. Imagine, sir, my feelings, when I discovered—"

The Head gasped.

"I can imagine them only too well, sir! I sincerely hope that the offender will not prove to be a Remove boy!" said Mr. Quelch. "I cannot, indeed, believe that any boy in my Form would be guilty of such an act. Such unheard-of disrespect—"

"With your leave, Mr. Quelch, I will place the matter in your hands for investigation. Obviously, it was a junior boy who played this amazing prank—no senior boy could be guilty of such a trick. If you will consult with the other junior masters—"

"Certainly, sir! You may leave the matter in my hands with confidence!" said the Remove master. Mr. Quelch had always been Dr. Locke's right-hand man, his prop of support in times of difficulty. No doubt it was for that reason that the agitated old gentleman now placed the matter in his hands; but possibly there was also a suspicion in the Head's mind that it was one of Mr. Quelch's boys who was the guilty party.

That was not a pleasing idea to Mr. Quelch. No Form-master liked to have his Form rooted over for an iniquitous offender. Still, if Mr. Quelch found that offender in his Form, there was no doubt that he would see stern justice done—all the sterner because of the annoyance it would cause him.

Dr. Locke rose, and after a few more words, left the study. The whole affair had agitated him very much, and he was glad to leave it in stronger hands.

Ten minutes later, five Form-masters were gathered in Common-room. They were Capper, master of the Fourth; Hacker, of the Shell; Wiggins, of the Third; Twigg, of the Second; and Mr. Quelch himself. In succinct words, the Remove master explained to his colleagues what had happened. The startling news was received with becoming gravity. Perhaps an eye twinkled here and there at the thought of the remarkable aspect the great man must have presented, with a face streaked with red ink. Still, it was undoubtedly a very serious matter, as all the beaks agreed.

"But I hardly see why I am called into this consultation," remarked Mr. Twigg. "It cannot have been a Second Form boy, I imagine."

"I was about to remark that it can hardly have been a Third Form boy," observed Mr. Wiggins.

"Frankly," said Mr. Hacker, "it is absurd to suppose that a boy in the Shell would be guilty of such an act!"

"I will engage that no boy in the Fourth Form would even have dreamed of such a thing!" remarked Mr. Capper.

"This leads us nowhere," said Mr. Quelch, "for I am absolutely positive that the offender cannot have been a Remove boy."

The five beaks exchanged rather inimical looks. It was clear that nobody was going to own that offender, if he could help it.

"Each of us," said Mr. Quelch, "had better question the boys of his own Form! It will be simple to discover the names of all the boys who took part in—securing the Head's hat."

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"That is true!" said Mr. Hacker. "I understand that the hat blew into the window of a room chiefly used by your boys, Mr. Quelch."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"That room, sir, is used by all the juniors, the Fourth and the Shell!" he said, with asperity.

"But my boys—" said Mr. Twigg.

"And my boys—" said Mr. Wiggins.

"There is no evidence, sir, that the ink was introduced into the—the hat in that room!" said Mr. Quelch.

"It may have happened anywhere."

"Ink must have been obtained," said Mr. Capper. "No boy would be likely to have ink about him in the quadrangle, for instance. If any of your boys were in that room, Mr. Quelch—"

"It was one of your boys, Mr. Capper, who handed the hat back to the Head!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Temple, of your Form, sir."

"Temple is a very well-mannered and obliging boy," retorted Mr. Capper. "He would naturally desire to be of service to his headmaster."

"The hat was certainly in his hands, sir—"

"I attach, sir, no importance whatever to that circumstance, sir!" said Mr. Capper, with some wrath.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Quelch, "some boy certainly introduced ink into Dr. Locke's hat! He has left it to us to discover the offender! Let us proceed."

"By all means!" retorted the Fourth Form master. "I am only too anxious to exonerate my boys from all suspicion."

"I share your feelings, sir!" said Mr. Wiggins.

"And I!" said Mr. Twigg.

"And I!" grunted Mr. Hacker.

Mr. Quelch's eyes glinted.

"Let us proceed!" he repeated coldly. "My Form cannot be cleared from this obnoxious suspicion too soon."

And the five beaks proceeded, and five junior Forms were ordered to assemble in their respective Form-rooms for examination by five Form-masters who were determined, if they could possibly help it, not to discover the offender in their particular Forms!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Neck or Nothing!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Buck up, Bunter!" called out Bob Cherry.

"But I say—"

"Form-room, fathead!" said Harry Wharton. As head boy of the Remove, Wharton was gathering in Mr. Quelch's flock.

"That's all very well," argued Bunter. "But what's it about? Looks as if we may be late for dinner at this rate!"

"Quelch's orders, ass!"

"Blow Quelch!" growled Billy Bunter.

But he rolled off to the Form-room with the rest. He might relieve his fat feelings by "blowing" Quelch, but Quelch's orders had to be obeyed, all the same, even at the awful risk of being late for dinner.

"What's the fearful row about, you men?" asked Lord Mauleverer as the Removites crowded along the Form-room passage.

"Nobody seems to know," answered Harry Wharton. "But all the Lower School seems to be called up."

"Something to do with the Head!" said Skinner. "I'm sure of that! What have you been up to, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"Say, has that fat guy been up to anything?" asked Fisher T. Fish.

"Well, he was jawing something about the Head having ink in his hat!" chuckled Skinner. "It if turns out to be that—"

"You beast!" roared Bunter. "I never did it! Did I, Smithy?"

The Bounder's eyes glinted at him.

"How should I know?" he answered coolly.

Billy Bunter turned his eyes, and his spectacles on the Bounder. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles in his surprise.

"Why, you beast!" he gasped. "You jolly well know—"

"I know nothin' about it, you fat ass!" answered the Bounder coolly and quietly, "and if you know anythin', the less you say the better. If there's a floggin' goin' do you want to be the man to bag it?"

"How could I be flogged for what I haven't done?" gasped Bunter.

"I fancy they're lookin' for somebody to flog. If you open your silly mouth too wide, you may be the happy man."

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

"You Remove men know what's up?" called out Temple from the door of the Fourth Form-room. "I've heard that there's been some lark on the Head."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Well, a Shell man says he heard it from Hacker," answered Temple. "Somethin' to do with his hat! Has anybody sat on his hat?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"His jolly old tile blew off in the quad this morning," said Hobson of the Shell. "A lot of fellows chased it. Anybody kick it?"

"It was all right when I fielded it in the passage and took it back to the beak!" said Temple. "We were goin' to boot it along the passage when Smithy called out that it was the Head's roof, so—"

"You didn't play any trick with it?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No fear!"

"That ass Bunter has been saying that there was ink in it—"

"My aunt! If there was, I never saw it! Did you, Fry?"

"I jolly well didn't!"

"Did Bunter get hold of it?" asked Dabney.

"No, I didn't!" roared Bunter in alarm.

"Then how do you know there was ink in it, if there was?" demanded Temple.

"I—I didn't, I—I mean, I don't—that is, I—I wasn't—I—I—" Billy Bunter stammered.

Wingate of the Sixth came along the passage.

"Now, then, get into your Form-rooms," he called out. And the juniors dispersed into their various Form-rooms.

Billy Bunter caught the Bounder's arm and pulled him back as the other fellows went into the Remove-room.

"I say, Smithy—" he whispered.

"Well?" said the Bounder, between his teeth.

"Are you going to own up, old chap?"

"About what?" asked the Bounder coolly.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh, really, Smithy! It's pretty certain that this row is about what you did to the Head's tile in the Rag—"

"You're dreaming!" said Smithy pleasantly. "I did nothing to the Head's tile—except watch it skim across the Rag when the wind blew it across into the passage."

"I mean, the ink—" gasped Bunter.

"What ink?"



"My heye!" P.-c. Tozer was coming up Friardale Lane when he met the Head of Greyfriars. Mr. Tozer was prepared to touch his helmet, but at the sight of the streaks of crimson down either side of Dr. Locke's face, he stood stock still, staring blankly. "My eye!" he repeated, wondering whether he was dreaming.

"Oh, don't be a silly ass! That ink you put in the Head's hat—I saw you, as you jolly well know—"

"Did you?" said the Bounder in a low voice. "Are you sure that I didn't see you doing that, Bunter?"

Bunter jumped almost clear of the floor, and his spectacles slid down his fat little nose.

"Wha-a-a-t?" he gurgled.

"You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours!" said the Bounder agreeably. "You're as deep in the mud as I am in the mire, old fat man."

Bunter blinked at him helplessly.

"You—you beast," he gasped. "Mean to say you'd make out that I did it when I jolly well saw you—"

"You see too much, Bunter! If you saw anything you'd better forget it as soon as you can. Take my word for this—if you say a single word about me, I'll hand you out some of the same medicine. My word's as good as yours, I fancy, or a little better—and there was nobody else in the Rag!"

With that, the Bounder lounged into the Form-room, leaving Billy Bunter rooted to the floor, overcome with amazement and dismay. He realised that Smithy meant every word he said; if there was accusation, there was going to be counter-accusation! With the thought of his father's presence in the school that afternoon, the Bounder was merciless. He was not going to be up for a flogging when his father came through Billy Bunter's tattlings, and Bunter, realising that he had already said too much, could only make up his fat mind to say no more.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter, as he rolled into the Form-room, at the sight of Mr. Quelch coming up the corridor.

The Remove were all in their places when Mr. Quelch entered the Form-room. There was a buzz of excited whispering, which ceased as the master entered. Many glances were turned on Billy Bunter. Most of the Remove, by this time, had an inkling of what had happened and guessed that the Owl of the Remove knew something about it. Whatever was the mysterious happening it looked to them as if Bunter was the guilty party; otherwise, it was difficult to account for his knowledge of what was unknown to all the rest. Nobody, of course, thought of giving Bunter away, and he was safe, if he did not give himself away—which was very likely to happen if he opened his mouth at all.

As for the Bounder, he was perfectly cool and calm. But his heart was beating rather unpleasantly in spite of his outward calm, as Mr. Quelch's gimlet eyes ran searchingly over the assembled Form.

"My boys," said Mr. Quelch quietly. "An outrageous practical joke has been played on your headmaster. It is necessary for me to discover whether the foolish and disrespectful boy concerned is in this Form! Ink—a quantity of red ink—was somehow introduced into your headmaster's hat. Upon my word! If you venture to laugh—"

Mr. Quelch broke off, with a glare.

There were undoubtedly signs of merriment in the Remove for a moment. Somehow, they seemed to think that there was something funny in finding ink in a headmaster's hat!

It did not seem funny to Mr. Quelch. But then, there was a considerable

difference between fifteen and fifty in the point of view.

However, the grins died off the various faces under the basilisk-like glare that Mr. Quelch cast on the Remove. The juniors listened with great gravity.

"Dr. Locke's hat," resumed Mr. Quelch, "was blown off in the quadrangle this morning, as many of you are aware. A number of boys very kindly ran after it to restore it to him. One boy, however, in whose hands it must have fallen, ventured to introduce ink into it, which later soaked over Dr. Locke's head, and—and—" At this point another glare was required to repress signs of risibility in the Remove. "And—and streaked his face, I understand, and caused him much inconvenience and discomfort. This boy must be found. If he is a member of the Remove, I command him to stand forward!"

Mr. Quelch hoped and believed that the boy in question was not in the Remove. He would have been chagrined had a boy stepped forward.

He was spared that chagrin! Nobody stepped forward.

Bunter turned his spectacles on the Bounder for a moment, wondering at Smithy's coolness; but the Bounder did not turn a hair.

"I hope and trust," resumed Mr. Quelch, rather relieved, "that the boy belongs to some other junior Form. However, I am bound to inquire into the matter with thoroughness. Every boy who took part in—in chasing the—the hat, will step out before the Form."

Willingly enough the hat-chasers stepped out. The Famous Five came

first, and after them came Peter Todd and Hazeldene. These, apparently, were all the Remove boys who had been out of doors at the time. Mr. Quelch was still more relieved. None of these was likely to have been the culprit. However he questioned them.

"Did any of you boys actually obtain possession of the hat?"

They shook their heads.

"I never got anywhere near it, sir," said Hazeldene.

"Nor I, sir!" said Toddy.

"I nearly got it once, sir," said Bob Cherry; "but it blew away again. Nobody touched it in the quad."

"I should have had it, sir," said Harry Wharton, "but just as I jumped at it, it flew into the window of the Rag. After that I never saw it, till the Head went out with it on, sir."

Mr. Quelch nodded.

"It is fairly clear," he said, "that the outrage must have been perpetrated after the hat was in the House. It is very unlikely that any boy had a bottle of red ink out of doors. Also, in the quadrangle the act must have been observed. You boys are certainly exonerated. You may go back to your places."

The seven went back to their places. Mr. Quelch's eye ran over the Form again.

"I must now inquire whether any Remove boy picked up the hat while it was in the House," he said.

"A Fourth-Form fellow picked it up, sir!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Quite so. I am aware that Temple of the Fourth returned it to the headmaster. But it may have fallen into other hands before that—there is, at least, a possibility which I must ascertain. Was any boy of this Form in the recreation-room when the hat blew in at the window?" This was the official name of the Rag!

"I was, sir!" said Vernon-Smith. Prevarication cost the Bounder little; but it was useless to attempt to conceal the fact that he had been in the Rag, when all the hat-chasers had seen him at the window, and probably the Head himself.

Mr. Quelch started a little, and his face hardened slightly. If there was a fellow in his Form to be suspected of any daring and reckless jape, it was Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"Were you alone in the room, Vernon-Smith?"

"I saw no one there when I went in, sir."

Billy Bunter trembled inwardly; but no eye was on Bunter now. The Bounder did not intend to mention that he had been there; and Bunter had only to hold his tongue.

On the other hand, Mr. Quelch had asked plainly whether any Remove man had been in the Rag at the time; and it was rather risky to leave that question unanswered—if it came out afterwards that he was there!

Bunter, certainly, did not want to betray the Bounder to punishment. Still less did he want the Bounder to "put it" on him. After all, it was not likely to transpire that he had been there, if he said nothing about it. There seemed to be safety in silence; and Bunter was silent.

Nor had he long to think over the matter; for Mr. Quelch was giving the Bounder all his attention now, and he went on almost without a pause.

"Did you pick up the hat when it blew in at the window, Vernon-Smith?"

"It blew right across the room, sir!" answered Vernon-Smith, with perfect coolness. "It hit me on the nose as it blew in, and then whisked away!"

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"You did not touch it?"

"I touched it with my nose, sir! I couldn't help that. Then I ran to the door—the hat whizzing down the passage."

Unscrupulous as he was, Smithy had so far avoided telling a direct lie. He had stated what had happened; though not all that had happened.

But Mr. Quelch, dealing with a fellow of the Bounder's reputation, was not to be satisfied without a categorical answer.

"Was the hat in your hands at all, Vernon-Smith?"

The Bounder breathed hard.

"No, sir!"

"You did not put the ink into it?"

"No, sir!" A faint spot of colour came into the Bounder's cheek, but he made the answer with cool firmness. Smithy was not by nature a liar—he was too proud and too arrogant to descend to such meannesses; but in the "war," as he regarded it, with the beaks, he allowed himself the use of all

THIS WEEK'S WINNING RIBTICKLER!



Professor: "Give me the names of the bones that form the human skull."

Student: "Hang it! I've got them all in my head, but I just can't remember them!"

Glyn Thomas, of 22, Hewitt Street, Hoole, Chester, who submitted the above winning joke, is now the proud possessor of a useful pocket knife.

