The School Story-Book for the Holidays.

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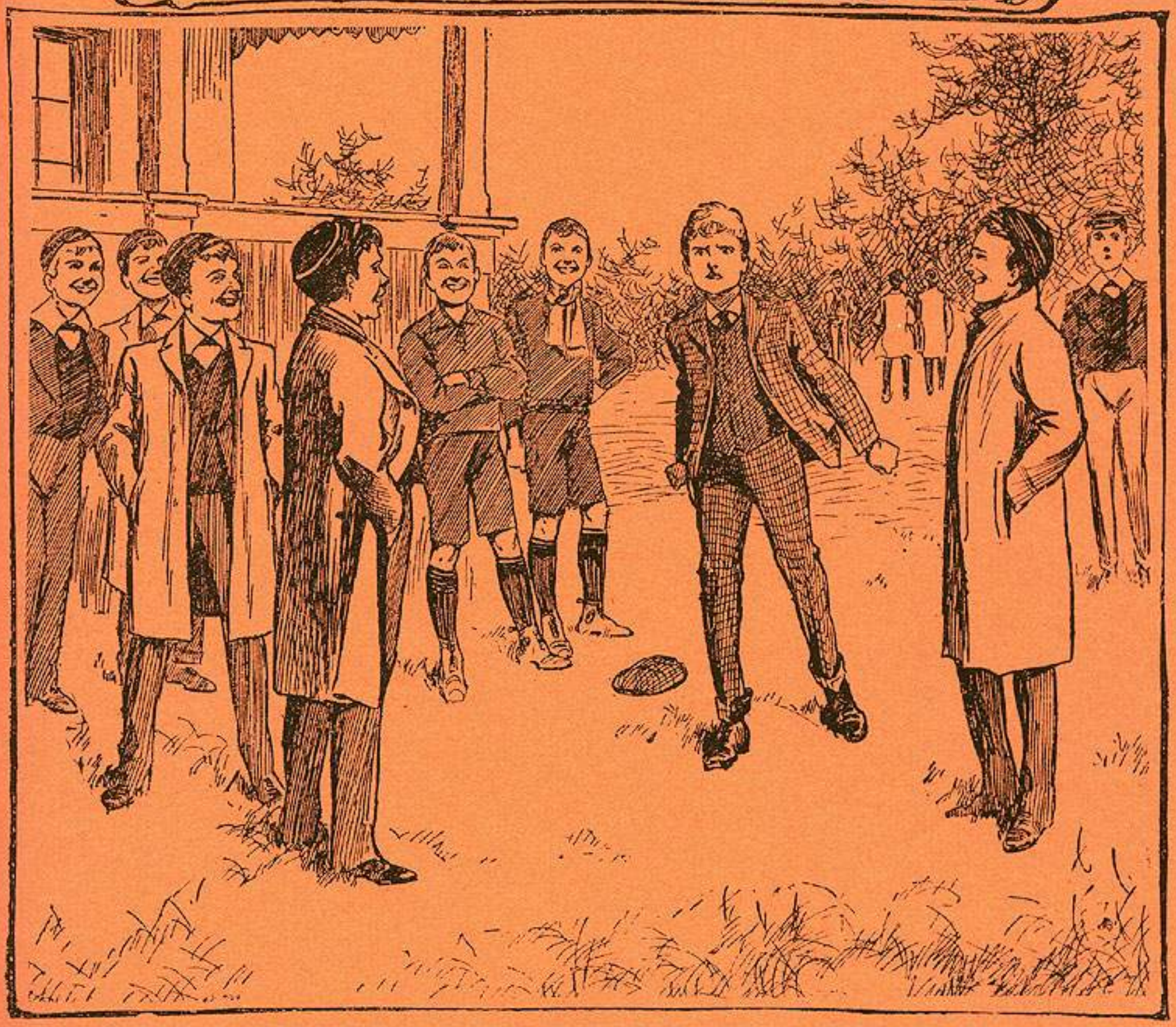
COMPLETE STORY FOR ALL

A TALE OF HARRY WHARTON & CO.

A LAD FROM LANCASHIRE

By FRANK RICHARDS



"WHO THREW THAT CLOD?" EXCLAIMED THE LANCASHIRE LAD, WITH BLAZING EYES.

A Lad from Lancashire

A Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Wharton Does Not Lend a Hand.

HARRY WHARTON, the captain of the Remove at Greyfriars, looked amazed. He was alone in Study No. 1, sitting under the window, engaged in repairing a damaged football, when the door opened, and Bulstrode came in. There were no two fellows in the Remove on worse terms than Wharton and Bulstrode, so the visit was surprising in itself; but there was more to follow.

Bulstrode was looking serious and important, and there was nothing hostile in his manner this time. After him, four or five fellows came into the study, all of them looking just as serious and important as Bulstrode. They all belonged to the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton laid down the damaged football, and looked at the visitors. They did not look as if they had come for a "rag," but he could not imagine any other purpose for their visit.

"It's all right," said Bulstrode hastily, reading Harry's thought in his face. "It's all right, Wharton. We haven't come for a row."

"Not a bit of it," said Snoop. "Quite the reverse."

"Exactly the reverse," said Trevor. "We want your help, Wharton."

"Don't jaw, you chaps," said Bulstrode. "I can do the talking. The fact is, Wharton, you and I haven't been on very good terms lately——"

"Never, I think," said Harry.

"Well, never, then," assented Bulstrode. "But there are times when fellows who are not on good terms can forget their little differences, and stand by one another for the good of the Form they belong to."

Harry Wharton could not help looking amazed.

"That's quite true," he said. "But excuse me, Bulstrode, you're not exactly the kind of fellow I expected to hear that from."

"I don't expect you to do me justice," said Bulstrode. "But never mind that. The fellows chose you for captain of the Remove, and you ought to be in this—ought to take the lead in it, in fact, and that's why we're here."

"Take the lead in what?"

"In the matter we've got on hand. It concerns the honour of the Remove," said Bulstrode, rather grandly. "If you don't take it up, we shall act without you."

"Here, draw it mild, Bulstrode," said Hazeldene. "You haven't given him a chance yet."

"Don't you interrupt me, Veseline. This is how the case stands, Wharton. There's a new kid coming into the Remove.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Nothing amazing in that," he remarked. "We were all new kids once, and not so very long ago. Are you thinking of getting up a reception for the new kid?"

Some of the Removites grinned, and Bulstrode frowned.

"Well, as a matter of fact, we are," he said. "A warm reception—you understand?"

"No, I don't think I do, quite. I don't see how you can have anything up against the new kid till you've seen him, anyhow."

"That's because you don't know anything about the matter."

"Well, I'm willing to learn," said Harry Wharton patiently. "Suppose you explain?"

"It's one of those rotten Mowbray scholarships," explained Bulstrode. "I dare say you know that Bishop Mowbray was a governor of Greyfriars once—blessed if I know when—but it doesn't matter."

"Reign of Edward the Sixth," said Barr.

"Thank you, Barr; but, as I said, it doesn't matter. You

know the old bounder founded some rotten scholarships to help poor boys to the benefits of a college education, and the rest of it—you know the piffle by heart, so I needn't repeat it."

"I don't see that it's piffle. It was jolly decent of the bishop."

"Oh, I might have expected you would say that, Wharton!" sneered Bulstrode. "I never knew a more contrary chap than you are. I shouldn't wonder if you set yourself up against us in this, out of sheer obstinacy."

"Oh, give him a chance!" said Hazeldene.

"Shut up, Vaseline! Well, we've had all sorts of chaps here on the scholarships—sons of officers killed abroad, and sons of poor parsons, and sons of poverty-stricken naval captains, and so on; but they've passed the limit this time. Who do you think is coming to Greyfriars on the Mowbray Scholarship now?"

"Blessed if I know—or care!"

"A mill-boy," said Bulstrode impressively. "A chap who worked in a mill—a carder, or mindor, or shuttler, or loomer, or something—chap who has worked for his living."

"Horrid," said Harry gravely. I suppose it's a fearful disgrace to work for one's living. Though I don't know how the world would get along if everybody chucked work."

"Oh, don't be funny! I've heard all about this chap from Carberry, the prefect—he was there when Dr. Locke was explaining to Wingate, our captain. Carberry is just as much down on it as we are."

"Yes, he would be," said Harry Wharton scornfully. "Carberry is a cad and a pub-haunter, and he has a lot of right to look down on anybody! Rats!"

"I told you he would be against us from the start," said Bulstrode, looking at his followers.

"Don't be in a hurry," said Hazeldene. "You haven't explained yet."

"Oh, do shut up, Vaseline! I've heard it all from Carberry. He says the doctor doesn't see anything wrong in it."

"He wants you chaps to open his eyes, I suppose."

"Well, we all know the doctor is a bit of a fossil," said Bulstrode. "I hear that this kid who is coming into the Remove—what's his name, now?"

"Linley," said Barr—"Mark Linley."

"That's it—Mark Linley. Well, this kid Linley has worked in a mill since he was a nipper, and used to buy books with his odd tanners, and study of an evening, and some local curate up there helped him on to getting this scholarship—like his cheek! And the long and the short of it is that he's coming to Greyfriars—and coming into the Remove."

"Well, what about it?" demanded Harry Wharton. "Suppose he is? If a chap did what you say this chap has done, I suppose that isn't anything against him? A fellow who has as much grit as that ought to be encouraged."

"I knew he would take that line," said Bulstrode. "There's one thing you can always depend on with Wharton—he won't agree with anybody else."