It's up to all of you to win these useful prizes.

weapons. His view was that a master was a fool if he expected a fellow to convict himself.

"The hat blew directly across the room, into the passage?"

"Yes, sir! I ran after it too late!" said the Bounder coolly. Now that he was committed to lying, Smithy threw all scruples to the winds. "It was whisked across the room in a twinkling, sir, and out of the door."

"The door was open, then?"

"Wide open, sir," said the Bounder calmly.

"Did you see it after that?"

"Wharton was calling in at the window, sir, after the hat, and I stopped to answer him. Then I went after the hat. It was only a matter of a few seconds, of course."

"You did not see it again?"

"I saw it in Temple's hands, sir—and called out to him that it belonged to the Head," said the Bounder. "Thinking that it was some fellow's hat, they were going to kick it along the passage—and I was afraid it would

be damaged, and they would get into a row."

"That was very right and proper, Vernon-Smith. Was Temple near at hand?"

"Oh, no, sir! There was a strong draught down the passage, and the hat had whizzed along right to the corner."

"And there Temple picked it up?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Did you see anyone else in the passage?"

"I didn't notice anybody, sir," said the Bounder, with an air of reflection. "But there are two or three doors on that passage, and, of course, any fellow might have gone into one of them."

"Was there sufficient time, Vernon-Smith, for any boy who happened to be in the passage to play a trick with the hat, and get out of sight before you looked out of the recreation-room?"

"I suppose there was, sir, if he was quick! He would have to be quick, as I stopped only a few moments to speak to Wharton, at the window, before going after the hat."

"Oh crikey!" murmured Billy Bunter.

Even the obtuse Owl could see what the Bounder was driving at. The blame was to be put upon some entirely imaginary person who might have been in the passage outside the Rag at the time.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch, at length. "I am glad to see that my Form appears to be cleared of suspicion. You may dismiss."

And the Remove, glad that the ordeal was over, marched out of the Form-room, Bunter greatly relieved, after all, to find that he was not going to be late for dinner. And Mr. Quelch, with a thoughtful brow, took his way to the Fourth Form Room, little doubting that it was Cecil Reginald Temple of the Fourth Form who had played that prank on the Head's hat—and quite assured that it was not, at all events, a member of his own Form.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Some Person or Persons Unknown!

MR. CAPPER was about to dismiss his Form, when Quelch came in. Mr. Capper had questioned his Form, and was satisfied of the dove-like innocence of the Fourth. He raised his eyebrows as Quelch entered.

"You have found the culprit, Quelch?" he asked.

"I have some suspicion, sir," said the Remove-master.

"I had no doubt, sir, that you would find that it was a Remove boy," remarked Mr. Capper, with a nod.

"On the other hand, sir, my suspicion rests upon a Fourth Form boy," said Mr. Quelch coldly. "I am glad to say that the Remove is completely exonerated."

Mr. Capper looked grim at once.

"I have questioned my Form," he said stiffly, "and I am completely satisfied—"

"Perhaps, sir, you will allow me to put a question to Temple of your Form?" said Mr. Quelch.

"I see no occasion for it, sir," said Mr. Capper still more stiffly, "as I have already questioned Temple, as well as the other boys."

"Perhaps I should point out, sir, that Dr. Locke has placed this inquiry in my hands," said the Remove-master frigidly. "If, however, you prefer the Head himself to take it in hand—"

"I repeat, sir, that I see no occasion

for questioning a boy of my Form, but I have no objection to make—none whatever!" snapped Mr. Capper. "Temple, please answer any questions that Mr. Quelch may deem it advisable to put to you."

"Certainly, sir!" said Temple. "I understand, Temple, that you picked up Dr. Looke's hat after it blew through a room into the passage?" said Mr. Quelch.

"I saw it bowlin' along, sir," answered Temple cheerfully; "I picked it up, thinkin' some fellow had dropped it, not noticin' for a minute that it was a man's hat. Then I did notice it, sir—"

"Did you place ink inside it?" Temple jumped.

"Oh, no, sir!" "It appears, Temple, that you are the only boy in whose hands the hat was actually seen," said Mr. Quelch, with a very suspicious look at the captain of the Fourth.

"I dare say, sir," answered Temple calmly. "But Dabney and Fry were with me when I picked up the hat, and they can tell you whether I played any games with it."

"Certainly!" said Fry. "Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"I have already gone through this," said Mr. Capper sarcastically. "I trust, sir, that you have no suspicion that this boy of my Form—the captain of the Fourth Form—is telling untruths, and that two other boys of my Form are supporting him in a deception?"

"Certainly not!" said Mr. Quelch. Now that he learned that Temple had two witnesses to his guiltlessness he dismissed his suspicion at once. "I place full reliance on what Temple states."

"I am glad of that, sir!" said Mr. Capper, with an audible sniff.

"I will ask you, further, Temple, whether the hat passed into any other hands than yours before it was returned to the headmaster?"

"No, sir," answered Temple. "Smithy—I mean Vernon-Smith—called out to us that it was the Head's hat, and I went to the door to take it to him. Just then the Head came in, and I handed him the hat."

"Then whatever happened to the hat must have happened after it blew out of the recreation-room and before you picked it up?"

Temple looked curiously at the Remove-master. His own impression was that what had happened to the hat had happened in the Rag. His further impression was that Smithy could tell the whole story if he liked. But it was no business of his to give a fellow away, and he answered:

"I don't know anything about it, sir. I know that nothing happened to the hat after I got it, so it must have happened before I got it. That's all I know about it, sir."

"Did you observe anyone in the passage?"

"Never looked, sir," said Temple promptly. He was fairly certain that there had been nobody in that passage, but he was quite willing for some unknown and imaginary person to get the credit of what had happened.

"Did you see anyone, Fry?" "Never looked, sir," said Fry.

"And you, Dabney?" "Never looked, sir."

Mr. Quelch was silent. He admitted that Temple & Co. were cleared. Matters seemed at an impasse. Mr. Capper weighed in.

"No boy of my Form was in the recreation-room at the time, sir! But possibly some Remove boys—"

"One!" said Mr. Quelch coldly. "And

he has given me a satisfactory explanation. The hat was blown past him, and he did not touch it."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Capper.

"Yes, indeed, sir!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Yet it is certain that ink was introduced into the hat," said Mr. Capper. "On that point, I presume, there is no doubt?"

"Obviously none! I can only conclude that there was some boy in the passage at the time, who secured the hat long enough to play that wretched trick, and then sent it rolling along to the spot where Temple picked it up."

Mr. Quelch was driven to that conclusion. Driven to it as he was, he could not help realising how improbable it sounded as he stated it. And he was deeply annoyed by the sarcastic curve of Mr. Capper's lip.

"You think that possible, sir?" asked Mr. Capper.

"I think it is the only explanation, sir!" said Mr. Quelch sharply. "I am finished here, sir."

He whisked out of the Fourth Form Room. Mr. Capper at once dismissed the Fourth, and they joined the swarm of the Shell, the Third, and the Second going out. The other Forms had already been dismissed.

Five Form-masters gathered in the passage. Hacker, Wiggins, and Twigg stated, all together, that no member of their respective Forms knew anything about the occurrence. Mr. Capper favoured them with the same statement, adding that a Remove boy had been in the Rag at the time, as he now learned, and the further detail that there were always pens and ink on the table in the Rag, where the juniors often wrote their letters. Four Form-masters exchanged significant glances, and Mr. Quelch coloured with vexation.

"I can only repeat," he said, "what I have said to Mr. Capper—that the Remove boy who was in the room at the time has given a perfectly full and frank explanation."

"Is he a boy whose word you can take without question, sir?" asked Mr. Hacker acidly.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips. Certainly he could not say that much of Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"I have no reason to doubt his word on this occasion, sir," he said tartly. "I will not suspect a boy in my Form, sir, absolutely without grounds."

"Then he is a boy whose word you would not take as a matter of course on all occasions?" asked Mr. Twigg maliciously.

"The matter is hardly worth discussing, sir," said Mr. Quelch, unexpectedly driven into the peculiar position of defending the member of his Form whom he liked and trusted least.

"The boy was Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Capper.

"Vernon-Smith!" repeated Mr. Wiggins. "Is not that the boy in your Form, Mr. Quelch, who was sentenced to expulsion a short time ago for breaking bounds after lights-out?"

"That is immaterial, sir."

"I hardly regard it as immaterial," said Mr. Hacker more acidly than before. "A boy of bad—at least, of very doubtful—character—"

"I have no doubt, sir, that this miserable trick was played by some boy who has, so far, succeeded in keeping out of sight," said Mr. Quelch. "That boy may belong to any

of the Junior Forms. I decline—I absolutely and utterly decline—to allow it to be taken for granted that the boy belongs to my Form. Some mischievous boy in the Shell, perhaps—"

"Sir!" said Mr. Hacker.

"Or in the Fourth Form—"

"Sir!" said Mr. Capper.

"At all events, the matter will not rest here, and the truth, whatever it may be, shall be established," said Mr. Quelch, and, with the briefest of nods to his colleagues, he walked away, very pink in the face.

He left four Form-masters standing in a group, with their heads together and significant expressions on their faces and significant tones in their murmuring voices. Mr. Quelch did not see or hear them further, but he knew quite well what the beaks were saying to one another. He reached his study in a state of intense annoyance.

Left to himself, Mr. Quelch would probably have entertained the deepest and strongest suspicion of Vernon-Smith. But the attitude of his colleagues aroused his obstinacy. He could not, and he would not, allow it to be taken for granted that it was a Remove boy—a member of his own Form—who had perpetrated this outrage.

If it proved to be a Remove boy, Mr. Quelch was the man to hand out the sternest justice. But, in the circumstances, he was not going to believe it without the clearest proof; he was not going to let his colleagues have the satisfaction of being in the right while he was in the wrong. The Bounder had an ally, for once, in his Form-master; Mr. Quelch, who did not like him and did not trust him, and who would not have been displeased to see him sacked from the school, was his defender now. And as the inquiry into the outrage was in Mr. Quelch's hands it looked as if the Bounder was safe.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Prefects on the Prowl!

"PLAYING?" "Yes!" "Just as you like, of course," said Harry Wharton. "But I think you said that your pater was coming down, and if you'd rather cut it—"

"He's not coming after all!"

"Oh, all right, count you in, then!" said the captain of the Remove; and affecting not to notice the Bounder's black scowl, he strolled away.

It did not matter much, so far as the game was concerned, whether Smithy played that afternoon or not. The Remove men looked on the Form match with the Fourth merely as practice, and Smithy was sure of his place in the team for Highcliff, the next week, anyhow. But with so strong a man as Smithy in the front line, Wharton was able to make one or two little changes, giving lesser lights a chance. Wibley and Kipps and Dupont, as well as Tom Redwing, were called on, much to their satisfaction, and Hazeldene was

(Continued on next page.)



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assigned to goal in the place of Squiff. The more hefty men, giving the smaller fry a chance to show what they could do, were going to stand round and cheer.

It was still windy, but bright and clear, when the footballers went down to Little Side.

The Bounder was frowning, and his dark looks cast a cloud over his chum Redwing's cheery face. There was a deep suspicion in Redwing's mind that Smithy knew more than he had told of the peculiar episode of the headmaster's inky hat, but he had asked him no questions. That matter, since the inquiry in the Form-rooms, had progressed no further. But it was known that the "beaks" and the prefects were "on the prowl," and that it had not been dropped, by any means. Redwing wondered whether it was on the Bounder's mind. Certainly something was.

"Your father isn't coming, then?" he asked, as he walked down to the field with Smithy.

"No!" The Bounder's lip curled. "He seems to be playing cat-and-mouse."

"How do you mean?"

"He wrote that he was coming! Now he's phoned that he's not! Something turned up in the City—it may be true; the pater's up to his neck in West African gold mines at present. But he—"

"May be true, Smithy!" repeated Redwing, really shocked.

"Oh, you don't know the pater," snapped Smithy. "Now he's got his back up, I hardly know him myself. He was fairly knocked over when he thought I was sacked and done for, and he seems to suspect me and watch me like a cat! He isn't coming to-day—but he will come! I fancy the idea is a surprise visit, to catch me napping!"

"Smithy!"

"Well, he will be along this week, anyhow, but he says that his time is so taken up, he can't let me have a date."

"If he says so, Smithy, it is so!" said Redwing quietly. "You're talking rather wildly, old man."

"I know it's rotten, with this affair hangin' over my head!" muttered the Bounder irritably. "If he barges in when a row is goin' on—" He broke off, and Redwing did not ask him what "affair" he alluded to. Tom could guess that only too accurately. "Why couldn't he come, when he said he was comin', and get it over? Cat and mouse!"

But the Bounder threw off his gloom and irritation when he found himself in the ranks of the Remove on the football field. A game in the keen March wind was what he wanted to blow the cobwebs away; and it did him good. Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Hurree Singh and Peter Todd were standing out, as well as Squiff, and they stood and watched the game, with appreciative eyes on the Bounder.

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Fourth, had a sporting chance, with a weakened Remove team. But the Bounder seemed to walk all over them. Frank Nugent was in the front line, and playing a good game, but of the best men of the Remove, only Wharton and Smithy were there. The first goal came to the captain of the Remove—but it was followed by three from the Bounder, one after another, amid cheers from the Remove fellows.

"That man Smithy is a rod in pickle for Highelife next week, and no mistake!" remarked Tom Brown.

"The rodfulness in the esteemed

pickles is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bravo, Smithy!"

"That's the stuff to give the troops!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Go it, Smithy! Give us a few more!"

Cecil Reginald Temple, the captain of the Fourth, had a hopeful nature. He always started a game as a prospective victor. He generally ended it hopelessly vanquished. Happy anticipation faded out of Cecil Reginald's face, which was as long as a fiddle by the time the match ended, with the Remove victorious by five to one.

Smithy was looking quite merry and bright when he came off the field. He had enjoyed the game, and done remarkably well; and the cheers of the crowd on the ground were like meat and drink to the Bounder, who dearly loved the limelight. He was in quite high spirits in the changing-room after the match, much to the satisfaction of his chum. But when they came out of the changing-room together, Billy Bunter met them.

"I say you, fellows—" began Bunter.

"Oh, scat!" snapped the Bounder, irritated at being reminded, by the sight of Bunter's fat face, of the trouble he had cast out of his mind.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Hook it!"

"If you don't want to hear Loder's message—"

"Loder!" repeated the Bounder.

"What does Loder want?"

"He wants you in his study!" grunted Bunter, "and he told me to tell you, and blow him, and blow you, too, so yah!"

And Bunter grunted and rolled away. The black look came back to the Bounder's face.

"What the dickens can Loder want?" asked Redwing.

The Bounder smiled sarcastically.

"Can't you guess? The beaks have drawn blank, and the prefects are on the prowl. Loder of the Sixth is a prefect—and a jolly dutiful one—"

"Anything but that!" said Redwing, with a stare.

"Well, the less he's keen on duty, the more he'd like to make the Head think him keen!" grunted the Bounder. "If he bags the man who inked the Head's topper, it will make it safer for him to smoke in his study, and break bounds with Price of the Fifth. He's taking this up as a chance of greasing up to the Head."