Harry Wharton flushed red. His temper was perhaps a little uncertain, sometimes, but it was his generous heart that prompted him to speak now as he did.

"I don't want to be contrary," he said, "but I don't think you ought to be down on the chap until he's done something to deserve it. Nobody but a fool would say that it is a disgrace to work with your hands for a living."

"Thank you," said Bulstrode, with a sneer. "I suppose I'm a fool, then, as I certainly don't intend to associate with a mill-hand."

"You mayn't be asked to. He may be a little particular himself."

Some of the Removites chuckled, and Bulstrode's brow grew darker.

"I suppose, then, that you're going to back this outsider up against the Form, Wharton?" he exclaimed savagely.

"Nothing of the sort. I don't even know him. But I do say that you won't get me to be down on a fellow who has done what anybody might be proud of doing."

"Oh, rats! Of course he's a rough rotter—nothing like us——"

"Well, you are rather a pig yourself, you know, Bulstrode."

And the Removites giggled again. They rather liked Wharton's plain speaking.

"Well," said Bulstrode, bringing his fist down on the table with a thump that made the ink spurt out of the inkpot, "what I say is, we're not going to have this cad thrust upon us like this, and I'm standing up for the honour of the Form. Most of the fellows are with me, I warn you. If you don't like to join us, you can stand outside, but it won't make any difference to what we're going to do."

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"And what are you going to do?"

"We're going to show this mill kid that he's come to the wrong place. We can't make the doctor send him away, but we can make him jolly glad to go away of his own accord."

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

"And that's what we're going to do," said Bulstrode. "We're not going to have mill-hands in the Greyfriars Remove. We'll explain to him first that this isn't the place for him. If he likes to go, that will settle it. If he sticks it out——"

"He will if he's got any grit."

"Very well, if he sticks it out, we'll make his life a burden to him till he decides to go."

Harry Wharton rose to his feet.

"And you've made up your minds about this," he said, "without even having seen the chap—without having a chance to know whether he's a cad or not."

"Well, he's a rotten outsider, anyway."

Harry Wharton laughed scornfully.

"I see, it's on the old principle. 'Ere comes a stranger—'eave 'arf a brick at him!'" he said. "As a matter of fact, Bulstrode, whatever this mill fellow is like, he can hardly be such a hooligan as you are proving yourself at the present moment."

"Oh, you needn't preach to me! I told the fellows you would be up against us, out of sheer contrariness."

"It's nothing of the sort. If the new chap is a rotter, I sha'n't back him up in any way. If he's a cad, I shall be as much down on him as anybody. But if he's a decent fellow, I won't have a hand in ragging him because he started life worse off than we did. To be plain, Bulstrode, what you're playing now is a cad's game—a dirty, snobbish cad's game. That's plain English."

"By Jove, it is!" said Barr. "You needn't amplify it, Wharton. That's plain enough. So you're up against us?"

"I don't say so. I don't know anything about the new chap. But I should say he's pretty decent to work for a scholarship and win it, and get a clergyman to help him. And if he's decent, he won't have me against him. That's all. And now you can get out. I'm not particular, but I don't like rank snobs in my study."

And Wharton turned his back on Bulstrode and his party, who looked at one another very uncomfortably, and walked out of the study.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
The Lancashire Lad Arrives.

"THERE he is!"

It was Bulstrode who uttered the exclamation. A little crowd of Greyfriars boys stood at the entrance to the platform in the station of Friardale. A train had just clattered to a standstill, and Bulstrode and his friends looked eagerly among the alighting passengers for the new boy.

"There he is!"

Bulstrode pointed at a lad of nearly fifteen, who had alighted from a third-class carriage. The stranger did not look much like a Greyfriars lad, but Bulstrode was certain enough of his identity. All the other passengers were grown-up country people, and this was the only individual who could possibly be supposed to be coming to Greyfriars. But at his appearance the Greyfriars fellows sniffed expressively.

He was not dressed in Etons, nor did he wear a topper. He wore a cloth cap, an overcoat substantial enough, but of a far from fashionable cut, and tweed trousers of a pattern that was not of the quietest. His gloves were thick and warm, but they did not, as Skinner suggested, look like boxing-gloves. His boots had evidently been designed rather for use than ornament, and they showed plentiful traces of long travel in muddy weather.

But the boy, whatever shortcomings he might have in personal attire, had a sturdy, well-set form, and a pleasant face. His eyes were dark, and very keen and earnest in their glance.

He did not look towards the crowd of boys at the gate. The moment he stepped from the train he strode along quickly towards the guard's-van.

"Be careful with that skip, please!" he said.

The guard was bundling out a large cane basket, fastened by a zinc rod and a padlock. The boy's forehead wrinkled anxiously as it bumped on the platform, as if he feared that it would be damaged. It looked, however, as if it would stand a great deal of knocking about, and as if it had stood some already. The Friardale porter came along with a trolley, and yanked the cane trunk upon it.

The trolley trundled along the platform to the barrier, and the lad took out his ticket. He gave it up at the gate, and followed the trolley, and then for the first time noted the Greyfriars group.

Bulstrode winked at his friends, and the half-dozen juniors took off their caps with solemn faces.

"Master Linley, I believe?" said Bulstrode.

The new-comer nodded.

"That's my name," he said, in a pleasant voice, which had a musical trace of the Lancashire burr in it. "Mark Linley. Do you belong to Greyfriars?"

"Yes, we have that honour," said Bulstrode. "You are the new kid—the young gentleman from—from Northumberland, I believe?"

And Skinner and Snoop and Barr cackled.

"I am from Lancashire," said Linley simply.

"Ah, yes; I knew it was somewhere in the Arctic regions!" said Bulstrode, with a nod.

Linley stared at him.

"Are you trying to be funny?" he asked.

"Not at all. We've come down to meet you. We thought you'd like to see some of us before you got to Greyfriars——"

"Shall I put this on the 'ack, sir?" asked the porter.

"Yes, please."

"You can't lift that, old man," said Bulstrode. "We'd better come and lend you a hand."

"Thank you kindly, sir, but——"

"Not a word; we're going to help!"

And Bulstrode & Co. laid hold of the cane trunk, and helped. Of course it came with a crash to the ground, and if it had not been of the solidest construction, it would certainly have burst open with the shock.

Mark Linley ran forward with an anxious face.

"Please, don't!" he exclaimed. "I don't mind a joke, but I can't afford to have my things smashed up. I'll help the porter."

"Rats!" said Snoop. "We'll help the porter! Get back!"

"I tell you——"

"Oh, Rats! Get back!"

And Snoop laid hold of the can trunk again. A glint came into Mark Linley's eyes, and he pushed Snoop back. It was only a push, but there was force in it, and Snoop staggered back, and trod on Hazeldene's foot. Hazeldene gave a yelp, and shoved him off violently, and Snoop sat down.

"Let that skip alone!" said the lad from Lancashire.

"That which?" demanded Bulstrode.

"That skip."

"What on earth's a skip?"

"That," said Linley, pointing to the huge cane trunk. "Have you never heard of a skip before?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Then I suppose you're a skipper?" asked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Linley smiled at the feeble joke, and helped the porter place the skip on the hack. The hack-driver gathered up his reins.

"Don't be in a hurry to get off, Linley," said Bulstrode. "We haven't finished talking to you yet."

Mark Linley hesitated.

"I've had a long journey," he said. "I've travelled all the way down from Lancashire since this morning. I think I shall go in the hack."

"But we came down specially to meet you."

"That was very kind of you," said Linley, in a frank way, that would have won upon any heart but Bulstrode's. "I suppose you fellows know about me—that I am coming to Greyfriars with a scholarship?"

"Yes, rather!" grunted Bulstrode.

"I know there can't be many fellows who began life as I did at Greyfriars," said Linley, the colour coming into his cheeks a little. "I hope it won't make any difference——"

"There's none; you're the first."

"Then it's very kind of you chaps to treat me like this. A good many folks at whoam—I mean, at home—thought—I mean, feared—that a fellow who had been in a mill would have a rough time at Greyfriars College."

Bulstrode chuckled.

"They were right!" he remarked. "As a matter of fact, young shuttler—I believe you were a shuttler when you worked in the mill——"

Mark Linley laughed.

"I was a minder," he said.

"Well, a minder, or a shuttler, or a loomer, it's all the same," said Bulstrode, rather vaguely. "You are right in thinking that a shuttler—I mean, a minder—would be out of place at Greyfriars College."

"I—I suppose so," said Linley quietly.

"Oh, shut up, Bulstrode!" muttered Hazeldene. "Don't be a cad, you know!"

"Hold your tongue, Vaseline, or I'll jolly soon make you! Look here, young shunter, or shuttler, or whatever you are, we came down to meet you to have a little talk with you before you get into Greyfriars."

"Yes," said Linley quietly—very quietly.

He was beginning to understand now that the meeting was not intended to be a friendly one.

"It's very meritorious of you," said Bulstrode, in an airy way, "to get a scholarship, and to get to this college by your own efforts——"

"You couldn't have done it, old chap!" remarked Skinner.

"Oh, shut up, Skinner! It's very meritorious of this young shaver to educate himself, and all that, in the intervals of shuttling a loom, or looming a shuttle, or whatever he did for a living. But Greyfriars wasn't founded as a home for the meritorious poor. We don't want mill-hands there!"

Mark Linley's eyes glinted, but he did not speak.