And Smithy stamped away angrily to the Sixth-Form studies, leaving his chum in a worried frame of mind. As the inquiry had been passed on to the prefects, it was Loder's duty to take it up, and he could scarcely avoid at least a pretence of exerting himself a little. But the bully of the Sixth was certainly not a "whale" on duty, and perhaps Smithy was right in suspecting that Gerald Loder saw in this a chance of getting into favour with the Head. The fact that he had sent for Smithy showed in what direction his suspicions lay; and Smithy's words on the subject were as good as a confession, as Redwing realised only too clearly.

The Bounder lounged along the Sixth Form passage with his hands in his pockets. He tapped at Loder's door and entered.

There were three seniors in the study; Loder himself, his friend Carne, and Stephen Price of the Fifth Form. There was also a scent in the air that hinted at recent cigarettes.

"Oh! You!" said Loder, looking across at the Bounder, and Carne and Price left the study.

"Bunter says you wanted me," grunted Smithy.

Loder of the Sixth gave him a very keen look.

"It's about what you did in the Rag this morning," he said. "It was you that put the ink in Dr. Locke's hat."

The Bounder laughed. Some fellows, taken by surprise, might have given themselves away on the spot, which was no doubt Loder's object. But the cool and wily Bounder was not likely to give himself away.

"Try again!" he suggested.

"What? What do you mean?" snapped the prefect.

"I mean what I say!" answered Vernon-Smith coolly. "Do you think I'm a scared fag in the Second, to have my leg pulled as easily as all that?"

Loder knitted his brows.

"Do you deny it?" he demanded.

"I've already done that! I'm not takin' the trouble to deny it all over again!" drawled the Bounder. "If you want to show what a toppin' prefect you are, Loder, you'll have to put in some work—you can't trick a fellow like me into admitting things."

That, certainly, was not the way for a Lower Fourth junior to talk to a Sixth Form prefect. Loder's cheeks flushed, and he rose from his chair and picked up his ashplant from the table.

"I've no doubt whatever that you played that disgraceful trick on the Head, Vernon-Smith!" he said. "And I'll land you yet, I promise you that! Just now, I'm going to whop you for checking a prefect. Bend over that chair!"

"You're not going to whop me, Loder!" answered the Bounder, with perfect coolness. "You've accused me of what my Form-master has cleared me of. You'll repeat it before Mr. Quelch!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I'm goin' to Quelch now," said the Bounder deliberately. "If you've any proof of what you've said, you can hand it out to him!"

"Stop!" shouted Loder, as Vernon-Smith stepped through the doorway.

Smithy did not stop. He walked away quickly; and Loder, in a very uneasy frame of mind, ran to the door and stared after him. The Bounder went directly to Mr. Quelch's study.

The Remove-master was there, carefully putting together a pile of typescript, his celebrated "History of Greyfriars School," which was to accompany him when he left. He glanced round at the Bounder.

"What is it, Vernon-Smith?" he asked.

"If you please, sir," said the Bounder meekly, "Loder of the Sixth accuses me of playing that trick on the Head this morning. I've asked him to place the matter before you, sir, as my Form-master."

Mr. Quelch stared.

"Where is Loder?" he asked.

"In his study, sir."

"Kindly ask him to step here."

There was a suppressed grin on the Bounder's face as he walked back to the Sixth. Loder, in his doorway, gave him an evil look.

"Quelch wants you in his study, Loder!" said Vernon-Smith, and without waiting for an answer he returned to Mr. Quelch's study—without a trace of a grin on his face as he entered it.

Injured innocence was the Bounder's game now.

Very unwillingly the bully of the Sixth arrived in the presence of the Remove master. He was greeted with an exceedingly cold glance.

"It appears, Loder, that you have



"You're not going to whop me, Loder!" said Vernon-Smith coolly. "You've accused me of what my Form-master has cleared me of. You'll repeat it before Mr. Quelch." "Wha-a-at!" "I'm going to Mr. Quelch now," said the Bounder deliberately. "If you've got any proof of what you've said, you can hand it out to him!"

come to the conclusion that this boy of my Form was guilty of the outrage this morning. What new facts have come to light?"

Loder breathed hard.

"N-none, sir, to my knowledge," he stammered.

"On what grounds, then, do you accuse Vernon-Smith?"

"I did not exactly accuse him, sir—the junior misunderstood me," said Loder, breathing harder. "I was questioning him, and he appears to have inferred—"

"I'm sorry if I misunderstood," said the Bounder, with great meekness. "But as Loder said that he had no doubt, and that he would land me yet, sir—"

Mr. Quelch frowned portentously. "If you used those words, Loder, it can scarcely be a case of misunderstanding. I ask you again, has anything fresh come to light to cast suspicion on this boy of my Form?"

"I—I— No, sir!" stammered Loder.

Mr. Quelch gave him a look. Then he glanced at the Bounder.

"You may go, Vernon-Smith," he said, obviously with the intention of speaking very plainly to Loder of the Sixth when the junior was gone.

"Thank you, sir."

The Bounder left the study. It was five minutes later that Loder left it, and he looked quite tired—after five minutes of the most acid edge of Mr. Quelch's tongue.

Vernon-Smith strolled out into the quad, laughing. It was amusing to the Bounder to have beaten a Sixth Form prefect, and landed him in a "row" with a beak. Loder's methods of investigation were not such as a master could approve of—especially a master

who was anxious not to have an offender discovered in his Form.

Smith had beaten Loder—and he laughed, rather forgetting the proverb that he laughs best who laughs last!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

BILLY BUNTER had a thoughtful expression on his fat face in class the following day.

That thoughtful expression was not caused by any undue attention that Bunter was paying to his Form-master.

Indeed, Bunter was, in these days, giving Mr. Quelch less attention than ever—if possible.

As Quelch was leaving for an indefinite period, in a day or two, Bunter had astutely calculated that lines, in the circumstances, did not matter.

Lines might fall on Billy Bunter now as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa, and the fat Owl was not going to care in the very least.

Quelch, it was certain would not come back till after the Easter holidays, after which lapse of time even a "beast" like Quelch could hardly ask a fellow for his lines!

Bunter had quite a lot on hand, which ought to have been written, and hadn't been written! In the circumstances, he did not mind if they were doubled, or trebled, or quadrupled. All he had to take care of was not to get a licking before Quelch went!

Lines did not matter; but lickings, of course, mattered as much as ever!

Still, Mr. Quelch was unwilling to handle the cane, more than he could help, in his last few days with his

Form. He was, indeed, so mild that the Remove hardly knew their Form-master.

So Bunter was able to think out a much more important matter than Latin prose, or Roman history, as he sat in class.

Bunter was thinking of that deplorable affair of the Head's hat! The beaks, as Smithy expressed it, had drawn blanks. Prefects were on the prowl; but their prowling, so far, had resulted in exactly nothing. Bunter, if he liked, could have let in a whole flood of light on the matter.

Of course, he wasn't going to!

Bunter was no sneak!

Likewise, he had not forgotten the Bounder's threat of "putting it on him" if he opened his large mouth too wide!

Still, Bunter argued to himself, one good turn deserved another.

A fellow who did another fellow favours had a right to expect a fellow to do a fellow favours in return.

For instance, suppose a fellow had been disappointed about a postal order he had been expecting all through the term? Suppose a fellow was hard up, while another fellow, whose rotten secrets he was keeping, was rolling in cash? In those circumstances, hadn't a fellow a right to expect a fellow to do the decent thing?

Bunter decided that a fellow had!

After class, therefore, Billy Bunter's spectacles turned on the Bounder when the Remove went out.

Vernon-Smith walked into the quad with his chum Redwing. He was looking a good deal more cheerful than on the previous day.

His father's visit still hung over him;

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(Continued from page 13.)

Mr. Vernon-Smith was going to drop in at Greyfriars, on some unspecified date, that week or the next. Or, at all events, he was going to keep his son in a state of expectation of such a visit—to keep him on his good behaviour!

But if there was no "row" on, the Bounder did not mind. And now that a day and a night had passed, there was much less prospect of a row.

It was to be hoped that the absurd affair of the Head's hat would die away, as no discovery had been made, and would be forgotten.

Even the prefects, whose duty it was to unearth the offender, grinned among themselves over the absurdity of the affair. It was probable that they would let it drop as soon as they could, after a decent show of activity.

Smithy was talking football as he walked in the quad with his chum. Redwing had played up well in the Form match, and the Bounder was keen on seeing him figure in a really important fixture, and was disposed to urge his claims on the captain of the Remove to a place in the team going over to Highcliffe the following week. Smithy was talking cheerfully and eagerly when Billy Bunter—thinking of quite other matters—rolled up and weighed in:

"I say, Smithy—"

"Roll away, barrel!"

"I say, old chap, the post's in," said Bunter.

"Oh!" Vernon-Smith gave heed at that. "Is there a letter for me?"

"Eh? I don't know—"

"Then what do you mean, you fat ass?" snapped Vernon-Smith.

"I mean, my letter hasn't come," explained Bunter. "I believe I told you that I was expecting a postal order, Smithy."

"You silly owl!" roared the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy! I say, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you!" Bunter rolled after the Bounder. "I say, Smithy, will you lend me a quid till my postal order comes?"

"No!"

"I mean, ten bob, old chap."

"Get out!"

"If you're too jolly mean to lend a fellow five bob—"

"For goodness' sake cut off, Bunter!" said Tom Redwing.

"You shut up, Redwing, while I'm talking to Smithy! You might lend a fellow five bob, Smithy. I'll settle up as soon as my postal order comes. It's from one of my titled relations, you know. It will be here in the morning."

The Bounder stopped, turned towards Bunter, and drew back his foot. The fat Owl jumped back as actively as a kangaroo.

"Don't you jolly well kick me, you beast!" he exclaimed indignantly.

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"After all I've done for you, you rotter! Who'd be up for a flogging if I liked to give him away? I ask you!"

"So that's the game, is it?" said the Bounder quietly, but with a deadly glitter in his eyes.

He made a rapid stride towards Bunter. The Owl of the Remove jumped back again, but not in time. Vernon-Smith's grasp closed on his collar and swung him round.

"Yarooooop!" roared Bunter, in dire anticipation.

His anticipations were immediately realised!

"Thud!"

The Bounder's boot landed, as if he had been kicking for goal!

Bunter flew!

"Whoop!" he bellowed, as he landed on his fat hands and knees. "Ow! Beast! Yow-ow-ow! Whoop! Oh, crikey! Wow!"

The Bounder walked away with Redwing, leaving him to bellow. And Billy Bunter had to realise that, though undoubtedly one good turn deserved another, he was not going to get his celebrated postal order cashed for keeping Smithy's secret.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

By Order of the Head!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Seen this?"

"The Head's fist!"

"Gated!"

"Rotten!"

"Rotten shame!"

It was Friday morning, and when the Greyfriars fellows came out after morning classes there was a notice on the board in the headmaster's hand, which drew all eyes as soon as the news spread.

A thick crowd gathered before the board.

Two or three dozen voices commented on the notice at once, and everyone made it clear that the Greyfriars fellows did not see eye to eye with their respected headmaster.

The notice was brief. It stated that, until the perpetrator of the "pernicious practical joke" on the headmaster was revealed, the Lower School would be detained within gates for all half-holidays.

It was rather a sweeping announcement, and it took the juniors by surprise and excited general dismay and wrath.

The Bounder's lip curled as he read it.

Contrary to his expectation, the affair was not dying a natural death, as no discovery had been made. Dr. Locke was taking drastic measures.

"Gating" for half-holidays was a serious matter. Indeed, it was likely to interfere with football very seriously, unless exceptions from the sentence were granted.

Evidently, the Head had not forgotten or forgiven; he was resolved that the offender should be brought to light.

But the fact that such measures were taken proved that the actual culprit had little to fear, so far as the Bounder could see. If the powers had known where to lay their hands they would not have gone to this length.

"The rottenfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, lugubriously. "If we are gatefully kept in on Highcliffe day—"

"Oh, the Head won't stop football matches!" said Harry Wharton, rather more confidently than he felt, however. Really, there never was any telling what a beak might or might not do when he got on the war-path.

"Hardly!" said the Bounder. "We're

all right for Highcliffe. And they won't keep this up. Anyhow, we're not a long way from the end of the term."

"That's all very well," said Skinner hotly. "But I don't see it! It's not fair!"

"Do you expect fair play in this wicked world?" yawned the Bounder. "Blessed are those that don't expect!"

"Oh rot!" snapped Skinner. "I've got a little excursion on for Saturday afternoon, and I don't see being gated for nothing."

"May save you from the sack!" suggested the Bounder. "You might get spotted on that little excursion of yours."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's not a laughin' matter," said Temple of the Fourth. "I'm having a car out on Saturday—at least, I was! This looks like knockin' it on the head."

"Pretty thick!" declared Hobson of the Shell. "All very well for you fags—but gating the Shell—well, my hat!"

"Oh, shut up, Hobby!"

"All the Lower School!" said Stewart of the Shell. "We're really Middle School—practically seniors—this oughtn't to apply to us."

"Rats to you!" came a shout from Remove and Fourth.

"Well, look here," said Hoskins of the Shell. "I can't be gated on Saturday, I'm going to a concert at Lantham, they're putting on Smelowski's symphony in B flat and Caskowski's Rumpelstilzchen Rhapsody! I wouldn't miss 'em for worlds."

"I say, you fellows, I'm going to tea at the bun-shop in Courtfield on Saturday," squeaked Billy Bunter. "I heard Mauly say he would be there—I mean, I'm going—"

"We're not standing this!" said Fry of the Fourth wrathfully.

"Goin' to tell the Head so?" asked Tubb of the Third.

"Kick that cheeky fag!" said Temple.

Tubb was duly kicked for checking the Fourth! But his question remained unanswered. Edward Fry, wrathful as he was, was probably not going to tell the Head what he thought!

"I'll tell you what!" said Bob Cherry. "It's been only a joke so far—but it's getting serious now, with all the Lower School gated! The fellow ought to own up!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The own-upfulness is the proper caper!"

"Chance for you, Bunter!" said Hazeldene.

"Why, you beast—" roared Bunter indignantly.

"If it was you, Bunter—" said Peter Todd.

"It wasn't!" shrieked Bunter.

"Well, it jolly well looks as if it was!" said Bolsover major. "You know all about it before the beaks said a word, I know that."

"Beast!"

"Well, how did you know, if you didn't do it?" demanded Snoop.

"Cut that out," said the Bounder, before Bunter could answer. "It's rather rotten puttin' it on any fellow! It means a flogging for the fellow if he's nailed!"

"Serve him right, too!" exclaimed Temple of the Fourth. "I dare say it was funny in its way, but it's rotten bad form playing tricks on the headmaster! It's not done!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Dabney. And there was a murmur of approval. Nobody really approved of japing the chief; other beaks might be considered fair game, by reckless fellows, but the chief stood apart, over and above! Japing the Head was barred by all.

The crowd broke up in an angry and excited state of mind.

So far, there had been a good deal of merriment on the subject of the headmaster's inky hat! It was bad form to jape the Head—still, it was rather funny to think of that majestic gentleman presenting himself at the vicarage with his majestic countenance streaked with red ink. Thoughtless fellows had found it rather amusing.

That was all changed now.

Much more clearly than before—now that the Lower School was gated—the juniors realised what rotten bad form it was to jape the Head!

Nobody, hitherto, had expected the fellow concerned to own up! Fellows were not expected to ask for a whopping.

But since the Head's notice had

appeared on the board opinion had changed on that point. Groups of fellows, discussing the matter, agreed nem. con. that a fellow who would let all the other fellows be gated, because he was afraid to own up, was a rotter, a sneak, a rank outsider, and a worm.