"We don't want to be hard on you, Linley," said the bully of the Remove, quite magnanimously, "but we bar mill-hands in the Remove at Greyfriars. You might find a fellow or two to back you up out of sheer contrariety, but the rest of the Form would be down on you. All the other Forms would be down on you. It would be very rough. Now, we want to do the fair thing. If you like to go back to Yorkshire at once——"

"Lancashire," said Mark quietly.

"Ah, yes, Lancashire! If you like to go back at once, we'll raise a subscription to pay your return fare, and leave you something over for yourself. What do you think of that?"

"Do you want me to tell you what I think?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Very well, then; I think you are a snob and a coward!"

And Mark Linley stepped into the hack. The vehicle was driving away on the road to Greyfriars before Bulstrode could find his tongue. His companions were grinning. Ready as they were to back him up in ragging the Lancashire lad, there was little sympathy between them, and they enjoyed the discomfiture of the Remove bully.

Bulstrode gritted his teeth as he gazed after the station hack.

"So that's how he takes it," he exclaimed at last—"that's how he takes a generous offer! Well, we'll try what roughness will do next! He's had his chance, and thrown it away! I'll make him sorry he ever came to Greyfriars!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Not a Warm Reception.

MARK LINLEY stepped from the hack inside the gateway of Greyfriars, and watched with a careful eye while his skip was delivered over to the tender mercies of Gosling, the school porter. Then he asked the hack-driver his fare.

"Which I'll leave to you, sir," said the driver.

The boy looked troubled. He could guess that the man was accustomed to liberal fares from the better-off boys of Greyfriars. But Linley's means were too limited for him to pay any more than his due. It was one of the difficulties of going to a wealthy school, which he had foreseen, and which he could not help.

"Please tell me how much the fare is!" he said.

The driver snorted.

"'Arf-a-crown!" he said.

Mark felt that he was being overcharged, and he glanced at Gosling. But the school porter's face was unsympathetic. What right had a poor person to come to Greyfriars, was the way Gosling looked at it.

There was no help for it. Mark handed the driver a half-crown, and had the comfort of learning later that the proper fare was eighteenpence, with twopence extra for the skip. Gosling looked at the skip, and grunted.

"'Eavy weight, sir," he said.

"I will help you carry it, if you like," said Mark mildly.

"I can manage it," said Gosling sourly. "I don't mind carrying things for young gentlemen as is gentlemen, sir.

Master Wharton always gives me a shilling when I carry up his box."

"Wharton probably has more money than I have," said Mark quietly.

And he turned and walked on, with a somewhat heavy heart. And Gosling snorted again.

"Tuppence, I'll bet!" he muttered. "Tuppence for carryin' up that thing! And wot a trunk to bring to a collidge like this 'ere, too! Where did the boy come from? Let 'im stick in the place where he belongs! Wot I says is this 'ere, let him stay where he belongs if he can't afford to hact like a gentleman!"

A depressing feeling of loneliness settled upon the lad from Lancashire as he crossed the great Close towards the school buildings. The grey old edifice, the facade of ancient windows, the ivied tower, the quiet green Close, had a curious effect upon the boy. How quiet and old-world it seemed, how removed from the strife and bustle of a Lancashire town, as if it belonged to another planet. The whirr of the looms was still in the ears of the mill-boy, fresh from the activity of the busiest county in England. Greyfriars struck him with a feeling he could hardly define, pleasant, and yet a little melancholy.

The fellows in the Close took little notice of him. Some glanced his way, and he saw one or two giggle. He coloured painfully. He had already observed that his clothes did not in the least resemble the Greyfriars' cut. Upon those same clothes his mother had expended many an anxious hour—anxious that her boy should cut as good a figure as possible at the great public school. But poor Mrs. Linley could not impart the magic cut of the good tailor.

A group of fellows belonging to the Upper Fourth—the next Form above the Remove—were standing under the leafless elms, and they looked at Mark with great interest.

Mark stopped to speak to them. He wanted information.

"Excuse me," he said. "Can you tell me where to find Mr. Quelch?"

Temple winked at his friends, and took upon himself the role of spokesman.

"Mr. Quelch?" he said. "Who is he?"

"The Master of the Remove."

"The Remove? What is that?"

"The Lower Fourth Form, I think," said Mark Linley, looking a little puzzled. He did not know, of course, that the Upper and Lower Fourths at Greyfriars were on terms of cat-and-dog strife, and the ignorance of these youths on the subject of the Remove amazed him.

"Ah, yes, I think I have heard of them!" said Temple. "A set of inky little beasts, who sneak about in corners and consume jam-tarts."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"And what do you want with the master of the Remove, my son?" asked Temple, in a honeyed tone.

"I am going into his Form, and I have to report my arrival to him."

"Indeed! Then you are a new Removite?"

"Yes—I suppose so."

"Another kid for us to lick into shape," said Temple. "Bump him!"

Mark Linley started back, but it was too late. Half a dozen hands seized him, and he was promptly bumped. This ancient and time-honoured ceremony consisted, at Greyfriars, of squashing the victim to the earth, rolling him violently over, and leaving him wondering whether he was on his head or his heels. Mark made the bumping worse by struggling—a rash thing to do with three or four mischievous fellows grasping him.

He was suddenly released, and he sat up in bewilderment. His cap was gone, and his hair was towsled. His coat, over which Mrs. Linley had taken so much trouble, was splashed with mud in a dozen places. His boots were muddy all over. It had been a wet morning, and the Close was very sloppy.

The Lancashire lad staggered to his feet. Temple, Dabney & Co. were walking away, laughing, and were already at a distance. Mark's eyes glinted. He was strongly inclined to dash after them and call them to account, although the odds were so greatly against him. But he restrained himself. He guessed that it was only a piece of rough horse-play, and he must be prepared for that sort of thing. He resolved to be a little more on his guard as he dusted down his clothes, and removed as many of the mud stains as he could with his handkerchief.

"My hat! Where did you spring from?"

Mark looked round. It was Levison, of the Remove, who addressed him, though, of course, the new boy did not know him. Levison was laughing.

"Been using yourself as a duster to wipe up the mud?" he asked. "You look like it."

"I have been rolled over by those fellows," said Mark. "I suppose it was a joke."

"Ha, ha, ha! Are you the new chap who is coming into the Remove?"

"Yes. Can you tell me where to find Mr. Quelch?"

Levison pointed past the gymnasium—nearly opposite to the direction Mark should have taken.

"Go straight on, turn to the right, past the gym, and then to the left, and then go through the garden," he said. "Knock at the door."

"Thank you very much."

"Not at all," grinned Levison; "always willing to oblige a new chap."

Mark went in the direction indicated. He turned to the right, past the gym., and then to the left, and came to a garden gate. A fat junior in spectacles was leaning on the gate, apparently wrapped in meditation. Mark Linley tapped him on the shoulder, and the fat junior looked round.

"I say, Cherry, I wish you wouldn't startle me——"

"My name is not Cherry," said Mark, with a smile; "it is Linley. I——"

"Oh!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at the new boy through his spectacles. "You are the new chap in the Remove."

"Yes. Will you let me pass—I have to go and see Mr. Quelch?"

Billy Bunter stared.

"Well, Mr. Quelch isn't in the Head's garden," he said. "You'll get into a row if you go the other side of this gate."

"I was told——"

Mark paused. He remembered that Levison had worn a curious grin while giving him directions.

Bunter chuckled.

"Somebody was rotting you," he said. "You can't go into the Head's garden. I'll show you the way to Mr. Quelch's study, if you like."

"Thank you. I wish you would."

"Certainly," said Bunter, without making any movement from his comfortable position against the gate, however. "You are the chap who worked in a bicycle factory, aren't you—or a coal mine, was it?"

"A cotton-mill," said Mark quietly.

"Oh, was it a cotton-mill? Most of the fellows have decided to cut you. They think you're not good enough to speak to. Of course, as a matter of fact, I suppose they're right. Still, I don't believe in being down on a fellow who can pay his footing. By the way, I was just thinking when you disturbed me—— I'm expecting a postal-order to-night, and I'd like you to lend me a couple of bob off it, if you could. Of course, you will have the tin back this evening without fail, as my postal-order is coming by the next post for certain."

Mark Linley hesitated. He had been taught to be careful with his money, and he had often had bitter enough need to be careful, when a few shillings had sometimes meant the difference between life and death, in some period of lock-out or strike, during his hard-working days as a factory hand.

But it seemed ungracious to refuse to lend, especially as the promise of repayment was so prompt, and as the fat junior had already offered to oblige him. He felt in his pocket, and fished out two shillings.

"There you are," he said.

"Thank you!" said Bunter. "Come along."

And he moved off quite briskly. Mark Linley imagined that they were going in the direction of Mr. Quelch's quarters, but that was far from Billy Bunter's intention. He was making a direct line for the school tuck-shop. Near the door of the shop he stopped, and pointed through the growing dimness of the Close towards the looming school house.

"There you are," he said. "Go over there, and in at the big door, and inquire again. I'd come with you, only I've got to go in here on important business."

And, leaving the Lancashire lad standing uncertain, the fat junior disappeared into the tuck-shop, and Mark Linley's two shillings were soon going at express speed in sausage-rolls, buns, tarts, and ginger-beer.

Mark walked slowly away towards the big doorway Billy Bunter had pointed out to him, and paused irresolute on the top step. He was beginning to feel discouraged. A handsome lad of about his own age came to the doorway from the lighted hall, and glanced at him

"Can I help you?" he asked.