After all, a good many fellows asked, what was a whopping? A fellow could stand a whopping! The fellows who were most emphatic about this, were, of course, fellows who were in no peril of the whopping! Herbert Vernon-Smith was of quite a different opinion.

Not that the Bounder was afraid of a whopping, or anything else. Fear of any kind had been left out of the Bounder's composition.

Indeed, in other circumstances, the Bounder would rather have gloried in the limelight that would have shone on him if he had owned up and taken his punishment, and thereby got the rest of the Lower School off the gating. The limelight would have been worth the licking.

But Smithy had reasons now for avoiding trouble. He wished, so far as that went, that he had never played that reckless trick. Wishing was of no use, it was done and could not be undone. It had to be kept dark. He had his father to think of.

In the present state of strained relations at home, he could not take the
(Continued on next page.)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

THE most important thing I have to say this week, chums, is to remind all of you that if you want a copy of our marvellous guinea presentation volume of "World Pictorial Gazetteer," you must send up a reservation form and six tokens, which latter have been appearing in the MAGNET during the past few weeks, together with a postal-order for 2s. 10d. to cover the cost of postage. Requests for this Presentation Volume are coming in by the thousands, and it's up to every one of my readers to secure this wonder volume, which is the most interesting reference book yet published in this country. In all, there are 1,024 pages, comprising 1,500 pictures and maps—a real treasure book of reference that will prove invaluable to all those who are anxious to know the things that matter in this great world of ours. Such a splendid offer as this will not come your way again, so be sure and take advantage of it—ALL OF YOU! You will find the seventh token on page 26 of this issue.

THERE certainly are some curious things in this old world of ours. Take names, for instance. Shakespeare once asked

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Well, here is the answer. There is a Chinaman in California who is called Wa Shing—and he runs a laundry! There is an optician whose name is N. E. W. Lenz! Then we have I. Lancit, a doctor; Lily Rose, a florist; Dr. Toothacher, a dentist; and Miss Patient, a nurse!

One of the strangest coincidences concerning names happened when a gravedigger named Tombs married a young lady named Coffin. And the clergyman who married them was called Graves!

After that you won't be surprised to learn that there are people who rejoice in the names of Izzy Strange, Ima Bird, Poppy Flowers, and Augusta Wind!

HERE is a neat little trick which one of my readers has sent in. Ask your chum if he can prove that

HALF OF TWELVE IS SEVEN?

He'll probably tell you that you are suffering from softening of the brain. Then you simply prove to him that you

are not. Write down twelve in Roman numerals, thus:

XII.

Then draw a line half-way across the numerals, cutting off the bottom half. You will then have

VII

—seven! Simple, isn't it?

A Canadian reader sends me a most interesting yarn concerning

THE SHIP THAT WOULDN'T STAY SUNK!

For 117 years this vessel has been under water—but it has bobbed up again, and the Canadians are so proud of her that she is to be preserved. She is the British frigate "Nancy," which was launched as long ago as 1789. During the war with the United States she was sailing Lake Ontario when she encountered several American vessels. After a running fight the Nancy was sunk, but even then she did not give up the ghost. She began gathering silt, and actually formed herself into an island. Three or four years ago she was raised and found to be in a good state of preservation, despite her 117 years beneath the waters of Lake Ontario. This gallant little ship has now been renovated and converted into a museum.

From another reader, who was recently in France, comes a tale concerning

FRANCE'S PIGEON HERO,

the only pigeon in the world to have a memorial unveiled to it! During the Great War the forts of Verdun were in a very bad way. The garrison of the fort of Vaux sent out their last pigeon with an urgent plea for assistance. The gallant little bird won through the terrific inferno of gun-fire and gas bombs, carrying its message which meant life or death to the garrison. It won through and saved the day!

The French decorated the pigeon with the Legion of Honour and also the Croix de Guerre, and when

it eventually died after the war they unveiled a marble plaque to its memory. Surely this pigeon was the most honoured bird that ever engaged in warfare!

"WHAT PRICE VICTORY?"

Here's another ripping school story, chums, that you simply must read. It stars the old favourites, Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jims, and their rivals of the Grammar School. This lively story, which appears in our companion paper, The GEM, price 2d., on Sale next Wednesday, is full of Fun, Footer and Adventure. See your newsagent about it to-day.

And now for next week's tip-top programme! Frank Richards can always be depended upon to produce the finest of all boys' yarns, and next week's long, complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, is no exception. It is entitled:

"DISOWNED BY HIS FATHER!"

and if any other author can pack more fun and amusement—not to mention a proportion of thrills—in any one story, I should like to meet him and shake him by the hand! It's a great yarn, chums, and it is well backed up by our other splendid features. The best thing I can do is to repeat my oft-given advice—"Order your copy in advance, and don't run the risk of the MAGNET being sold out!"

There are thrills galore for you in next week's chapters of our powerful detective yarn, and two pages full of chuckles in the "Greyfriars Herald" supplement, not to mention "Linesman's" interesting Soccer talk, and the Greyfriars' Rhyme-ster's contribution.

And fire in your queries, chums! The more there are, the better I like it!

YOUR EDITOR.

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risk of being "up for trouble" when Mr. Vernon-Smith came along.

If that promised, or threatened, visit had been over and done with, the matter would have been different.

But any day the millionaire might "barge" in; and, iron-nerved as he was, the Bounder felt a tremor at the idea of his father finding him in disgrace when he came, condemned to severe punishment for a reckless, disrespectful, unmannerly prank on his headmaster.

His once over-indulgent parent had, since Smithy's narrow escape from the sack, developed a sternness that both surprised and exasperated the Bounder. In very plain language, Mr. Vernon-Smith had warned him to be careful, and told him of dire consequences that would follow if he was not. Until the fit passed, at least, Smithy had to take care, and he was quite determined that there was going to be no "row" on when his father came.

But for that consideration, the Bounder would have owned up like a shot. But that consideration silenced him, though he winced every now and then when he heard the unknown japer described by indignant fellows as a sneak, a funk, a worm, and other unpleasant things.

At tea in Study No. 4 that day Tom Redwing looked at him quietly, but rather significantly. Smithy knew what was in his mind, he had as good as admitted the truth to his chum.

His face set doggedly.

"You think that japin' ass ought to own up, Reddy?" he sneered.

"Yes," said Tom quietly. "Now it's come to gating for all the fellows, there's nothing else for a decent fellow to do!"

"Let's hope he'll get on with it, then!" said Smithy flippantly. "Got any idea who it was?"

"A pretty clear one, I think."

"Well, you can go along to a beak or a prefect, if you choose, and tell tales you know!" jeered the Bounder.

"I'm not likely to do that!" said Tom. "But if you did it, Smithy—"

"If I!" said the Bounder.

"If you did it, it's up to you, old chap! After all, you're not afraid of a

flogging; you've had a few in your time!"

"You know I'm not!" snarled the Bounder. "And you know, or should know, that I'd have gone to the Head and got it off my chest already if it wasn't for my father. But that washes it out."

"I know. But you should have thought of that before you did it, Smithy."

"Fat lot of good tellin' me that now!" growled Vernon-Smith. "Talk sense, if you can. Besides, who says I did it?"

"You've as good as said so yourself."

"Only to you, old bean; and you're not cur enough to peach. If you were, I'd deny every word I've said to you!" said the Bounder coolly.

"A lot of the fellows think it was Bunter."

"That's his look-out!"

"You can't leave it at that, Smithy."

"Can't I?" sneered the Bounder. "If Bunter opens his silly mouth too wide, Bunter can take what's comin' to him! If he kept his chin quiet, he would be in no danger!"

"If they have him up for it—"

"Let them!"

"You couldn't leave him to it."

"Couldn't I? You'll see!"

Redwing said no more, and they finished tea in silence.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

"Own Up, Bunter!"

"BUNTER!"
"Bunty!"
"Where's that fat ass Bunter?"

Billy Bunter's company was not, as a rule, yearned after in the Greyfriars Remove. Indeed, as a rule, the less fellows had of it the better they liked it. Now, however, he was a much-sought-after fellow. At least a dozen of the Remove, and three or four of the Fourth, and some Shell fellows, were looking for William George Bunter, and calling his name up and down the passages.

Bunter was wanted!

It was some hours since the Head's drastic notice had appeared on the board, and nothing had come of it. The following day, Saturday, was a half-holiday, and it was clear that it was time for something to happen. Opinion had crystallised on that point. So long as nobody else was bothered about the affair, the offender could please himself. Now that the whole Lower School was "for it," the offender had to own up and take his gruel. And as it was the general opinion that Bunter was the offender, quite a little army of fellows had decided to make that quite clear unto him.

Billy Bunter had had his tea in Study No. 7, with Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, when he heard voices calling his name. Tea in Study No. 7 had been rather a meagre affair; Bunter had had hardly enough for two. So when three or four voices shouted his name in the Remove passage, Billy Bunter sat up and took notice at once.

He rolled to the door of Study No. 7 and threw it open, and blinked into the passage through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, here I am!" he squeaked. "Is it a feed? I'm ready!"

"Here he is!"

"Bag him!"

"Collar him!"

A crowd converged on the doorway of Study No. 7, and Bunter blinked at them in alarm. Evidently it was not a feed that he was wanted for. It looked more like a ragging.

"I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter.

He backed into the study. Six or seven fellows followed him in, and six or seven more clustered round the doorway. Peter Todd rose from the tea-table.

"What's this game?" he inquired.

"Bunter's got to own up!" said Bolsover major, who was apparently the leader. "We're not going to be gated to please Bunter!"

"I guess not!" snorted Fisher T. Fish.

"I'll sure say nope!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, is that it?" said Peter cheerfully. "Right-ho! Get on with it! Don't burst him over my study, that's all."

"Now, then, Bunter," said Skinner, "you catch on? A jape's a jape, and I'm not saying it wasn't a good joke on the beak. But now we're all gated, it's time to own up!"

"That's only decent, Bunter!" said Wibley.

"It's up to you, Bunter!" said Micky Desmond. "Sure, you wouldn't lave us all gated intirely, and you the man that did it!"

"I wasn't!" roared Bunter.

"No good telling lies!" said Bolsover major. "We all know you did it, and you've got to go to Quelch and tell him so!"

"I didn't!" shrieked Bunter. "I—I say, Peter, old chap, you stand by a fellow! You know me, old chap; you can take my word!"

"Hardly!" grinned Peter Todd. "It's because I know you so well, old fat tulip, that I can't!"

"Beast!"

"Rag him!" roared Bolsover major. "He's going to be ragged till he owns up! Wipe up the study with him!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Wibley. "Fair play's a jewel! None of your rotten bullying here, Bolsover!"

"I tell you—" roared Bolsover.

"Shut up! Leave Bunter alone!" said Wibley. "We've come here to put it to him, as a decent chap—"

"I say, you fellows, I never did it!" gabbled Bunter. "I didn't, really! As

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At the sound of voices in the passage shouting his name, Billy Bunter rolled to the door of the study, threw it open, and blinked into the passage through his big spectacles. "I say, you fellows, here I am!" he squeaked. "Is it a feed? I'm ready!" By the looks on the faces of the crowd converging in the doorway it looked more like a ragging.

if I'd have the nerve to jape the Head!" "That sounds true!" remarked Peter Todd.

"He knew all about it!" roared Bolsover. "Wasn't he gassing about ink in the Head's topper before the beaks had said a word?"

"Half a dozen fellows heard him!" said Kipps. "I heard him, for one! Nobody knew anything about it, but Bunter!"

"Own up, Bunter!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows—" gasped Bunter.

"Are you going to own up?" demanded Bolsover major.

"No!" yelled Bunter.

"Then we'll jolly well—"

Without stopping to finish, the bully of the Remove rushed at Billy Bunter, grasped him, and landed him on the study carpet with a bump.

There was a terrific roar from Bunter. Peter Todd ran forward, but Skinner put a foot in his way, and he tripped and rolled over. Excited voices filled the study: some fellows were for ragging Bunter, others for arguing with him. Bolsover major, evidently preferring action to words, grasped the Owl of the Remove by his fat ears, and banged his head against the leg of the table. Wild roars proceeded from Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came Bob Cherry's voice from the passage. "What's the jolly old row?"

"Yaroooh! Rescue! Whoop!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows—Yaroooh!"

"Bump him!"

"Bang his napper!"

"Let him alone!"

"Give him a chance!"

"Scrag him!"

"Ow! Leggo! Beast! Help! Rescue!"

raved Bunter. "I say, you fellows—Yaroooh! Oh crikey! Oh lor! Yooop!"

Harry Wharton came shoving a way through the crowd. The uproar had brought the captain of the Remove on the scene. Bob Cherry's vigorous elbows helped to make a passage for him, and Wharton forced a way into the crowded study.

He grasped Bolsover major's collar, as the bully of the Removed banged Bunter's head, twisted him back, and pitched him across the study.

"Enough of that, Bolsover!" he said curtly.

"Why, I—I—I—I'll jolly well—" gasped Bolsover, scrambling up.

"Stand back!" rapped the captain of the Remove. "Bunter's not going to be ragged! Stand back!"

"He's going to own up!" roared Bolsover furiously. "Think we're going to be gated for the rest of the term because that fat polecat is afraid of getting what he's asked for?"

"No fear!" said Skinner emphatically.

"I say, you fellows—" gurgled Bunter.

"There's going to be no ragging!" said the captain of the Remove coolly.

"Hands off Bunter! If he did it—"

"I didn't!" howled Bunter.

"Well, I believe you did!" said Harry. "Every fellow in the Form believes you did—or, rather, knows you did! You knew all about it, and you couldn't have known if you hadn't done it! If you've got a rag of decency, you'll get all the fellows out of a scrape by owning up. Any decent fellow would."

"But I didn't—"

"Rag him, I tell you!" roared Bolsover.

"I say, you fellows, keep him off!"

"Stand back, Wharton, or we'll jolly well rag you, too!" shouted Bolsover.

"You're welcome to try!" said the captain of the Remove contemptuously. "But you're not going to lay a finger on that fat, funky ass. Now, look here, Bunter—"

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

"It's up to you," said Harry. "You've got us all into a scrape, with your silly tricks, and it's up to you to get us out of it. I shan't allow any ragging, but you can see what all the fellows think of you."

"Rotten cad!" said Skinner.

"Worm!" said Snoop.

"Pesky mugwump!" snarled Fisher T. Fish.

"Won't you allow any ragging, what?" hooted Bolsover major. "Are you going to keep him under your wing? I can jolly well tell you that he will get ragged a dozen times a day till he owns up!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Own up, Bunter!"

"But I never did it!" yelled Bunter. "You're a lot of silly asses! I never had anything to do with it!"

"Then how did you know anything about it?" demanded the captain of the Remove. "You let out that you knew before the inquiry started."

"Because," gasped Bunter—"because — Oh lor!—I—I—I was there!"

"Where?"

"In—in the Rag!" gasped Bunter.

"That settles it!" said Peter Todd.

"It's pretty certain that the trick was played in the Rag, where there was a bottle of red ink!"

"But Smithy was there," said Frank Nugent. "He would have seen—"

"I dare say he did. Smithy wouldn't give a man away!"

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"No; that's so!"
 "You silly idiots!" howled Bunter, as Bolsover major made a move towards him. "You silly fatheads! It was Smithy, and I saw him do it!"

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Smithy is Wanted!

"SMITHY!"
 "Oh!"

There was a sudden silence in Study No. 7. The Remove fellows stared at Bunter. That fat youth gasped for breath, and set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose. Bunter's statements, as a rule, did not carry much conviction; indeed, they were sometimes taken in a contrary sense! Fellows sometimes said that if Billy Bunter stated that a thing was so, that was evidence that it wasn't so.

But the fat junior's words did carry conviction in the present case. The probability was in his favour.

The Bounder was the man for such a reckless trick—and Bunter was not! Even fellows who had felt certain that Bunter was the man, had wondered how on earth the fat Owl had found nerve enough to do it.

The Bounder, on the other hand, had nerve enough for anything! And he was "up against" authority on principle. And he had old grudges against the Head!

In fact, many fellows had rather suspected the Bounder, but he had carried the matter off so easily that suspicion was lulled. He had satisfied Mr. Quelch—and Quelch was well known to be a downy bird!

The circumstance that Bunter, obviously, had known all about the ink in the hat before the inquiry started, pointed indubitably to Bunter! But that was now explained, if he had been in the Rag at the time, and had seen the Bounder put the ink in the hat.

For a long moment the juniors stared at Bunter blankly. Bob Cherry was the first to speak.

"Smithy!" he said.
 "Oh!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.
 "The esteemed Bounder!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, from the passage.

"I—I suppose that's the truth!" said Nugent dubiously.

"Easy enough to tell. We can ask Smithy!" remarked Skinner.

"Rot!" roared Bolsover major.

"Oh, really, Bolsover—"

"Rot!" repeated the bully of the Remove, not convinced, or not choosing to be convinced. Bolsover was an obstinate fellow, and did not like giving up an opinion he had once adopted. "It's all gammon! The fat villain's trying to squirm out of it. Smithy never did it."

"It's rather like Smithy!" said Johnny Bull. "And he was there—though he explained it to Quelch all right—"

"He told Quelch a bushel of lies!" gasped Bunter. "I can tell you fellows I was fearfully shocked when I heard him. Not the sort of thing I could do."

"Rot!" snorted Bolsover major.

"Smithy may be a bad hat—I'm not saying he isn't—but he's not the man to keep his mouth shut and leave a lot of fellows in a row! Smithy would have owned up before this!"

"My hat! So he would!" exclaimed Bob. "Smithy's the man to do it! He's just the man to play such a trick—but he's not the man to leave other fellows in the soup!"

"That's true!" said Wharton slowly.

"If Smithy did it, I can't understand

him keeping it dark, since the Head's notice was up. He's no sneaking funk, like Bunter."

"Smithy did it!" said Johnny Bull. "We ought to have known, really! That fat idiot saw him at it—that's how he knew. It was Smithy all right."

"Rubbish!" hooted Bolsover major. "Quelch thinks he didn't do it—he was satisfied. Quelch knows a thing or two. And Loder of the Sixth got after him—and got a wiggling from Quelch for his pains. I suppose you know better than the beaks and pre's, what?"

"I say, you fellows—"
 "Anyhow, we can ask Smithy!" said Harry Wharton. "He tells lies to the beaks, as we all know; but he doesn't tell lies to the Remove! Smithy will tell us if he did it!"

"He would have said so already if he'd done it—bragged of it!" grunted Bolsover major. "But let's ask him—and then we'll jolly well scrag that fat fibber for trying to put it on Smithy! If he'd seen Smithy do it, as he says, he would have gabbed it all over the Remove long before this!"

"By Jove!" Wharton was struck by that argument. "The tattling ass never keeps anything dark, that's true—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

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"Well, if you knew it was Smithy, why haven't you said so before?" demanded the captain of the Remove.

"As if I'd give a fellow away!" said Bunter virtuously.

"You've just given him away to us, if it's true, you blithering idiot! Why haven't you gabbed before, in your usual way?"

"Beast!"

"If it was true, he would have let it out," said Bolsover major. "He can't keep anything inside that fat jaw of his—except grub!"

"Smithy said he would put it on me, if I said anything!" gasped Bunter.

"Now you know!"

"Oh, let's go and see Smithy!" exclaimed Wharton. "There's no believing a word from Bunter!"

"Yah!"

The Removites crowded out of the study; Bolsover major shaking a big fist at Bunter as he went. They trooped along to Study No. 4.

"Smithy here?" asked Wharton, looking in.

"No!" Tom Redwing was alone in the study. "Smithy's gone out. I think he's in the quad somewhere."

"Come on, you fellows!"

The crowd of fellows went downstairs. But Smithy was not to be found in the quad.

Apparently he had gone out of gates. "Gone over to Highcliffe, very likely," said Bob Cherry. "Smithy's thick again with Pon & Co. over there. It's not long to lock-up now."

"Well, we can wait," said Harry.

There was nothing else to be done. Some of the fellows went down to the gates to wait for Herbert Vernon-Smith to come in. But when Gosling came out to lock the gates he had not appeared.

If Smithy was out of gates, he was staying out. Possibly the festive attractions of Ponsonby's study at Highcliffe School had kept him later than was prudent.

Calling-over was due soon, and some of the Removites wondered whether the reckless Bounder was going to "cut" call-over. He had done so often enough before. Probably he would have done so again, but for his keen desire to avoid trouble with the beaks till his father's visit was over and done with.

When the bell rang for call-over the Bounder appeared suddenly from nowhere, as it were, and went into Hall with the rest of the Remove.

As the gates had been closed for some time, it was evident to the juniors that Smithy had got in over the Cloister wall in time for roll. But as no person in authority was aware of that, it did not matter to the Bounder. He was there to answer to his name, and that was all that mattered.

Billy Bunter blinked at him very uneasily in Hall. It could not be said that Bunter had "given away" the Bounder, as he had only told about him in the Remove. But he was afraid of the consequences, all the same. For some reason Bunter did not understand, Smithy had been very keen to keep that jape on the Head a secret, not only from authority, but from all the Greyfriars fellows. So far as the fellows were concerned, it was a secret no longer; and the fat Owl was in dread of the Bounder's savage temper.

Having turned up only just in time for roll, Vernon-Smith was still ignorant of the excitement in the Form. But he noted a good many eyes on him, and guessed that something was "on," while the juniors were answering "adsum" to Mr. Prout as he called the names. He whispered to Tom Redwing.

"What's up, Reddy?"

"A row," muttered Tom. "They've been after Bunter to make him own up to—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Silence!" called out Wingate of the Sixth.

But the Bounder did not need to ask more. He knew what to expect when the Greyfriars fellows went out of Hall.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Lie Direct!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH strolled into the Rag with his hands in his pockets. His manner was cool and careless, and he did not seem aware of the fact that the whole of the Remove, to the last man, followed him into the Rag with an excited buzz of voices.

He sauntered across to the fire, and stood with his back to it, and smiled faintly as the crowd of fellows gathered before him. He knew what was coming, and was ready for it. He had not had long to think over the new situation; but he did not need it. His mind was made up—ruthlessly. He was not going to be up for a row till after his

father had come and gone—that was settled and fixed in the Bounder's mind. If Bunter had tattled, Bunter could take the consequences; and on that point the Bounder was absolutely unscrupulous.

"Anythin' up, you men?" he drawled. "Yes," said Harry Wharton, coming directly to the point. "Some of the fellows started ragging Bunter, to make him own up to that jape with the Head's topper. He says you did it."

"Not really? He didn't say you did it?" asked the Bounder coolly.

"I!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Well, he might as well have. I suppose he would say anybody did it to get out of a ragging."

"Oh, really, Smithy—" squeaked Bunter.

"Very kind of him to pick me out for the distinction," yawned the Bounder. "Why did you select me, Bunter?"

"Why, you beast, you jolly well know you did it!" gasped Bunter helplessly. "You know I saw you in the Rag on Wednesday morning!"

"I was in the Rag on Wednesday morning," agreed the Bounder, with icy coolness. "Everybody knows that, I think. I don't seem to remember seeing you there, Bunter."

"Wha-a-at?"

"Then it wasn't you, Smithy?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Let's have this plain!" said Vernon-Smith. "Loder of the Sixth tried to jump me into admitting it, and I had him up before Quelch, and he got his hair combed for it. If you're trying the same game, Harry Wharton, you're going to get the same stuff. If you want to accuse me of japing the Head, come and say it in Quelch's study."

Wharton looked at him hard.

"Nobody's going to accuse you to a beak, as you know jolly well, Smithy," he answered. "If you did it, you ought to own up, and get all the fellows off gating. You know that. But there isn't a man in the Remove who would give you away—even Bunter. You know that, too."

"Let it drop, then," suggested Smithy.

"We can't let it drop. Whoever did it ought to own up, now things have got as far as this. Any decent fellow would."

"And I'm not a decent fellow?" sneered the Bounder.

"What's the good of putting words into my mouth, Smithy? If you did it, it beats me why you haven't owned up before this. It's not like you to put all the fellows in the soup to get out of a whopping."

The Bounder winced.

"Smithy never did it!" bawled Bolsover major. "It was Bunter—"

"It wasn't!" howled Bunter.

"Rag him!"

"Beast! I say, you fellows—"

"Stand back, Bolsover, you rhinoceros!" rapped Bob Cherry, giving the bully of the Remove a shove.

"I tell you—"

"Shut up, Bolsover!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "It's for Smithy to speak. If he says he didn't do it, we shall take his word. In that case, it must have been Bunter."

"I never—" shrieked Bunter.

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Yes, or no, Smithy?" said Bob Cherry.

The Bounder drew a deep breath.

"No!" he said.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter,

his eyes almost popping through his spectacles at the Bounder.

Bunter himself had as little regard for veracity as a fellow well could have. But, like many fibbers, he did not expect fibs from others. And this was not a "fib" like Bunter's reckless prevarications; it was a downright, deliberate falsehood. It was really beyond Bunter's own limit.

And from the Bounder it was surprising. His unscrupulousness with the "beaks" was well known; but it was equally well known that he disdained to tell a lie among his fellows.

"What did I tell you?" hooted Bolsover major. "I said all along it wasn't Smithy."

Harry Wharton looked at Bunter. His jaw had fairly dropped in his dismay and astonishment. Then he looked at Smithy.

The Bounder's face was cool and composed; the lips set hard. There was a doggedness in his expression that was not reassuring.

"I—I suppose that settles it," said the captain of the Remove slowly. "We must take Smithy's word."

"Of—of course," said Bob Cherry; but he spoke haltingly.

"Smithy's straight with us, whatever he may be with the beaks," said Skinner; but his narrow eyes were very curiously on the Bounder.

A faint colour came into Vernon-Smith's cheeks. He noted that Tom Redwing had quietly slipped out of the room, and he knew that it was because his chum was too sick with him to stay there and listen to his falsehoods.

There was an uncomfortable pause.

It was said of old that great is truth,

(Continued on next page.)

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and it must prevail. Almost every fellow in the Remove was ready, without question, to take Smithy's word on the subject. Yet somehow something seemed to ring false. A lie, though never so coolly told, can never have the ring of truth.

"I jolly well knew it was Bunter!" came Bolsover major's bull voice.

"Oh, shut up, Bolsover!" said Nugent uneasily.

"It's between the two of them, and we've had a plain answer from Smithy," said Bolsover.

"Look here! It's jolly odd!" said Squiff slowly. "Bunter says he was in the Rag at the time. You didn't see him there, Smithy?"

"I've said so!" snapped the Bounder curtly.

It was strange, perhaps, that the Bounder, who would have lied without hesitation to his headmaster or his Form-master, found the falsehoods stick in his throat now. He loathed the part he was playing. But he played it.

"Well, if Bunter played that trick you'd have seen him, if he'd been in the Rag," went on Squiff. "So he never played it there. How and where the dickens did he do it?"

"I never did——" wailed Bunter.

"He was the fellow in the passage, I suppose, who got hold of that dashed hat before Temple nailed it."

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Is that it, Bunter?" asked Bob.

"No!" yelled Bunter. "I was in the Rag—sitting in that armchair there—that very chair! Smithy didn't see me when he came in. He never knew I was there, till he'd inked the hat and chucked it out into the passage. I can tell you, he jumped when he saw me peering round the back of the chair at him."

The juniors exchanged glances. Somehow or other, fibber as Bunter was, he carried conviction now.

"And he said he'd hammer me if I said a word!" gasped Bunter. "And afterwards he said he'd put it on me if I gave him away! He wouldn't even lend me five bob, after I'd kept it dark, you know! He kicked me!"

"Oh, ring off!" said Harry Wharton. "Blessed if a fellow knows what to think. Anyhow, shut up!"

"If any fellow here can't take my word," said the Bounder deliberately, "I'm ready to knock his face through the back of his head."

"Scrapping won't settle it," said Harry, "and—and I think we take your word, Smithy—I'll try, anyhow."

"Thank you for nothin'!" sneered the Bounder.

"Bunter's got to own up!" said Bolsover major. "We're not going to be gated till the Easter hols to please Bunter."

"Let Bunter alone!" snapped Wharton.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, chuck the whole thing," said Bob Cherry. "We're bound to take Smithy's word—but—but—but Bunter's not going to be ragged! If you're keen on a row, Bolsover, you can begin with me."

Bolsover major snorted. But it was easy to see that the general feeling in the Remove had changed. Smithy's word was taken—but at the bottom of their hearts hardly any of the fellows really believed him.

"Let it drop!" said the captain of the Remove. "The fellow who played that trick, and won't own up to it, is a worm and a rotter—and we can let it go at that!"

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There was a flush in Herbert Vernon-Smith's cheeks as he walked out of the Rag. But his resolution remained unshaken. If the facts were made known to a crowd of fellows, they would not be long in reaching other ears. Nobody would "sneak"; but an exciting topic could not be talked up and down the school without getting to the knowledge of the beaks sooner or later. Neither could the Bounder have admitted that he was the fellow wanted, without owning up, which was the last thing he intended to do. He had marked out his course, and he was going to follow it, with the unscrupulous obstinacy that was a part of his nature.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Beans for Bunter!

"Y AROOOH!" roared Billy Bunter.

Cecil Reginald Temple, of the Fourth, landed his foot on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars, with what a novelist might have called a sickening thud.

It was morning break, the next day. Billy Bunter, rolling in the quad, was thinking chiefly of the tarts in the school shop—unhappily out of his reach, as he had been disappointed about a postal-order! Why Temple of the Fourth walked up and kicked him, Bunter did not know. But he knew that Temple did—he was only too painfully aware of that.

"Give him a few, you fellows!" said Temple to his friends, Dabney and Fry.

"What-ho!" said Fry.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

And they gave Bunter a few!

Billy Bunter roared! He dodged wildly, but it was not easy for the fattest fellow at Greyfriars to dodge three lunging boots.

"Ow! Wow! Beasts!" roared Bunter. "Warrer you kicking me for, you rotters? Yaroooooh!"

"Have you owned up yet?" demanded Temple.

Then Bunter understood why he was kicked.

Since the scene in the Rag, the Removites had left the fat Owl in peace. Even Bolsover major was no longer keen on ragging him into owning up. Doubt of the Bounder's denial had intensified, and there were few fellows in the Remove who did not believe that Smithy was the man.

Of all that, however, Temple & Co. were unaware. The previous day it had been rumoured all over the Lower School that Bunter was the man—his knowledge of the facts, before the inquiry started, being widely discussed, and taken as proof. Unfortunately for Bunter, all the Lower School were gated till the offender came to light; and though the Remove had dropped the subject, it was as lively as ever in the other junior Forms. Quite a number of fellows, in the Fourth and the Shell, and some warlike fags in the Third and Second, were looking for Billy Bunter that morning—and Temple & Co. so to speak, had got in early before the crush!