His tone was very pleasant.

Mark glanced at his face, half fearing another practical joke at his expense. But a single glance at the handsome face was enough.

"Yes," he said; "thank you. I am looking for Mr. Quelch's room."

"Come in, and I'll show you."

Mark joined the junior, who led him along the flagged

passage, speaking cheerily as he went. Although a glance at him was sufficient to tell that he was at least as good as anybody in Greyfriars—socially speaking—there was no hint in his manner that he felt he was talking to one of a lower station in life. Mark Linley felt his heart warming as he walked on. He wondered who the junior was, and felt that he would like to know him. The information was very quickly forthcoming.

"Are you the new fellow in the Remove?" the junior asked.

"Yes," said Mark, colouring. "I—I think I ought to tell you that I am the fellow coming here on a scholarship. I dare say you've heard about it—Bishop Mowbray's scholarship——"

The other nodded.

"Yes. Your name is Linley?"

"That's right. I am from Lancashire—I worked in a mill."

There was a hint of defiance in Mark's manner as he said it. But the other only nodded quietly, as if factory-hands were not at all uncommon at Greyfriars.

"Yes, I've heard about it. Awfully plucky of you to go in for the scholarship and get it. I've heard that it's very hard."

"It was hard," said Mark, his heart warming still more. "I think I scraped through. I was determined to do it if I could, but I never had much time for study."

"I suppose not. Here is Mr. Quelch's room. By the way, my name is Wharton. I am captain of the Remove—top boy, you know. Every Form has its captain here, as well as the school captain, old Wingate. If I can help you in any way, I shall be glad. I dig in Study No. 1 in the Remove passage."

Mark Linley was glad that it was dusk in the passage, for he felt the tears gush into his eyes. Not that he was one of the crying kind. But this off-hand kindness from a perfect stranger, after his first reception at Greyfriars, strangely moved him.

"Thank you!" he said, in a low voice. "Thank you very much! You are very kind."

"Oh, bosh!" said Wharton. "Give us your fist!"

And he shook hands with the new boy, and walked away, and Mark Linley tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and entered.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Wharton Decides.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as Harry Wharton entered Study No. 1 in the Remove passage. "You're late for tea."

"Sorry!" said Wharton, throwing his cap into a corner. "What have you got for tea? I'm hungry."

"Bread and butter," said Bob Cherry, with a grand wave of the hand over the study table. "For those who prefer it, there's butter and bread. You can, however, have the bread without the butter, or the butter without the bread, if you pine for variety."

Harry Wharton laughed.

The tea-table in Study No. 1 was indeed very bare that evening, although it was usually as well provided as any in the junior Forms. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Hindoo chum, who was popularly supposed in the Remove to live on air, was contentedly dissecting a banana, and consuming infinitesimal helpings. Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent had not yet commenced on the bread and butter. They were hungry, but they were thinking of bacon and chips, sausages and mashed, and other things more solid than bread and butter.

"We could have bread and scrape in Hall, without going to the expense of providing our own tommy," Bob Cherry remarked. "If we make a tea of bread and butter, the Head ought to make us an allowance in cash for it. We were waiting till you came in to see if there was any wind to be raised. Inky was too hungry to wait, so he has started on his Brobdingnagian supper."

The Nabob of Bhanipur grinned.

"The hungerfulness was slight," he remarked in his elegant English. "But the honourable banana is sufficient foodfulness for the inward regions of my esteemed self!"

"Well, it isn't sufficient for mine, if I can get anything solider," said Bob Cherry. "Where have you been wasting your time, Harry, and leaving your chums to a slow and lingering death by the horrors of starvation?"

"I've just met the new chap—Linley, you know," said Harry Wharton abruptly. "I showed him to Quelch's study. I heard Levison telling Stott that he had sent him wrong, and I was going to look for him when I met him at the door."

"Good Samaritan!"

"Well, I can't see much of a joke in sending a stranger wandering about a place. It seems to me to come very close to telling lies. The new chap seems a decent fellow. Not exactly like us——"

"Well, that couldn't be expected of a common mortal," said Bob Cherry gravely. "We must be reasonable."

"Oh, don't rot! I mean, he's a bit strange to our manners and customs; but I can't see that he's any the worse for that. He struck me——"

"Where? On the nose?"

"Ass! He struck me as being a very decent and quiet chap, and very civilly spoken."

"I hear that Bulstrode & Co. are going for him bald-headed," said Nugent. "They're trying to get the whole Form to take it up."

"They came here to see me about it," said Harry Wharton, frowning. "I refused to have a hand in anything of the sort. I hope you fellows will do the same."

"When Wharton says turn, we all turn," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, don't be funny! It's a cad's game to rag a stranger, anyway, just because he's had to work for what we got for nothing."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Keep your wool on, old son. I'm not going to rag anybody, even though you left me to starve while you were walking this chap about Greyfriars. If you like, I'll take the new fellow on my knee, and kiss him on his baby brow, and talk to him about the sweet and happy days of childhood, when the honeysuckle and the rose entwined——"

"Oh, do shut up!" said Wharton, laughing. "Let's have tea now. Where's that fat young villain, Bunter?"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Here he is!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as a fat face and a pair of big spectacles glimmered at the door. "Where have you been, porpoise? But I needn't ask. I can see a smear of jam on his chivvy."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Have you brought in anything for tea?"

"Certainly not! I'm surprised at the question! A chap lent me a couple of bob off my postal-order this evening, and I've just had a snack at the tuck-shop, to keep up my strength. I am willing to cook anything you like for tea, and I'll fetch it from Mrs. Mimble's, if you like."

Harry Wharton fished a postal-order for five shillings from his pocket.

"Ask Mrs. Mimble to cash this," he said. "I've just had it through the post. You can lay out half of it for tea, and bring me the change. If you don't bring me the change I'll skin you!"

"I hope I can be trusted with a little cash, Wharton," said Billy Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Remove with great dignity.

"Yes, I hope you can, this time, or I shall take it out of your hide," said Wharton. "I want the money. Cut off!"

"If you would like to lend me the odd half-crown off my postal-order——"

"Oh, do get off!"

"The post's in!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Your postal-order must be in the rack downstairs, Bunty."

"I think there must have been some delay in the post," began Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! The postal-order will be here to-morrow morning all right. But, apart from that, I suppose you fellows know that 'The Gem' football competition is up?"

"Yes; but we want our tea now!"

"Just a minute. As I am getting the first prize in 'The Gem' competition, I shall shortly be having a pound a week for thirteen weeks. When I get that I intend to settle up several old accounts, and I can clear this off, too. I suppose I can have the half-crown, Wharton?"

"You can have a thick ear if you don't buzz off!"

"I'm sincerely sorry that you should trust an old acquaintance so little, Wharton. I have been trusted to-day by a perfect stranger——"

"That's the reason he trusted you," grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Cut off! Buzz! Bunk! Get!" roared Wharton. And as he was reaching for a ruler, the fat junior thought it better to "buzz off."

"That young porpoise grows fatter and stupider every day," Bob Cherry remarked. "I think I'll walk along and see that he doesn't scoff the provisions bringing them back. You chaps can get the kettle boiling."

Bob Cherry followed Bunter, and Nugent jammed the kettle on the fire and stirred the embers under it. The nabob contentedly munched his banana. Harry Wharton was standing with his hands thrust deep into his trousers-pockets, a thoughtful frown upon his face.

"Penny for your thoughts, kid," said Nugent, looking up from the fire with a crimsoned countenance, as the kettle began to sing.

Wharton came out of his reverie with a slight start.

"I was thinking about that new chap," he said abruptly. "It's a rotten position, really. The fellows seem to think that I've refused to back them up against him out of sheer contrary temper."

"Well, your temper is a little uncertain at times, old chap," grinned Nugent. "You must excuse my saying so, but a chap sometimes doesn't really know how to take you."

Wharton coloured.

"Oh, don't pile it on!" he exclaimed. "I suppose you agree with me that it would be caddish to jump on this new chap just because he's worked in a mill?"

"Oh, yes; rather!"

"Well, I've been thinking. He's strange here, and precious few of the fellows will help him out in anything. I'm captain of the Form, and I think I ought to look after him a bit. What do you think?"

"I think that if you do, the fellows will all say you're doing it just to set yourself up against the Form," said Nugent promptly.

"Yes; that's what I was thinking!" said Wharton, biting his lip. "I don't deny that my temper hasn't always been exactly what it should have been; but I was trying to live that down. I know very well that if this new chap is at all decent, I ought to help him out. What's a fellow captain for, if he allows himself to be scared from doing his plain duty by a set of carping, snobbish rotters?"

"Oh, draw it mild! Bulstrode and his lot may be snobbish rotters, but most of the Remove are all right. They just act without thinking."

"Well, they shouldn't. Anyway, they've no right to find fault with me because I think before acting!" said Wharton hotly. "Look here, there's this new chap now. He's gone in to see Quelch. He's got in pretty late, and tea will be over in Hall—Quelch had finished his a quarter of an hour ago. Well, why shouldn't we have the new kid in here to tea?"

Frank Nugent looked very grave.

"I've nothing to say against it," he said quietly. "But it is setting this study against the rest of the Remove. And it may be that Bulstrode is right—the new chap may be a rank rotter for aught you know. It stands to reason that he has mixed with a pretty rough lot in his time."

"That wasn't his fault, I suppose?"

"I don't say it was. But if you touch pitch you get defiled, whether it's your fault or not, and you pass it on to others."