Yelling, the fat Owl fled from the lunging boots. He escaped from Temple & Co.—but it was an escape from the frying-pan into the fire. He ran into a bunch of the Third, headed by Tubb.

"Owned up yet?" asked Tubb.

"You cheeky little beast——" gasped Bunter.

"Boot him!" said Tubb.

Tubb and Paget and Bolsover minor, and several more fags, booted the hap-

less Owl liberally before he could escape again. And he escaped the fags, only to meet Hobson of the Shell.

"Oh, here you are!" said Hobby, taking possession of a fat ear with a finger and thumb. "Owned up yet, Bunter?"

"Yaroooooh!"

"Kick him!" said Hoskins. "I say, I shall miss that concert this afternoon if the little beast don't own up in time! Kick him!"

"Whooooop!"

Bunter fled again. Again it was an escape from the frying-pan into the fire. Nugent minor, of the Second Form, was trailing him, with Gatty and Myers of that Form. The three ran him down and commenced proceedings by knocking his hat off.

"Owned up yet?" asked Nugent minor.

Even Billy Bunter was not to be ragged with impunity by the small fry of the Second Form! He charged at his tormentors, hitting out. But it booted not! Stewart of the Shell, and Wilkinson of the Fourth, came up, and put in some effective kicking. Bunter fled once more.

"I say, you fellows!" He came up gasping to the Famous Five. "I say, look here, I've been kicked——"

"Want some more?" asked Bob Cherry, drawing back his foot.

"Beast!"

"Better cut!" grinned Nugent. "There's a Shell man coming along and——"

Bunter out.

For the first time in history, Billy Bunter was glad when break was over, and he was safe back in the Form-room. Third school, for once, was a boon and a blessing.

But he looked forward with dire apprehension to the end of class. Even Latin prose with Quelch was preferable to being turned into a fat football by a crowd of indignant fellows in the Shell, the Fourth, the Third, and the Second.

He blinked at Vernon-Smith, sitting cool and calm in his place, with deep and intense indignation.

Smithy was the culprit—Bunter knew that, if nobody else did! It was up to Smithy to own up, and save Bunter from this direful persecution!

The Bounder did not even glance at him. He seemed to have forgotten his fat existence. He was, in fact, giving sedulous attention to his Form-master—being on the good-behaviour tack at present.

Smithy had had a letter from his father that morning, stating that he would probably look in at the school that afternoon. Mr. Quelch was leaving—this was his last class with the Remove for some time to come. If Mr. Vernon-Smith barged in before Quelch left, Smithy intended that he should hear a good report of his son, from his son's Form-master.

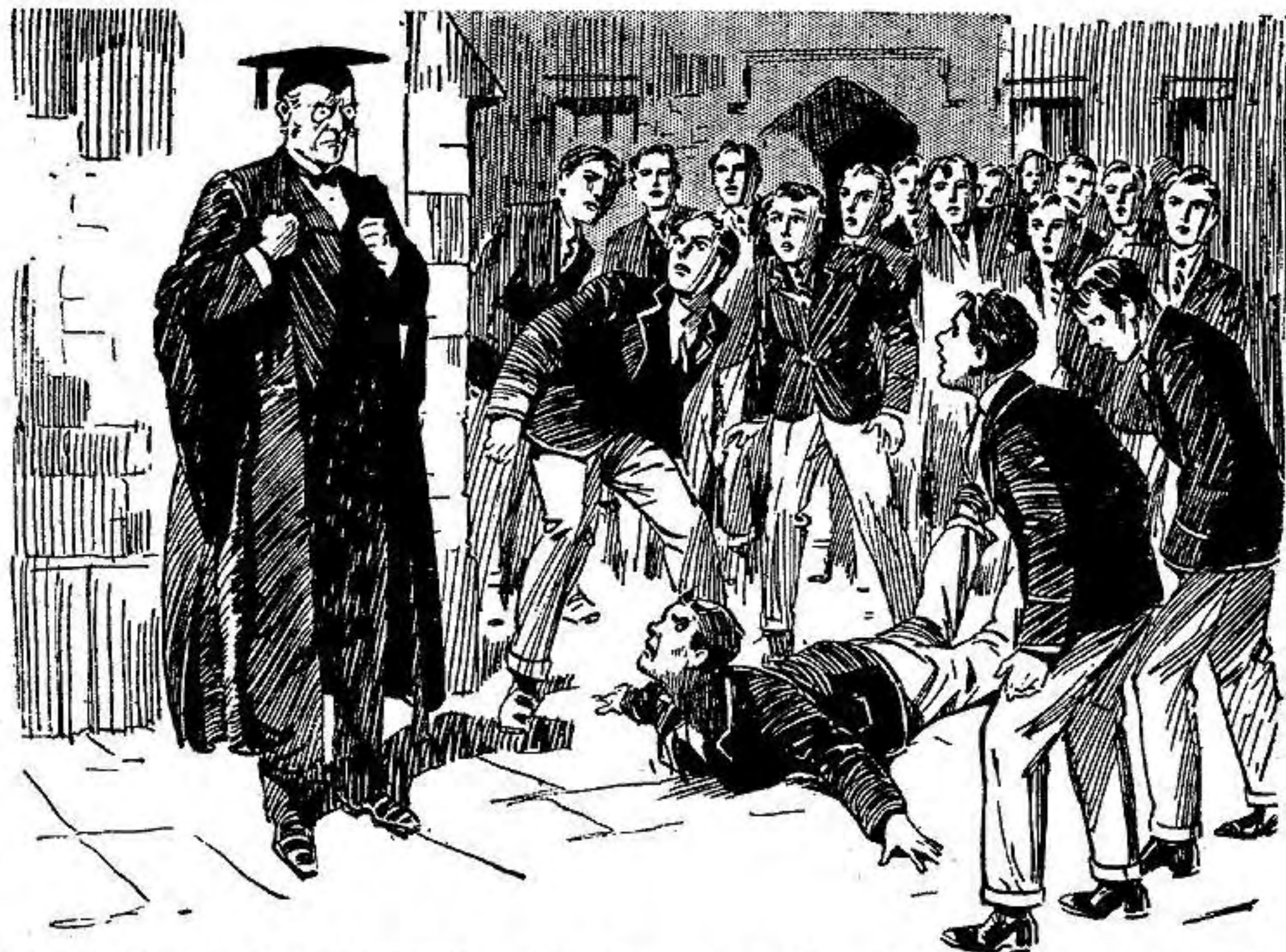
The Bounder's "con" that morning was the best in the Remove; and he was so attentive, so respectful, and so pains-taking, that Mr. Quelch gave him more than one kindly glance, and was glad to think that this boy, who had been the scapegrace of the school, was really making an effort, at last, to make good!

When the Remove were dismissed, Tom Redwing did not, as usual, join the Bounder going out; Bunter, however, did. He rolled after Vernon-Smith into the quad, with a determined expression on his fat face.

"Look here, Smithy——" he began.

"Leave me alone, you fat fool!" said the Bounder curtly.

"You've got to own up!" hissed Bunter.



Vernon-Smith was frog's-marched across the quad, to an accompaniment of trampling and shouting and yelling. "What—what does this mean?" demanded Dr. Locke, who had heard the uproar and arrived to inquire the cause. The Bounder was dropped as suddenly as if he had become red-hot, and lay sprawling, almost at the headmaster's feet, panting for breath.

The Bounder laughed.

"You rotter!" howled Bunter. "You jolly well know that you did it, and all the fellows in the Remove know you did it, too. They know you were jolly well lying when you said you didn't."

"Dreamin'?" asked the Bounder pleasantly.

"Oh, you awful beast!" gasped Bunter. "You know you did! You know I saw you put the ink in the Head's topper! You—Don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you, you beast!"

Vernon-Smith did walk away.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. His eyes gleamed with wrath through his big spectacles, and he bawled, careless of the fact that a dozen fellows or more heard him. "Rotter! Cad! Own up, you outsider! You know you did it! You've got us all gated with your rotten tricks! Go and tell the Head you did it, you rotten funk!"

The Bounder turned back, white with rage; he grabbed the Owl of the Remove by the collar.

Bang!

Bunter's bullet-head smote the trunk of an elm. It was a hard tap, and it drew a fiendish howl from the fat junior.

"That enough? Or do you want some more?" snarled the Bounder.

"Ow! My napper! Yarooo! Leggo!" raved Bunter. "I'll go to Wingate! I'll go to Quelch! I'll go to the Head! I'll—Yaroooo!"

Bang!

"Ow! Wow! Yow!" roared Bunter. "Take that as a tip!" said Vernon-Smith, and he released the fat Owl and turned away.

"Beast! You know you did it!" yelled Bunter. "I saw you put the ink in the Head's topper, and you know I did!"

With glittering eyes the Bounder came back at him. And Loder of the Sixth, coming out of the House, turned his head—his eyes glittering, too. This was a chance for Loder—the chance he had been looking for ever since Mr. Quelch had "combed his hair for him," as the Bounder expressed it. The prefect strode quickly to the spot.

"Stop that, Vernon-Smith!" he rapped.

The Bounder, about to grasp Bunter again, scowled round at him.

"Keep off, you beast!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows, keep him off! I say—" The fat junior broke off as he perceived Loder of the Sixth. "Oh crikey!" he gasped.

"So you saw Vernon-Smith putting the ink in Dr. Locke's hat that day, Bunter!" said Loder exultantly.

"Oh lor'!"

Loder dropped a hand on his shoulder.

"Come with me, Bunter!"

"I—I say, Loder—"

"Come on!"

"Oh lor'!"

Loder marched the fat Owl into the House, taking no further notice of the Bounder. A number of fellows were looking at Vernon-Smith very curiously. He gave a defiant glare round and drove his hands deep into his pockets and tramped away. Redwing, utterly sick with his chum, had been avoiding him that day, but he joined him now.

"The game's up, Smithy!" he said in a low tone. "For goodness' sake, old fellow, cut off to Quelch before he hears it all from Bunter!"

The Bounder gave him a bitter look. "Mind your own bizney!" he answered, and he turned his back on his chum.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

An Open Verdict!

HARRY WHARTON came out of the House and looked round the quad; there was a cloud on his face.

"Seen Smithy?" he called out. "He's wanted."

"Over by the elms," said Temple of the Fourth. "I say, is it true that Smithy was the man? I thought it was at first, only—"

"Bunter seems to have told Quelch that he was," said Harry. "Anyhow, it will come out now."

He crossed over to the elms and found the Bounder there, tramping moodily alone, with his hands in his pockets. Vernon-Smith met him with a dark, fierce look.

"What do you want?" he said, between his teeth. "More questions to ask, you cheeky rotter? I'm in a mood to knock you spinnin', so you'd better not—"

"Quelch wants you in his study," said Harry curtly. "If you were telling us lies yesterday, Vernon-Smith, you'd better not try the same game with Quelch. Anyhow, you're wanted."

"Has Bunter told him?"

"Do you think he could keep anything in, with Quelch dragging it out? Of course, he's let out the whole thing."

"That means that you believe Bunter, and not me?" said the Bounder.

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Wharton looked him steadily in the face.

"Yes!" he answered. "I've tried to believe you, Smithy, but it's no go. Bunter's a fearful fibber, but he's telling the truth now—anybody can see that he is. You ought to have had more sense, Smithy, if you hadn't more decency. Lying is a mug's game; the truth always leaks out somehow. I know that it was you, and so does every other fellow in the Remove."

"Fat lot I care about that if I pull through with Quelch!" sneered the Bounder. He clenched his hands. "You're glad of a chance to be down on me; you've never been my friend. Well, that's how much I care for you and what you choose to believe!"

And he struck full at the face of the captain of the Remove.

Wharton's hand shot up, and he knocked the blow aside. His eyes gleamed with scorn.

"You may pull through with Quelch," he said. "But if you do, you won't pull through with the Remove. You're found out, you rotter, and the only decent thing you can do now is to own up!"

He backed away, as the Bounder came at him with clenched hands and flaming eyes.

"You silly ass!" he exclaimed. "Quelch is waiting for you! Do you want a prefect to come after you?"

The Bounder dropped his hands and stalked away to the House. Three or four fellows spoke to him as he went, but he did not answer them or look at them. With a scowling face and a heavy heart, he went in and made his way slowly to his Form-master's study.

Mr. Quelch's eyes were like cold steel as they turned on him. Billy Bunter stood by the table in a dismal state of dismay. Loder was gone—in a very satisfied frame of mind. It was Smithy's turn to have his "hair combed." He had laughed over his victory over Loder, but it was Loder who had the last laugh. Smithy, as he came in, did not need telling that Quelch had extracted the whole story from Bunter, and that he believed it. His face was dark with anger.

It was unpleasant enough for this to transpire on Mr. Quelch's last day in the school; it was still more unpleasant to have to admit that the offender was, after all, in his Form, and to leave Messrs. Hacker, Capper, Twigg, and Wiggins that tit-bit to chew over. Most unpleasant of all was the discovery that the Bounder had fooled him; that in his anxiety to believe that the culprit was not in the Remove he had shown less than his usual perspicacity, and allowed an unscrupulous fellow to pull the wool over his eyes.

"Vernon-Smith"—the Remove-master's voice was rather like a saw under a file—"you know why I have sent for you!"

"Not at all, sir." The Bounder was cool and calm. He had a fear that, as Wharton had told him, the game was up; but he was going to play it out to the finish.

"It seems, from Bunter's statement, that he was in the recreation-room on Wednesday morning when a trick was played on the headmaster."

"Indeed, sir! He did not say so when you questioned the Remove that day."

"You jolly well know why, you beast!" gasped Bunter. "You know you said you'd put it on me—"

"Silence, Bunter! Do you deny that Bunter was there, Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder desperately.

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"You deny that you—hem!—introduced ink into the headmaster's hat?"

"I do, sir."

Mr. Quelch's gimlet-eyes seemed to pierce him. But the Bounder stood steadfast and stubborn. The contempt in those searching eyes stung him. He was lying, and his Form-master knew that he was lying; he realised that. But proof was another matter.

"I do not believe you, Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch at last.

"I'm sorry for that, sir," said the Bounder coolly.

There was a pause.

"Might I point out, sir," said the Bounder with icy coolness, "that Bunter is well known never to tell the truth?"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"It's rather hard, sir, if a fellow is to be found guilty on the word of the biggest liar at Greyfriars."

"You jolly well know—" gasped Bunter.

"Silence! I am quite aware of Bunter's untruthfulness, Vernon-Smith; but I am not without judgment," said Mr. Quelch coldly. "On this occasion I most certainly believe what Bunter has said, and believe that he was threatened by you—"

"Nothin' of the kind, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch, rising.

"I have, as I believe, found the offender, but it is a matter for the headmaster to decide. I shall now take you both to Dr. Locke, and he will judge."

"I'm ready, sir!"

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

"Follow me!" said the Remove master.

The Bounder's manner was quite cool as he followed his Form-master. Billy Bunter mumbled dismally as he went, his fat face full of uneasiness. On their looks, Bunter might certainly have been taken for the guilty party—at all events, by an eye less keen than Quelch's. A crowd of fellows gathered, and watched them as they went. From the corner of the Head's corridor they watched the door of the dreaded apartment close on them.

"Thrillin', ain't it?" yawned Skinner, when several long minutes had ticked away. "How long are they going to be?"