"I understand what you mean, Frank. But we've no reason to assume that the new kid has any rotten ways till we know him better. I can't see anything wrong in being decently civil to a stranger. I don't say I shall chum up with him. I'm not the sort of chap to chum up very quickly with anybody."

"Well, have him in to tea, kid. It's all right," said Nugent. "If the Form don't like it, the Form can go and eat tintacks!"

Wharton laughed, and quitted the study.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
A Guest in No. 1 Study.

MARK LINLEY came out of Mr. Quelch's study after a brief interview with the Form master, feeling somewhat encouraged. The Remove master's manner had been kind, though formal, and Mark saw very plainly that he would get on with Mr. Quelch if he worked hard and deserved it; and that was what he had already resolved to do.

For the boy who had worked as a half-timer in childhood, and who had spent long days in the mill after that, and had "swotted" at his studies by candle-light in the evening, hard work had no terrors. The daily work of a junior at Greyfriars was child's play to the lad from Lancashire. There were many fellows in the Remove who groaned in spirit over the hardness of their tasks; but Mark Linley was looking forward to the same work as to a long rest after labour.

He stopped and looked about him in the wide, dusky passage. He felt very strange and lost, and was glad to see Wharton coming towards him.

"Find Quelchy all right?" asked Harry cheerily.

"Yes, thank you! He was very kind." Linley paused, and coloured a little. "Can you tell me where I can get some tea? I suppose it is tea-time?"

"It was tea-time nearly an hour ago," said Wharton. "I'm afraid it's all over now. But that's all right. I came to look for you, to ask you to have tea with us in No. 1, if you will. We're feeding a bit late, and we shall have a passable feed. Will you come?"

Linley hesitated.

"I should be glad to," he said, in his frank way. "I know no one here, and I can't say how I feel your kindness. But—but——" He broke off.

"But you don't want to come," said Harry, laughing. "It's all right. Don't make any bones about saying so, you know. We don't stand on politeness in the Greyfriars Remove."

Linley coloured painfully.

"It's not that, Wharton. But—but a good many fellows have already shown me how they feel about having a factory-hand in the school. This isn't the sort of place for a fellow like me, I suppose. I think you will very likely make the other fellows angry with you if you have me in to tea, and your friends there may not like it, either."

"My friends haven't any objection, or I shouldn't ask you, Linley," said Harry quietly. "As for the other fellows, they can go and eat coke. Will you come?"

Linley smiled a little.

"As I said, I shall be glad to, if you bear in mind what I have said, and you don't mind what the others think."

"They can think what they like. Come along."

And Mark walked beside Harry Wharton to Study No. 1. Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, passed them in the passage, and looked at them curiously, and stopped to speak.

"Are you the new Remove kid?" he asked.

"Yes," said Mark, colouring a little.

"Good! I wanted to see you. You'll find yourself in strange quarters here at first, but you'll get used to it. Mind, make it a rule to play the game all the time, and you'll be all right. That's all you've got to remember."

And Wingate walked on.

"Who is that, Wharton?" asked Mark, glancing after the stalwart captain of Greyfriars.

"That's Wingate, our captain; a ripping chap!"

The juniors entered Study No. 1. Nugent shook hands with Linley carelessly enough, but that carelessness put the new boy quite at his ease. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh salaamed to him with Oriental grace.

"Salaam, sahib," said he.

"Go it, Inky!" said Nugent encouragingly; "I like to see you doing that. You ought to turn a complete somersault while you're about it."

"The jokefulness of my esteemed chum is great, and his asininefulness is terrific," said the nabob placidly. "I am heartfully glad to welcome to our humble roof this estimable stranger, who is doubtless feeling very lonefully solitary, so far from the old mokes at home, as the song says."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Nugent. "You mean the old folks at home."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook his head gently.

"The excusefulness is terrific," he remarked. "But I must really insist that my quotefulness is correct. I learned that ancient and honourable song under the best native master in Bhanipur."

"Well, he must have been a ripper!" said Harry Wharton. "Here's Billy with the grub. Buck up with the tea, Billy."

"I say, you fellows, I wish you wouldn't let Bob Cherry hang about me like a shadow when I'm doing my shopping. He seems to have an idea that I should bolt the sausages before I got them here."

"I jolly well know you would!" said Bob Cherry. "Nugent's got the fryingpan greased all ready, and so you can shove them on. I'm hungry."

The sausages were soon sizzling over the fire. Bob Cherry shook hands with Mark, suppressing any surprise he may have felt at finding him in the study. The Famous Four always backed one another up under any circumstances.

The scent of the warming sausages filled the study, and it was a very grateful scent to Mark Linley. He was decidedly hungry, though the excitement of his coming to Greyfriars had caused him to hardly notice the fact until now.

Levison looked into the study as Billy was serving up the sausages. He stared blankly at the new boy.

"Come in!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, no. I see you've got visitors," said Levison. "I won't intrude."

And the juniors heard him chuckle as he went down the corridor.

Mark Linley turned red, and felt very uncomfortable.

"Buck up with the sosses, Porpoise," said Bob Cherry. "I believe you're lingering it out because you know I'm on the point of expiring."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"I hope you like sausages, Linley," said Wharton, serving the succulent dish. "They're rather ripping, and I can answer for the cooking."

"Yes, rather!" said Mark. "I'm jolly hungry, too. Thanks."

The feed was just beginning when the door opened, and

Hazeldene looked in. He had evidently heard from Levison of Wharton's guest, for he was grinning.

"Come in, Vaseline!" said Nugent.

Hazeldene shook his head.

"Oh, no," he said. "I see you've got visitors."

And he scuttled off.

Mark Linley's face became crimson. The other juniors hurried in with their talk to cover up the unpleasant incident. Harry Wharton's eyes were beginning to glint dangerously. He understood that this was the commencement of the persecution by which Bulstrode and his friends meant to drive the Lancashire lad out of the Greyfriars Remove.

"You play football, Linley?" Bob Cherry asked; and in the interest of that ever-absorbing topic Linley's face brightened up again.

"Yes, rather!" he said. "I was in the factory team——" He coloured again. "I mean, I used to play Rugger whenever I had a chance."

"Rugger! Soccer's the game here. Ever played Soccer?"

"No; but I can learn."

"Good! Do they play much Rugger in your part of the world?" asked Harry Wharton curiously.

Mark Linley smiled.

"Yes, certainly; more Rugger than anything else, I think. We have Northern Union matches to watch, and heaps of junior Rugger matches. But we're pretty keen on the other game, too. League football is followed awfully keenly in Lancashire, and we have some splendid teams in the English League. I've watched the game often enough, and I don't think I shall be slow picking it up to play."

"Good again! You'll have a chance. Football is compulsory here on Wednesdays and Saturdays, and every fellow who is worth his salt plays it every other day if he gets a chance, too."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Oh, excuse me, Billy," said Harry, laughing. "I wasn't referring to you. Of course you have to spend too much time in the tuckshop to have much left for footer."

"I don't want you to give the new chap the impression that I'm a greedy fellow," said Bunter. "I'm not greedy, only I like a lot. If I didn't keep up my strength by taking snacks now and then, I don't know what you fellows would do for a cook in the study. Hallo, there's Bulstrode!"

It was not Bulstrode who opened the study door; it was Snoop. He grinned in at the juniors.

"Hallo!" he said. "I hear you've got a visitor from the factories here."

"Get out!" said Harry Wharton angrily.

"Certainly! I'm rather particular who I associate with," said Snoop. "I bar mill-hands, and you can keep him all to yourself."

And Snoop went out, just in time to escape a pat of butter which Bob Cherry had picked up to hurl at him.

Mark sat with a crimson face. The wanton insult from a fellow he had never injured, and did not even know, stung him to the quick, and gave him a dreary impression of what his life was to be like in the Greyfriars Remove.

But the door remained closed only for a few moments. Bulstrode was the next to look in, and he grinned sneeringly at the tea-party.

"I hear you're—— Ow! Oooooh!"

The pat of butter caught Bulstrode fairly in the mouth, and he staggered back with a gasping yell. And the Removites yelled, too—with laughter.

Bulstrode wiped the butter off furiously, and glared in at them.

"You—you beast——"

"Are you going?" asked Bob Cherry calmly. "Or will you have the marmalade next?"

Bulstrode went.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Linley's New Quarters.

THE lad from Lancashire rose to his feet. His face was very white and strained.

Wharton looked at him quickly.

"You are not going?" he said.

Linley nodded.

"I think I had better," he said quietly. "I can't have you fellows annoyed like this on my account. Besides——"

"The annoyfulness is nothing, and the fatheadedness of the honourable rotters is terrific," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

But Mark shook his head.

"I've finished my tea," he said. "Thanks awfully, you chaps. You've treated me very decently. I hope you won't have to suffer for looking after me like this."

And Linley left the study.

He left the chums of the Remove silent, looking at one another. They were all feeling awkward and constrained. Wharton was savage. His guest had been insulted in his study, and he was inwardly resolving to call the ruggers to account for it.

"Well, it's rotten!" said Bob Cherry.

"The rottenfulness is terrific."

"He seems a decent chap enough," Nugent remarked; "and he's not ashamed of where he comes from, either. A snob would try to keep the factory dark."

"He's all right," said Harry Wharton abruptly. "I'm going to stand by him, for one. Those cads shall see that they can't bully me into playing the cad, too. Linley's a decent sort, and I'm going to back him up."

"Right-ho! I'm with you!"