"I wonder if Smithy will get by with it?" said Bob Cherry. "Will he have the nerve to tell the Head crammers?"

"Smithy's got nerve enough for anything!" said Peter Todd. "My hat, what an absolute rotter the man is!"

"The rottenfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

"Can't catch on, you know," said Bolsover major. Even Bolsover now took the same view as the rest of the Form. "Smithy's not a sneaking funk—at least, he never used to be. It's plain enough that he did it, and any fellow would have said that he'd own up like a shot."

"He will have to if they don't bowl him out!" said Skinner. "We're not going to be gated for the rest of the term to please Smithy, any more than to please Bunter!"

"They'll bowl him out all right!" said Hazeldene.

Keen excitement was growing as the minutes passed. The fellows waiting at the corner of the passage would have given a great deal to know what was passing in the Head's study.

If Smithy was sticking to his denial, it seemed doubtful whether he could be condemned on the sole testimony of a fellow with a reputation like Bunter's. Was he sticking to it? Had he the nerve to lie to his headmaster as he had lied to the fellows in the Rag? They all

knew that he had lied. But would the Head know it? Would he feel sure, if he did know it, to hand out a flogging? It was really a thrilling situation, and the crowd thickened, and whispered and murmured, and gazed down the long corridor towards the Head's door.

That door opened at last.

Bunter and Vernon-Smith came out. Mr. Quelch, apparently, was remaining with the Head.

All eyes were on the two as they came up the corridor.

"What's the jolly old verdict?" asked Skinner.

The Bounder did not speak. He pushed through the crowd and walked away, looking neither to the right nor to the left. But Billy Bunter was ready to talk. Talking, in fact, was Bunter's long suit!

"I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter. "I say, they're flummoxed! You'd hardly believe that Smithy would stand up before the Beak and roll out lies, but he did! I told the truth, of course, and—"

"Of course!" said Skinner. "You never tell anything else, do you?"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"But what's the verdict?" asked Harry Wharton.

"There ain't any," said Bunter.

"They jolly well believed me, but the Head said that proof would be required. As if my word wasn't proof enough, you know! I call it insulting!"

"So it's a case of 'as you were'?" said Bob Cherry. "My hat, that man Smithy has a nerve on him!"

"And we're still gated!" said Skinner. "Well, now that we know it was Smithy, he can fool the beaks if he likes, but he can't fool us! If he won't own up and do the decent thing, we'll jolly well make him!"

"Yes, rather!"

The Bounder had gone to his study. He was alone there, pacing moodily to and fro, when the captain of the Remove looked in. He gave Wharton a savage look.

"Step in, and I'll knock you out again!" he said, between his teeth.

"Thanks, I'm not coming in! I've called to tell you that you've got to own up! You've got till tea-time!" said the captain of the Remove.

"I'm goin' out to tea!" sneered the Bounder.

"You're not—unless you've owned up before you go!" said Wharton tersely.

And with that he walked away, leaving the fellow who was now something like an outcast in his Form to his own bitter reflections.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Ragging for Smithy!

"STOP!"

"I'm goin' out!"

"You're not!"

The Bounder had to stop. Seven or eight Remove fellows were in his way. They lined up to stop him.

That Saturday afternoon the Head's sentence of "gating" came into force; it was the first half-holiday since that sentence had been given. Gosling, at the gates, had orders to stop any of the Lower School from going out. Smithy had headed for the Cloisters, to drop over the wall there. But a good many eyes were on Smithy.

Whether the scapegrace of Greyfriars broke bounds or not mattered nothing to the Removites. That was not the point. He could break bounds or not, as he pleased—after he had "owned up."

(Continued on page 28.)

THRILL-PACKED STORY OF AMAZING DETECTIVE ADVENTURE.

The MAN BEHIND the SCENES!



Starring **FERRERS LOCKE**, detective, and his clever boy assistant, **JACK DRAKE**.

BY
HEDLEY SCOTT

HOW THE STORY STARTED.

CHRISTOPHER DEAN is attempting a double Atlantic flight when his machine is wrecked in mid-ocean by a bomb which has been cunningly hidden in the fuselage. Discovering that a big insurance was effected on Dean's life, **FERRERS LOCKE**, detective, suspects **JULIUS TANKERHEAD** and **MERVYN VILLIERS** of being double-dyed scoundrels who are operating behind many sporting ventures. (Now read on.)

Crook Cunning!

MR. **JULIUS TANKERHEAD** was alone.

Locked away from the rest of the world in his own private den, to which even no servant was admitted, Julius Tankerhead worshipped the god which ruled his every thought, his every action—money.

Like the misers of old—who were accustomed to spending hours among their ill-gotten gains, allowing the golden coins to trickle through their grasping fingers, away from the sight of men—Julius Tankerhead indulged the ruling passion of his life. He counted his money.

Around him, in neat piles, on the polished surface of the gilded table, were stacks and stacks of five-pound Bank of England notes, representing the sum of one hundred thousand pounds.

Above him the glittering lights from a crystal chandelier shed an extravagant glow over the sumptuously appointed room, flickering across the gilded furniture, which once had graced the gorgeous palace of Louis XV. Rare Persian rugs covered the parquet flooring, whilst an ormolu clock ticked away monotonously on the marble mantel.

In keeping with this wealth of extravagance, wondrous diamonds sparkled and glowed on the ugly, knuckly fingers of Julius Tankerhead. A myriad lights danced and swayed on their sharply cut facets as Tankerhead's fingers ran through each bundle of notes for the third time that evening.

Across the room, directly in front of where he sat, a large gilded mirror reflected his changing expressions. Greed distorted his features until his eyes glittered uncannily, whilst his lips parted over his teeth so as to render the expression of the face like unto that of some hideous mask. Then the greed

would fade out, leaving behind a sullen, vengeful expression. That was when the thought recurred to Julius Tankerhead that exactly half the sum of money on the table had to be paid over to someone else.

Parting with money, where Julius Tankerhead was concerned, was much worse than a severe pain; it was almost a heart attack.

"Ah!" He hissed the ejaculation through clenched teeth. "I do all the work, plan everything, and yet all I get is a paltry fifty thousand pounds! That bloodsucking partner of mine is too much of a sleeping partner—" He broke off and laughed fiendishly. "Perhaps one day he will really be a sleeping partner."

The murderous thought apparently comforted him, for he separated the piles of banknotes into two distinct heaps and sat gazing at them reflectively. Then, with a light chuckle, he pulled open the drawer of a small bureau close handy and drew out a photograph.

It showed a smiling likeness of Christopher Dean, the ill-fated pilot who had set out to make the double Atlantic flight.

"Poor fellow!" mused Tankerhead, gibbering at the photograph. "Of course, you never knew how valuable to me your miserable life was. And when you struck me, five years ago, you never guessed that I would be avenged—with a handsome profit into the bargain. Bah!" His mood changed, and, with a savage snarl, he ripped the photograph across again and again, and tossed the pieces into a gilded wastepaper-basket.

At the same moment a small electric bulb, fashioned like a flower, amid a filigree structure of plaited gold which stood upon the table, glowed a delicate shade of blue.

It was a signal from his butler that his presence was required on urgent business.

"Drat the man!" muttered Tankerhead, gathering up one pile of the banknotes and stuffing it away in a secret safe. "That will be Mervyn. He loses no time in coming to collect his money."

Savagely he snatched up the second heap of banknotes and stuffed it into the pocket of his velvet smoking jacket. Then, crossing to the wall, he touched

a hidden spring, and a complete section of the enamelled and gold-encrusted panelling swung aside on a central pivot, giving a view of an ordinary-looking library beyond. Thumbing out the electric lights, Tankerhead passed out of his private den, switched the secret doorway back into position, and hastened to meet his caller.

It was, as he had surmised, Mervyn Villiers—fat and smiling and overwhelmingly friendly.

Julius Tankerhead appeared equally friendly as, a few moments later, he poured out a liberal refreshment for his visitor and raised a glass himself.

"Here's to our next coup, Mervyn!"

"Here's to it, my dear old friend!" responded Villiers with great fervour. "May it work out as smoothly as Christopher Dean's Atlantic flight did—"

"Fool!" snapped Tankerhead. "No names! Am I not always reminding you of that?"

"Sorry!" apologised Villiers, and straightway in whispered tones he gave a faithful account of his sailorman visitor and the fate that had overtaken him.

Tankerhead whistled when his partner had concluded.

"That might have been dangerous, Mervyn," he said. "You are sure Morris did the job neatly? You're sure the flask and log book were destroyed—"

Mervyn Villiers nodded emphatically.

"And the piece of the bomb is now reposing at the bed of the river. We're as safe as houses. By the way," he added, "that blamed detective Ferrers Locke phoned me the other day."

Tankerhead started uncomfortably.

"Locke—the Baker Street detective! Gosh! What the dickens did he want with you?"

"He asked me if I knew a Julius Tankerhead," said Mervyn Villiers, sitting well back in his armchair and rather enjoying the discomfiture of his friend. "But I told him, of course, that I'd never heard of you."

This piece of information, intended to be reassuring, had a disturbing effect upon Julius Tankerhead. He rose from his chair and began to walk up and down the room. Suddenly he wheeled

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and faced his lounging visitor with a fixed stare.

"Do you believe in horoscopes—and things like that, Mervyn?" he asked abruptly.

Mervyn Villiers broke out into coarse laughter.

"Good lor', no!" he exclaimed. "Don't tell me that you do, Julius."

Tankerhead licked his lips nervously.

"Well, I don't," he returned. "But some quack got hold of me the other day and declared that ill-fortune was going to descend on me through a lock. Of course, it was all nonsense, I know. But every time I think of that word I think also of that accursed detective, Ferrers Locke. A few years ago he nearly caught me out, and I've never felt entirely safe since."

He glanced down to see Mervyn Villiers twitching with laughter.

"And now you tell me Ferrers Locke was inquiring after me through you. I wonder—I wonder—"

Another look at the derisive expression on the face of his visitor brought a nervous smile to Tankerhead's countenance.

"Oh, I know I'm a fool! Let's forget it. Here, let me fill your glass!"

There was a slight pause as glasses were filled and cigars lit up.

"By the way, Mervyn," said Tankerhead suddenly, "in case this nousey guy Ferrers Locke is after something, you and I had better stage a first meeting at the club when he's present; make it appear as if we've never met before. Got the idea?"

"Anything you like," agreed Villiers. "Now"—he leaned forward in his chair—"what about settling up?"

A smile spread over the lined face of Julius Tankerhead, but his mean soul shrivelled. With no show of reluctance, however, he withdrew from his pocket the pile of banknotes.

"There you are, my old friend," he said—"a cool fifty thousand of the best."

A light of greed shone in Villiers' eyes, and so engrossed was he in checking the banknotes handed to him that he failed to see the malevolent expression that dwelt in the face of his partner in crime.

"All correct, Julius," he announced, at length, by which time the hypocritical smile had returned to the face of his host. "Now, let's go over this business for Saturday. You've got the wagers fixed, of course?"

Julius Tankerhead sniffed.

"Of course. I've backed Malpen Villa at odds of two to one. The 'bookie' thinks I'm barmy, or near it, for on paper the result of the match is a certainty for the Athletic."

"I should say it is!" laughed Villiers. "Why, they haven't lost a home match this season, and the Villa are at the bottom of the table. The money's safe, of course?"

"Safe?" sniffed Tankerhead. "Why, Joe Blimers' nearly a millionaire. He'll take wagers over anything, from horse-racing to football or tiddly-winks. Anything from a pound to fifty thousand suits Joe, the poor fool!"

Both men laughed. Then they fell to serious discussion in lowered tones. Finally, Mervyn Villiers rose to go.

"I'll work the stunt with the footer boots, Julius, never fear. It's a great idea, and it has another virtue—it's a certainty. See you at the club tomorrow. Believe Locke always lunches there on a Thursday. Get someone to

introduce you to us. After all, you're a new member. It'll be easy!"

Five minutes later Mervyn Villiers, whistling softly, entered a taxi which had been waiting outside Tankerhead's highly respectable looking house and drove off. And the moment the taxi was out of sight a boy standing on the other side of the road apparently attending to some small defect in the chain of his tradesman's bicycle, mounted his cycle and drove off. He stopped at an out-of-the-way phone box, and was soon through to a Baker Street number.

"J this end, guv'nor. Been watching T's house all day. V called on him this evening and stayed for half an hour. Went out looking as if he'd lost a penny and found the first prize in the Irish sweepstake. What's your orders?"

"Come home!" Ferrers Locke's voice was crisp and short.

Two On the Trail!

"W E'RE getting warm, my lad!"

It was the following evening and Ferrers Locke was taking his ease before a glowing fire. In the opposite chair sat Jack Drake, no longer attired as a tradesman's errand boy.

At the present moment he was engaged in sticking a number of pieces of cardboard into position on a sheet of cartridge paper. Gradually, under his patient handling, the odd jumble of pieces was beginning to take the shape of a photograph.

"It's Christopher Dean all right, guv'nor!" he announced, a few moments later, fitting the last torn fragment into position. "Funny, isn't it, that I should find these pieces in Tankerhead's dustbin this morning?"

Locke's keen face was grim.

"Hardly funny, my boy!" he said quietly. "To me, it signifies something tragic."

"Well, I didn't mean funny in a literal sense, guv'nor," said Drake hastily. "But in view of your suspicions that some dirty plot between Tankerhead and Villiers resulted in Dean's death, out there in the Atlantic—"

He broke off.

"Yes, my lad, it certainly is extraordinary," put in Locke. "There's another thing, too. I lunched to-day, as I usually do on a Thursday, at the Sporting Club. And what do you think, Mervyn Villiers stood me a drink, and began to chat away for quite ten minutes."

"What was his game, guv'nor?"

Locke laughed lightly.

"That wasn't hard to fathom, my lad, when Mr. Julius Tankerhead, sponsored by the club secretary, was introduced to both of us—"

"To both of you?" echoed Jack. "But the villain Tankerhead knows Villiers and vice versa—"

"You wouldn't have thought so had you been at the club, my boy. To all intents and purposes they were meeting for the first time. And shall I tell you why? Because Villiers has obviously told Tankerhead that I inquired about him the other day. You remember Villiers declared that he had never heard of the man. A bluff—but I haven't got the full strength of it yet."

He fell silent, and drew meditatively at his seasoned briar, enveloping himself in a rising cloud of smoke.

"I've hit something else to-day, too, at the club," he resumed. "I had an awful job to steer clear of that blessed bookie, Joe Blimers. I was nearly rude to him, but, as it turned out, I'm glad I was a bit tolerant."

Drake looked interested.

"Jack," said Locke, "you know something about football. Well, who do you think will win the Athletic versus Malpen Villa match on Saturday?"

Drake's answer was swift and pat.

"Athletic, of course! The Villa really don't stand an earthly, guv'nor."

Locke nodded.

"So I gathered; but my talkative friend Joe, when I asked him politely how business was, cocked one eye at me in that horrid way he has, and laughed boisterously. Then he pointed, in the equally objectionable way he has, across the lounge to where Tankerhead was sitting, yarning with Villiers. Next he said: 'Lumme, give me a few more mugs like 'im an' streuth, I won't 'ave to do a 'and's work in a month or so!'"

Ferrers Locke knocked out the burnt ash from his pipe. Then he added:

"Which, being interpreted, boils down to this, that Mr. Tankerhead has wagered a small fortune on the result of Saturday's match, and that he's backed the Villa, the despised don't-stand-an-earthly team!"