"Same here!" said Bob Cherry.

"The backfulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows, it's not a bad idea, and the best way to back a fellow up is to stand him a good feed. If you like to have a feed in the study in Linley's honour, I'm quite willing to do the shopping for you, and the cooking as well, and make a really successful thing of it. I could do it for you in good style for about ten shillings."

"Oh, shut up!" said Nugent. "And look here, don't you start cadging of the new chap. He hasn't as much money to waste as we have."

"I'm hardly likely to start cadging of anybody, I hope," said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity. "I've never taken money in my life without putting it down on the account."

"Lot of good that does the lender," said Bob Cherry, with a grunt.

"I shall settle up all my accounts when I get the "Gem" prize of a pound a week for thirteen weeks," said Bunter. "It's announced this week, and when you see the name of William George Bunter at the head of the list——"

"When we do you can chatter about it, but do shut up now, Owl."

Bunter blinked indignantly at Bob Cherry, and left the study. He hurried after Mark Linley, and tapped a junior on the arm in the passage.

"I say, Linley——"

"Aes!" said the voice of Levison. "What do you want?"

"Oh, is it you, Levison? I want to speak to that factory chap. Have you seen him?"

"Go up the box-room stairs," said Levison, walking away.

Billy Bunter knew Levison well enough to go in the opposite direction to look for Linley. He overtook the latter on the stairs.

"Is that you, Linley? I say, about that couple of bob you lent me——"

"Had your postal order?"

"Well, no, as a matter of fact I haven't," said Bunter. "That's what I wanted to speak to you about. I've been disappointed about that postal order, and it won't be coming till to-morrow morning. When it comes it will be for ten bob. Could you let me have the other eight now, and have the postal order when it comes? That will really be cashing it in advance."

"I'm sorry. I haven't so much money," said Mark simply.

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"Hum! It's rather annoying," he said. "Still, if you can let me have another three, and take half the postal order to-morrow morning, it will do. I can manage."

"Yes, certainly."

Linley handed over the three shillings. Billy Bunter could hardly believe his eyes. The Removites knew him too well to ever lend him anything, and it was only a perfect stranger who could have any faith in his repaying a loan.

"Thank you, Linley. I shall let you have this back to-morrow morning for certain."

"Please do, Bunter; I shall want the money to-morrow, I expect."

"You can absolutely rely on it, as if my postal order didn't come, I have a large sum of money coming in from another source. So-long!"

And Bunter hurried away.

Mark Linley walked on, keeping up a cheerful face, but feeling a little downhearted. He passed the open door of the junior common-room, and there was a howl as he was sighted.

"Hallo, here's young factory!"

"What price cotton, young shaver?"

"How do you shuttle a loom?"

Mark turned away. A yell of laughter followed him.

"Well, I'm glad he's got the decency not to shove himself in here with us," said Snoop. "I half expected him to come in."

"Shocking come-down for you, Snoopy," said Temple, of the Upper Fourth, with a sneer. "Your people are in the oil and colour line, I believe."

Snoop turned crimson.

"It's a lie!" he yelled.

"It's a what?" asked Temple, coming a step nearer.

"I—I mean it isn't so," stammered Snoop. "You're mistaken, Temple."

"Well, if it were so, there's nothing in it to be ashamed of that I can see," said Temple, who belonged to a good family, and could afford to take a broad view of the matter. "I think you're a set of yelping rotters to pitch on young Linley like that. He looks worth a dozen of you young cads. Besides, the Remove is the kind of Form for any waster to be shoved into."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

There was a Removite yell, and ere long a scuffle and punching of noses. Then came a prefect with a cane, and exodus of the juniors from the common-room.

Mark Linley had walked away feeling very heavy-hearted. He had looked for difficulties at Greyfriars, and had half-expected to be sent to Coventry by some of his Form-fellows. But this angry and savage reception was much more than he had bargained for. A fag met him in the passage and called to him:

"I say, young shuttle-and-loom, Mr. Quelch wants to see you!"

Mark took his way to the Form master's study. Mr. Quelch nodded to him gravely and kindly.

"You will share Study No. 12 in the Remove passage, with Russell, Lacy, and Wun Lung," he said. "You may take your books in there. Has your trunk been taken up to the Remove dormitory?"

"I don't know, sir. It was left at the porter's lodge."

"You had better see about it."

"Yes, sir."

Linley left the room. He decided to look at his new quarters first, and went up to No. 12 in the Remove passage. The door was shut, and a glimmer of light came from underneath. Linley hesitated at the door, whether to knock or no. He had a right to enter his own study without knocking, and whichever way he decided his action would probably be misconstrued. He decided to knock, and did so, then opened the door.

Russell and Lacy were doing their preparation. Wun Lung, the Chinese junior, was curled up like a cat in the armchair. All three of the juniors looked up as Mark Linley entered.

"Hallo!" said Russell. "What do you want?"

"Mr. Quelch says I am to come into this study," said Mark awkwardly.

"Well, you've come in," said Lacy. "Now go out again."

"I—I mean, I'm to share this study with you."

"Oh, rats!" said Russell warmly. "Quelch doesn't know what he's about. The room is too small for three, as it is, and I was annoyed with Quelch for putting that Chinese monkey in here. It won't do, my son. Go back to Quelch, and tell him to think it out and guess again."

Mark did not know much about public schools, but he knew too much to take a message like that to a Form master.

"I'm sorry if I'm in the way," he said. "I suppose I must do as Mr. Quelch tells me."

"I suppose you must," grunted Russell. "Are you the new chap Linley, the fellow who worked in a coal-mine?"

"I am Linley, and I worked in a factory."

"Well, I don't see why you couldn't stay in the factory, and not come here to take up a quarter of a crowded study. But I suppose we shall have to put up with it. Do you want to do your prep. now?"

"My—my what?"

"Your prep. Great Scott! Don't you know what prep. is? Your preparation; you have to prepare your morning's work over-night."

"Oh, I see! Yes, I suppose I must do it here—now—but I shall have to get my books out of my skip."

"Out of your what?" roared Russell and Lacy.

"My skip," said Mark simply.

"Ye gods! What is a skip?"

"My trunk, I mean."

"Well, if you mean a trunk, why don't you say a trunk?"

"Well, it's not exactly a trunk, it's a ——"

"Skip!" grinned Lacy. "Of course. I skip, thou skippest, he skips. Well, suppose you skip off and find your skip, and let us finish our prep."

Mark turned to leave the study. The Chinese boy sat up in the armchair, and blinked sleepily at the lad from Lancashire.

"Me tinkee you lookee aftel tlunk," he said. "Bulstlode makee jokee, me tinkee—me tinkee you bettel lookee aftel skippee."

Mark was a little puzzled to make out the curious words of the Chinee, but he nodded and left the study. He understood that some joke was intended upon his property, and he was anxious. He left the house and hurried down to the porter's lodge. Gosling was standing in his doorway, and Mark asked him after the famous skip.

"Which I've carried it hup," said Gosling. "And wot I says is this 'ere, it was thundering heavy, Master Linley."

Mark tendered the porter twopence, which was certainly quite sufficient in the way of a tip, as Gosling had good wages and ought to have been satisfied with them. Gosling put the twopence in the palm of his hand and inspected it carefully, and Mark walked away, leaving him still inspecting it. The porter grunted expressively. But his stare and his grunt did not have the effect of extracting a larger gratuity from the careful Lancashire boy.

He re-entered the house, and seeing Billy Bunter in the hall, inquired his way to the Remove dormitory. Billy directed him cheerfully enough, and added that he would be glad of another shilling off the postal-order that was coming in the morning.

"I'm afraid I can't manage it, Bunter," said Mark, colouring. "I have very little money; you know."

"Oh, if you don't want to lend me a bob, say so!" said Bunter. "You can have it back with the rest to-morrow morning, that's all."

"I cannot do it now."

And Linley walked on, leaving Bunter snorting with disgust.

"I'm sincerely sorry I ever took the trouble to be kind to that chap," murmured Bunter. "Of course, I might have expected ingratitude."

Mark Linley ascended to the Remove dormitory, and quickened his steps as he heard loud voices and shouts of laughter proceeding from the room. He opened the door and looked in, and his eyes blazed with indignation at what he saw.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Mark Linley Loses His Temper.

BULSTRODE & Co. were in the dormitory, in a group round the famous skip. The gas was lighted, and it glimmered on a curious scene. The skip was opened, and the raggers were dragging the contents of the basket-trunk out. Bulstrode was standing on a bed, in the attitude of an auctioneer, with a mallet in his hand, which had probably been used in breaking open the new boy's trunk.

"Gentlemen, make your bids!" said Bulstrode. "Here is a pair of trousers, evidently a pair of Sunday trousers as used in Lancashire, as they are the only pair in this receptacle—this skip. Make your bids, gentlemen. I am offering you a pair of trousers of an unique cut. You see that the material is decidedly substantial, and, indeed, is quite thick enough to make tents or sails with——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the cut is unique. I can safely say, gentlemen, that a pair of trousers of a similar cut cannot be found in all Greyfriars."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let those things alone!' shouted Mark Linley, dashing into the dormitory, his eyes blazing with anger.

Bulstrode looked at him calmly, and took no further notice of him.

"Gentlemen, I can recommend these trousers, and I am surprised at receiving no bid. For uniqueness of cut, for novelty of design, for thickness of material, these trousers are unsurpassed. I challenge contradiction. Gentlemen, I am waiting for a bid for these unique and extremely valuable trousers."