"Phew!" whistled Drake. "No one but a fool would back the Villa, if they must back on the results of footer matches. It's about the daftest thing I've heard this season."

"And a small fortune wagered at Tankerhead's end will mean a large fortune for him if the Villa manage to pull it off," said Locke slowly. "You see, the talkative Joe confided in me that he had laid the estimable Tankerhead odds of two to one."

Drake whistled again.

"Then there's something fishy behind it," he ejaculated shrewdly. "Tankerhead's not a mug—a scoundrel, yes; but a mug, never!"

"Your perspicacity does you credit, my lad," smiled the detective, "for that is exactly my opinion of Mr. Tankerhead. Unless I'm mightily mistaken, something's going to happen to upset the result of that match—something drastic enough to ensure a win for the Villa."

"It certainly seems so," agreed Jack. "But if you think it's a case of squaring the players, guv'nor," he added hastily, "let me tell you you're wrong. The Athletic, to a man, are sportsmen. You couldn't buy them, not for all the gold in the country. In fact, I know all the players personally."

Ferrers Locke smiled reassuringly.

"My lad, you and I are not going to be at loggerheads over that. I'll believe you. There's something far more tricky than that behind Mr. Tankerhead's wager, I'll be bound."

"Oh, is there?" grunted Drake, who was a lover of football, and, incidentally, something of a "fan" where the fortunes of the Athletic were concerned. "Then it's time someone put a spoke in his wheel."

"That's exactly what I propose doing. Let me see, unless my memory is at fault, Villiers is a director of the Athletic, isn't he?"

"Correct!" answered Drake. "He joined the board this season."

"Then possibly some villainy will be contrived by him, for I'm convinced now that Tankerhead and Villiers are co-partners."

"Short of crocking the players, I don't see how the match can go against the Athletic," said Drake. "And even if they had to put out a full reserve eleven they'd still whack the Villa. Why, guv'nor, the Villa's the worst team in the three Leagues. They're certain to be relegated this season."

"I'm inclined to agree with you," returned Locke. "We shall have to watch these precious partners as patiently as a cat watches a mouse. And the sooner we set about it the better."

But throughout the following day, despite the close watch Locke and Drake kept on the movements of Tankerhead and Mervyn Villiers, no clue came to light.

Julius Tankerhead had retired for the night, that much was told Ferrers Locke when he called at the man's house half an hour before midnight and asked if he could see him; and by tracing the movements and deciphering them of certain shadows on the blind of an upstairs window, Locke knew that the footman who answered the door was telling the truth.

Accordingly, the detective drove round to Villiers' house in Malplaquet Crescent to pick up Jack Drake, as arranged.

Here a surprise awaited him, for chalked on the pavement, in shorthand, at the spot where the two had arranged to meet, Locke read the following message:

"M. left at 11 o'clock. Will send a message by taxi moment I know where he's heading. Please wait here."

"J."

And it was while Ferrers Locke smudged out that clever message, so as to render it undecipherable, that a taximan drove up, saw the detective's car, and came over to speak to the owner.

"You Mr. Henry?" asked the driver. "Cause, if so, I've got a message from a young cove for you."

"I am Mr. Henry," replied Locke, comforted by his assistant's discretion in not giving his real name. "I am expecting a message from a young cove as you call him."

The taximan scratched his head.

"Well, it's a blooming queer message, guv'nor," he said. "But as the young cove gave me a quid to deliver it here at eleven-thirty, I s'pose he knows what he's talking about."

"Exactly," smiled Ferrers Locke. "But kindly give me the message."

"Dressing-room," returned the taximan. "That's all the young cove said. 'Dressing-room.' Queer, ain't it, guv'nor?"

But Ferrers Locke did not linger to discuss the matter. That short message told him that Jack Drake had followed "M.," who was, supposedly, Morris, the confidential servant of Mervyn Villiers, to the Athletic's football ground. The second part of the message, "Dressing-room," suggested where Locke should meet his assistant.

Leaving the taximan muttering, he jumped into the driving-seat of his sports car, and was soon speeding towards the London Athletic Football Club's ground.

He made the journey in twenty minutes, parked the car in a side street, and cautiously approached the entrance nearest the main grand stand, underneath which were the dressing-rooms and offices of the club.

The gates, of course, were locked and barred, and a hoarding of thirty feet in height provided a seemingly insurmountable barrier. But Ferrers Locke

usually travelled prepared for emergencies.

In the darkened street he peered about him to see that no one was abroad and paying attention to him, then he withdrew from a large pocket inside his jacket—known as a poacher's pocket, on account of its size and depth—a coil of finely plaited rope, with a grappling-hook, covered with rubber, at one end.

It was a comparatively simple matter for the detective to throw up the grappling-hook so that it caught and wedged against the top of the hoarding, and in a very few moments he was shinning up the rope with the agility of a monkey.

Once on the top of the hoarding he tried to pierce the gloom inside the ground with eyes that were well-trained to seeing things in the dark, and fancied he caught sight of two dim, moving shapes close to the middle of the giant stand.

Only for a second or so did the detective linger on the top of the hoarding, what time he reversed the grappling-hook, drew up the rope, and then let it swing down on the inner side of the fencing.

A quick slide, and his feet were once more planted on firm earth, the rope swinging slightly against the fence as he released his grip of it.

Once again those keen eyes peered through the curtain of darkness to the back of the grand stand. What they saw, this time, brought a murmur of dismay from the detective's compressed lips.

Only one figure remained upright now, the other was making off at a run in the opposite direction towards the north-east entrance.

With a feeling of disaster, and worse, throbbing through him, Locke broke into a run.

He pulled up short, however, as those cat-like eyes of his suddenly became aware of a figure lying in his path. Another moment, and the detective was kneeling by the side of that still, prone figure, knowing instinctively that it was Jack Drake.

It was Drake, and he was "out" to the wide. A length of rubber tubing, lying close handy, and obviously abandoned by his assailant, showed the manner of the attack upon him.

Locke, feeling the back of the boy's head, touched upon a lump there as big as an egg. It was a hefty knock, and it had completely stunned the youngster; but it was not a dangerous blow.

And even while the detective was feeling in his pocket for a brandy-flask, Drake's eyes opened.

He blinked about him uncertainly for a second or so, and then realised that his beloved chief was kneeling by his side.

"Hallo, guv'nor!" he smiled faintly. "Guess the blighter caught me napping!"

"Bad luck, young 'un!" said Locke comfortingly. "Did you get a glimpse of him?"

Drake smiled ruefully.

"Yes; but he'd got a mask on. Still, I'm pretty sure it was Morris. I followed him here, saw him let himself into the club-rooms, but couldn't follow, because he shut the door behind him. 'Thought I'd wait until he came out—' He broke off and touched his head ruefully. "But the artful rotter didn't come out of the same door as he went. That's how I got this!"

"Never mind, young 'un. It's all in the day's work. But tell me, how long was this fellow inside the club-rooms?"

"Twenty minutes, I should say," replied Drake, sitting up. "And, obviously, he was up to something. What are you going to do, guv'nor?"

"I'm going in, too, Jack. You stay here—get the air; will clear your head—and keep watch."

"O.K., guv'nor," replied Drake calmly. "And one thing comforts me watching you. If ever the detective business falls flat you'll be able to turn burglar. Jove, I've never seen a lock picked more quickly."

But the Baker Street detective, pocketing his bunch of skeleton keys, hardly heard that. Already he was on the inner side of the door and softly closing it behind him.

(Ferrers Locke doesn't let the grass grow under his feet, does he, chums? Look out for some startling developments in next week's gripping chapters.)

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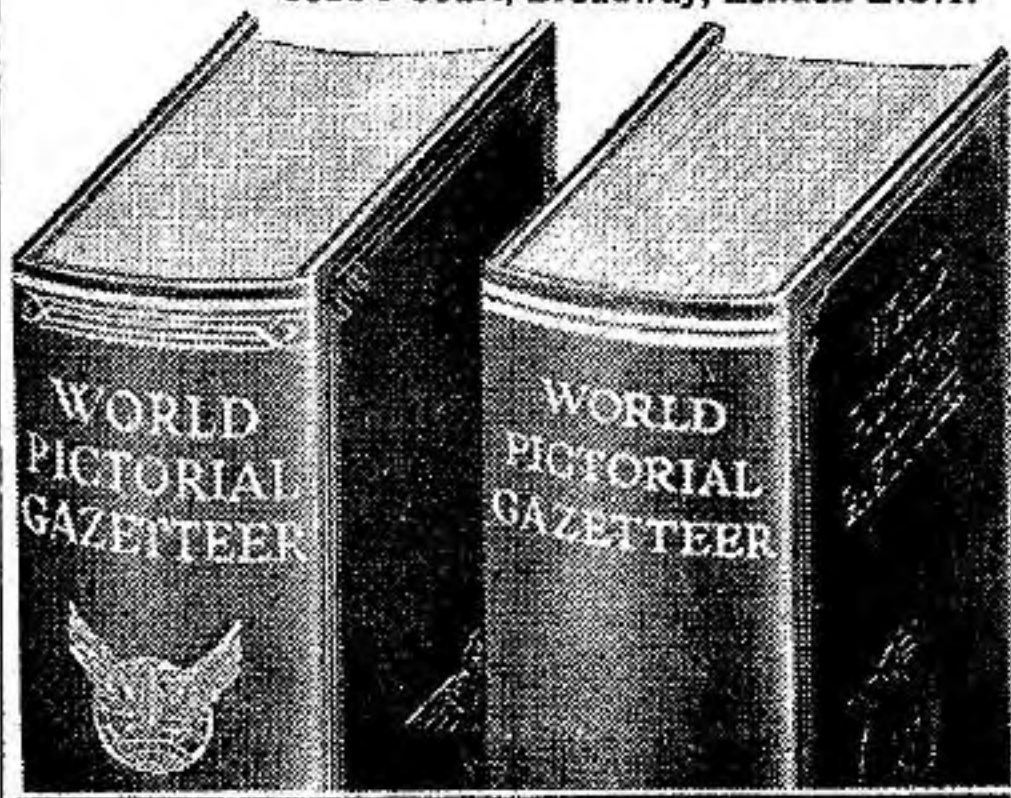
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THE MYSTERY OF THE HEAD'S HAT!

(Continued from page 24.)

That was the point. And on that point all the Lower Fourth had made up their minds.

Vernon-Smith clenched his hands almost convulsively, his eyes glittering at the juniors under his knitted brows.

"Will you let me pass?" he asked in a choking voice.

"No!" said Harry Wharton coolly.

"I'm goin' out!" breathed the Bounder.

It was nearly tea-time, and that afternoon Smithy had had a phone call from his father. Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith was not, after all, coming that day. Whether the angry millionaire was playing "cat-and-mouse," as Smithy bitterly suspected, or whether the booming state of stocks and shares in the City kept him extremely busy—anyhow, his promised visit was put off again. The Bounder intended to go over to Highcliffe to tea with Pon & Co.—now that he knew that he was not to expect his father. But there were difficulties in the way.

He stood and eyed the juniors. It was clear that he was making up his mind to rush.

"Better think twice, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "Have a little sense, old man! You played that silly trick on the Head—we all know it now! The Lower School's gated for the rest of the term if you don't own up! You're bound to do it!"

"You've jolly well got to, Smithy!" hooted Bolsover major. "And I'll jolly well lend a hand ragging you, if you don't!"

The Bounder sneered.

"A ragging, what?" he said. "I hear that you stopped them from ragging Bunter. Wharton, when they fancied that Bunter was the man."

"That's different," said the captain of the Remove. "Bunter's a silly ass, and you're not! There was some doubt in Bunter's case—but there's none in yours!"

The Bounder made a sudden rush.

"Stop him!" shouted Bob.

Many hands grasped at the Bounder. He hit out fiercely, and Peter Todd went over backwards, with a crash; and Bolsover major roaring, sprawled across him. But the next moment Vernon-Smith was overpowered, struggling fiercely and furiously in the hands that held him.

"Jolly old wildcat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Bag him!"

"Bump him!"

The Bounder, struggling fiercely, was bumped, and bumped again. Then, with a desperate wrench, he broke loose and dashed back into the quad.

"After him!" roared Johnny Bull.

And the juniors went whooping in chase. There were plenty of fellows in the quad, and many eyes fell on the chase. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth rushed to intercept the Bounder.

There was a terrific crash as they met, and they rolled on the ground in a heap.

The Bounder scrambled up, red with rage and exertion. But there was no escape for him. Hobson of the Shell made a jump at him and grasped him. As they struggled the Removites came panting up.

"Let me go, you rotters!" yelled the Bounder.

"Are you ownin' up?" demanded Hobby. "We all know about you now, you sneaking rotter! Owning up yet?"

"Hang you!"

"Frog's-march!" said Wharton.

"Hear, hear!"

"Good egg!"

Panting, and still resisting savagely, the Bounder was grabbed by a crowd of hands, and swept along in the frog's-march. More and more fellows came running up, till he was the centre of a shouting mob.

It was a very unusual scene in the Greyfriars quad, and perhaps the fact that their Form-master, Mr. Quelch, was now gone, caused the Removites to let themselves go a little. Right across the quad went the Bounder in the frog's-march, to an accompaniment of trampling and shouting and yelling.

"What—what—what—"

"Oh, my hat! The Head!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Dr. Locke had observed the uproar, and arrived to inquire the cause.

The Bounder was dropped as suddenly as if he had become red-hot! He lay sprawling, almost at the head-master's feet, panting for breath. The juniors stood round him, blinking at the Head—Remove and Fourth and Shell.

"What—what does this mean?" demanded the Head.

"Hem!"

"Hobson, what—"

"It—it—it's a ragging, sir!" stammered Hobby.

"Vernon-Smith!"

The Bounder staggered to his feet.

The Head, looked at him—long and hard! Then he looked round at the flushed and uneasy faces of the juniors. Probably it did not take the head-master long to put two and two together. He had had to let the Bounder off, on insufficient evidence; but it was fairly clear that the Lower School of Greyfriars considered the evidence sufficient. Nobody intended to tell the Head anything; but he did not need telling. There was a long pause—and then Dr. Locke spoke, in quiet tones:

"Let there be no more of this!"

"Very well, sir!" said Hobson meekly.

"You hear me Wharton?"

"Yes, sir!"

The Head rustled away. The Bounder, panting, glared defiance at the crowd of juniors. They gave him grim looks—but no hand was laid on him again as he swung away. The ragging was over!

"I say, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter came scuttling out of the House ten minutes later.

"I say, it's washed out!" yelled Bunter.

"What is, fathead?" growled Cherry.

"The gating! There's a new notice on the board, cancelling it!" squeaked the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh, my hat!"

There was a rush to see the new paper on the board. It was true; the "gating" of the Lower School was cancelled. The Head, evidently, had lost no time.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"That means that the Beak knows!" he said. "He knows it was Smithy—though he's letting him off! Well, we can let the rotter rip now—the gating's off!"

And there was general satisfaction.

Vernon-Smith "tea'd" with Pon & Co. at Highcliffe, and when he came back probably he expected a renewal of the ragging.

But the affair was at an end—there was no more trouble of that kind for the Bounder. He had made himself the most unpopular fellow in the Remove, but for that he did not care—or, if he cared, he gave no sign of it.

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss next week's grand yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "DISOWNED BY HIS FATHER!" It's full of exciting situations.)



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