The Removites shrieked with laughter. Mark Linley forced his way through the crowd and faced Bulstrode.

"Let those things alone, you cad!" he shouted.

"My dear factory sweep, I——"

"Will you let them alone?"

"Well, hardly," drawled Bulstrode.

"Then I will make you."

Bulstrode grinned.

"Hold him, kids!" he said. "He is getting dangerous. I will give him a licking after the auction."

Skinner and Snoop and Barr and Trevor caught hold of the Lancashire lad, and held him fast in spite of his struggles. Bulstrode grinned at his furious face, and held up the trousers to inspection again.

"Gentlemen, I am waiting for a bid. These unique trousers are going cheap——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will throw in this waistcoat with the same lot," said Bulstrode. "You will observe that the waistcoat is of a good ancient design, and the pattern is startling enough to wake you in the morning, if you place the thing beside your bed, and save the expense of an alarm-clock."

"Let me go!" shouted Mark Linley.

"You are a little chunk of real grit," said Wingate. "You are going the right way to work, and I think you'll pull ahead in time—with the best fellows in your Form, at any rate. Stick to it!" "I mean to!" said Mark Linley.

But they held him fast. Bulstrode dragged a couple of white shirts from the skip and flaunted them in the air.

"What offer for shirts, trousers, and waistcoat?" he said. "Don't be backward in coming forward, gentlemen. What offers?"

"Twopence the lot," said Hazeldene.

"Any advance on twopence?"

"Threepence," said Stott.

"Threepence I am bid. Any advance on threepence?"

No reply. Bulstrode raised the mallet.

"Going for threepence the lot—going—going—gone!"

The mallet came down, and smashed a little clock that had been taken out of the basket. There was a roar of laughter. Bulstrode tossed shirts, trousers, and waistcoat over to Hazeldene, who let them fall carelessly on the floor, where they were soon trodden underfoot. Bulstrode dragged some underclothing from the skip, and held it up to view. Mark Linley made a desperate effort, and broke loose from those who were holding him.

"Look out!" yelled Trevor.

But the warning came too late. Linley went at Bulstrode like a bulldog, and in a moment had him round the neck, and was punching wildly at his face. Bulstrode gave a roar of surprise and rage, and tumbled headlong off the bed, with Linley clinging to him. The bump on the floor was terrific, and both boys gasped from the impact. But Linley, clinging to his bulky enemy, was still punching.

"You noisy brats!" said the unpleasant voice of Carberry, the prefect, at the door. "What's all this row about?"

"It's the new fellow," said Snoop. "The factory rotter, Carberry. He's going for Bulstrode like a wild beast. Look at him!"

"Here, young shaver, stop that!" exclaimed Carberry. "Do you hear me? I'm a prefect, and if you don't obey me I'll skin you! My word!"

Mark was deaf to him. He was punching Bulstrode furiously, while the Remove bully, bewildered and dazed by the sudden attack, was hardly able to defend himself. The prefect, with an angry scowl, stooped and dragged the new boy away from Bulstrode by main force. Linley seemed inclined to attack him in turn, but he saw in time that he was a senior, and restrained himself. Carberry shook him savagely.

"What do you mean by it?" he shouted. "Don't you know that you have to obey a prefect's orders, you factory whelp?"

"I—I am sorry!" gasped Mark. "I—I lost my temper."

"Beastly tiger-cat!" snarled Snoop. "Look at Bulstrode! His nose is bleeding."

"I'll smash him for that!" howled Bulstrode.

"What's it all about?" demanded Carberry, still grasping Linley by the collar. "I've a good mind to give you a hiding apiece all round."

"It was that factory chap," said Snoop. "He's got a temper like a demon. He wants a good hiding. He wouldn't take any notice even of you, Carberry."

"I'll teach him to take notice of a prefect," said Carberry. "You young whelp, you oughtn't to come to a decent school! Why didn't you stick in the factory you belonged to?"

"Mind your own business!" said Linley.

Carberry stared at him, almost petrified, for the moment.

"You—you talk to me like that!" he gasped.

"I'll talk to anybody like that who insults me!" shouted Mark. "You're a bully and a cad, and these fellows are a

set of cads and cowards, too. I'll take them one at a time, and give them a hiding. I could do it."

"I'll give you a chance," said Bulstrode.

"Hold your tongue, Bulstrode! So I am a cad, am I?" said Carberry, with a glint in his eyes. "I think you'll have to learn better manners, you factory sweep. Lay him over that bed, kids!"

Half a dozen of the juniors hurried to obey. Hazeldene and Trevor and Skinner held back; but there were enough without them to handle the vainly-struggling lad. He was laid over the bed, face downwards, and the prefect took up a slipper that had been turned out of the box.

"This is the first lesson," he remarked. "If you ever want another, you'll get it—in the same place."

Mark Linley gave a gasp of pain as the slipper rose and fell. But then he set his teeth, and remained silent under the shower of blows that followed. His blood was at boiling point, and he was savagely determined that not a sound should pass his lips to gratify his enemies. And not a sound did pass his lips, though the punishment he received was a terrible one.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Hazeldene. "Hold on, Carberry; that's enough!"

Carberry's reply was a cuff that sent Hazeldene reeling. Then the slipper rose and fell again with more savage force than before. There was a sudden shout from the doorway.

"Stop it!"

Wingate came quickly in. At the sight of the captain's angry face, Carberry's hand fell to his side, and the juniors released the new boy. But Mark Linley did not move. He still lay face downwards across the bed, shaking with pain, and unable to move a limb for the moment.

Wingate's brow was like a thundercloud.

"What do you mean by treating a kid like that?" he exclaimed.

"He checked me," said Carberry defiantly. "I'm a prefect, and I'm not accountable to you for my actions, Wingate. He's had his lesson."

And Carberry hurled the slipper away, and strode out of the dormitory. Bulstrode & Co. followed him silently. They did not care to face the captain of Greyfriars just then.

Wingate lifted Mark Linley from the bed. The boy was staggering drunkenly, and his face was like chalk. He looked dazedly into the kind and anxious face of the Greyfriars captain. Big and rugged as he was, Wingate had a heart as tender as a girl's.

"I'm sorry for this, Linley," he said. "I don't know what you've done, but you've been treated badly. What was it about?"

Linley steadied himself on the captain's arm.

"It's all right," he said thickly. "It's—it's all right."

"It's not all right," said Wingate warmly. "I've a good mind to march you straight to the Head, and tell him what Carberry was doing."

"No, no!" exclaimed Mark, in alarm. "I—I don't mind! I'd rather not cause trouble. I don't suppose Carberry meant to hurt me so much. I—I don't want to get him into a row."

The captain of Greyfriars was silent. He recognised the true grit that showed in the Lancashire lad's words, yet he was greatly inclined to expose Carberry's brutality to the Head, all the same. One thought restrained him—if Linley were placed in the position of having complained, the Remove would regard it as sneaking, and he would never be able to make his peace with the Form.

"I—I suppose I was a fool to come here," said Mark. "They don't understand. They don't like a factory lad among them. I suppose it's natural. Where I come from, we always thought a fellow a rotter who wouldn't work, and despised him, and here it seems to be a disgrace to have worked. I dare say I shall get along all right in time, when they get used to the idea."

"You are a little chunk of real grit," said Wingate. "You're going the right way to work, anyway, and I think you'll pull ahead in time—with the best fellows in your Form, at any rate. Stick to it!"

"I mean to," said Mark quietly.

And Wingate left him, and Mark proceeded to repack the things that had been dragged from his "skip."

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Disappointed Raggers!

AT bed-time that night there was a great deal of suppressed excitement in the Remove. Fellows glanced at Mark Linley, and whispered to one another. The lad from Lancashire could not fail to see that a ragging was planned for after lights out, and his heart sank a little at the thought of being shut up in the great dormitory, far from help, at the mercy of his enemies, without a single friend to stand by him. But it was an ordeal that had to be gone through, and he prepared to face it bravely.

Just before bed-time Harry Wharton was passing Mr. Quelch's door, when the master of the Remove beckoned him to enter. The captain of the Remove stepped into the Form master's study.

"You have made the acquaintance of the new boy, Linley?" asked Mr. Quelch abruptly.

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"I believe there is some sort of a set made against him in the Remove, Wharton."

"Some of the fellows seem to have their backs up, sir."

"I need not say that I am sure you have no hand in it, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch. "If I thought it possible, I should not speak to you now as I am going to do. Wharton, I know something of Linley, from the clergyman who helped him to get the scholarship by means of which he came here. He is a steady, decent lad, and any shortcomings he may have will soon, I think, be rubbed off at Greyfriars. I should like you to lend him any little help you can, Wharton."

"Certainly, sir!"

"I am not asking you to chum up with him, of course. He is very different from you in station and training; but I know you would not take a snobbish view of the matter, though I am afraid snobbery is rather rife in my Form. As captain of the Remove, it is your duty to put down bullying and ragging, and I am sure I can rely on you, Wharton."

"I understand, sir, and you can rely on me."

Wharton joined the Remove, who were going up to bed. It was Carberry's duty to put the light out, but this evening Mr. Quelch took the prefect's place. When the Removites were in bed, Mr. Quelch paused a moment before extinguishing the light.

A less keen-sighted master would have noticed that the Remove were in a state of suppressed excitement, and only waiting for him to be gone, to get out of bed again.

"My boys," said Mr. Quelch quietly, "on several occasions lately there has been noise in this dormitory after lights out. I am determined to restore complete order to the Remove dormitory. I shall be very alert to-night, and any boy found to have left his bed after lights out will be given an imposition of five hundred lines, and six strokes with the cane. Good-night!"

"Go-o-o-od-night, sir!" said the Remove, in a long-drawn quaver.

The light was put out, and the Form master closed the door. There was a general indignant exclaiming at once.

"The beast!"

"The rotter!"

"The interfering brute!"

"It's on purpose to protect that factory brat!" exclaimed Bulstrode furiously. "Who's game to get up and put him through it, all the same."

"I'm not, for one," said Hazeldene. "I'm not going to get a licking and five hundred lines to please you, Bulstrode."

"We all know you're a coward, Vaseline. Trevor—Snoop"—Bulstrode sat up in bed—"will you get up if I do?"

"I won't," said Snoop. "Not much!"

"Don't be an ass, Bulstrode," said Trevor. "You know jolly well you daren't get up, any more than we dare. The factory kid can wait. I'm going to sleep."

"Who says I dare not?" yelled Bulstrode.

"I do. Go to sleep!"

"I've a jolly good mind to come and yank you out of bed yourself."

"Rats! Go to sleep!"

And Trevor began to snore. Bulstrode growled, but, as a matter of fact, he did not mean to venture out of bed, after the Form master's warning, and he soon followed Trevor's example, and snored in good earnest.

Mark Linley was breathing more freely with his relief.

It was hard enough to be ragged in the day-time, but he had escaped a dormitory ragging, and for that mercy he was thankful. He did not know much about the matter, but he knew that he had narrowly escaped a painful ordeal.

He fell asleep at last, and slept soundly enough till the rising-bell went in the morning. He was the first up in the Remove dormitory in the gloom of the December dawn. He was accustomed of old to jumping out of bed at the signal of the "knocker-up" at home in his Lancashire town, at a much earlier hour than this.

Many of the Removites grumbled at the hour of rising, but it seemed luxuriously late to the Lancashire lad. The stillness of the huge building was strange enough to him. Instinctively he listened for the thuds of the knocker-up and the clatter of the clogs on the pavements. But all was quiet in the still morning, save for the bell.

Harry Wharton sat up in bed, and glanced at the new boy.

"You're an early riser," he remarked, as he stepped out of bed.

Linley gave him a nod and a bright smile.

"Yes, this isn't early for me," he said. "I usually rise in the dark in the winter. It seems awfully quiet here!"

"The bell makes row enough, I think," said Bob Cherry, rubbing his eyes. "I believe Gosling makes it clang like that on purpose, because he's in a temper at getting out of bed. Heigho! How dark it is!"

"The darkfulness is terrific."

The juniors rose, one by one, and dressed themselves. Harry Wharton noted with an approving eye that Linley took a sponge bath all over, and wasn't afraid of the cold water. There were a good many fellows in the remove who contented themselves with a wash down to the chest on cold mornings, and Bunter, as a matter of fact, seldom went below his neck, except on the important occasion of his weekly warm bath. Linley looked very fresh and wholesome as he came down, and Harry liked his look, although his clothes certainly were of a country cut, and of a pattern tabooed by the Greyfriars fellows.

The morning was clear and cold, and Harry Wharton and his chums kicked a football out into the Close for a punt-about before breakfast. A number of Removites joined them, and quite a crowd were soon punting the footer round the Close in the crisp air. Mark Linley looked on, keen enough to join, but very doubtful about his reception if he did so.

The ball came his way, and stopped almost at his feet, with a crowd of juniors after it, and elbowing one another.

"Get out of the way, young mills and looms!" shouted Bulstrode.

"Hold your tongue, Bulstrode!" said Wharton sharply. "Kick that ball over here, Linley. Why don't you come into the game?"

Mark kicked the ball, with a good lift that showed how well he had his foot in. The crowd streamed away after it, and Mark joined in with them. Bulstrode stopped.

"If that factory rat comes in, I'm out of it," he said.

"And I," said Snoop.

"And I!"

"And I!"

"Same here!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, get out of it, then," said Harry Wharton passionately. "Come on, Linley!"

Linley shook his head.

"It's all right," he said. And he put his hands in his pockets and walked away.

Harry Wharton shouted after him.

"Linley, come back here!"

Mark started a little at the tone of authority in Wharton's voice, but he turned back, and looked at the Remove captain quietly.

"What is it?" he said.

"Come and help us punt this ball about. I'm football captain in the Remove, and you've got to do as I tell you as far as football is concerned. Come on!"

Linley laughed cheerily.

"Oh, if that's how it stands, I'll come on fast enough!" he said. "I've played football long enough to know how to obey orders!"

And he came back promptly.

"Well, I'm out of it!" said Bulstrode.

"And I," said Trevor.

"You can do as you like, Bulstrode," said Wharton disdainfully. "You're a waster, anyway, and out of place near a football. As for you, Trevor, if you stand out now, you'll stand out of the Remove footer team too, so take your choice!"

Trevor hesitated, but he knew that Wharton had a will of iron, and meant what he said. He left Bulstrode's side.

"Going to be bullied into taking up that outsider, are you?" sneered Bulstrode.

"Rats!" said Trevor.

Wharton kicked the ball, and the juniors were quickly whooping in pursuit of it. Mark Linley ran with the best of them. He had had his orders from his football skipper, and no amount of sneers and shrugs would have forced him away now. Harry Wharton noted his form with an appreciative eye. The mill-hand from Lancashire seemed to be all sinew and spring. He was fast and steady and keen, forbearing towards others to a degree rather unusual in the rough Form he had entered, but not in the least afraid of hard knocks himself.

In the chase of the ball, he was tripped over by Snoop, and Skinner and Stott rolled over him heavily; but the Lancashire lad was up again in a second, as cheery as ever. Wharton's brow darkened, for he knew that the incident was no accident. But Linley never seemed to think about it at all. He was "on the ball" again in no time, and it became pretty clear that there was nothing "soft" about the lad from the cotton mills.

As a bell rang the punt-about ceased, and the juniors, warm and exhilarated, trooped off towards the House. Harry Wharton dropped into step beside Linley.

"You seem to take to footer!" he remarked.

"I've played since I was a nipper," said Linley simply.

"I suppose you will join the Form club? We're pretty strong on football here," said Wharton. "I'm captain of the Form team—in fact, before my time there wasn't a separate Remove team. The Remove used to have a few players in the junior team, but the team was run by the Upper Fourth. It was my work starting a separate team, and we're quite as strong as the Upper Fourth now. We played St. Jim's and drew with them the other day, and the St. Jim's junior eleven has fellows in it from the Shell. My opinion is that the Upper Fourth would have been licked by the St. Jim's lot. The team is up to good form now, but there's always room for a good player. If you shape well, there's no reason why you shouldn't get your cap for the Form."

Linley's eyes sparkled.

"I should like to," he said. "I'd give anything—but there, the other fellows would be down on the idea at once!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"The opinion of other fellows doesn't weigh much with me in making up the Form team," he said. "If they had anything to say against your form as a player, I should listen, of course; other matters haven't anything to do with football. You had better join the Form club. Nearly all the Remove are in it, and you can't play for the Form without joining. As the football season is half over, you will pay half the usual subscription; that will be three bob. Frank Nugent, in my study, is the secretary and treasurer."

"Good," said Linley; "I'll be glad to join! I only hope it won't make trouble for you!"

Wharton laughed again.

"Bless you, I don't care if it does," he said. "I'm used to trouble, and I don't mind it. I had a rough time when I first came to Greyfriars, and I pulled through. You'll do the same if you stick to it."

"I shall stick to it."

"Right! It's the way to win in the end!"

And the juniors went in to breakfast.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
Resignations Accepted.

BILLY BUNTER felt a tap on his shoulder as he came out into the hall a little later, and he blinked round through his big spectacles.

"I say, Levison——"

"It is I," said Mark Linley. "I want to speak to you, Bunter. I lent you five shillings yesterday off your postal-order."

"Did you?" said Billy Bunter.

"You know I did."

"Oh, all right; don't get ratty about it! I suppose you don't think I'm not going to pay you, do you?"

"No, of course not. But the post is in now, and I should be glad if you would hand over the tin. I've got to pay my football subscription."

"Well, the fact is, Linley, I've had a disappointment about that postal-order. It hasn't come." Mark Linley uttered an exclamation. "Oh, it's all right; it's coming this evening for certain! I suppose it will do if you have it to-night?"

"I want to pay my football subscription."

"Well, you can pay it out of your own money, and have this to-night," said Bunter, who, like many people who never have any money, could not understand that other fellows' resources were limited too. Mark made an impatient gesture.

"I cannot; I haven't enough money without that."

"Well, leave the football subscription till this evening. If you could let it stand over for a day or two, I could repay it without any inconvenience at all!" said Billy Bunter confidentially. "The result of 'The Gem' football competition is announced in the number that comes out to-day, you know!"

"What has that to do with it?" demanded Mark.

"A jolly lot! I'm in that competition. I've been sending in the answers, you see, and with my great abilities at guessing the correct ones there's no doubt at all that I shall get the first prize. The prize is a pound a week for thirteen weeks. I'll tell you what, Linley. Suppose you let me have another fifteen bob now, and you can have the first pound?"

"I don't suppose you will get the prize——"

"Oh, really, Linley! With my ability——"

"Look here, I want that five bob!" said Linley abruptly. "When can I have it?"

"You can have it to-day," said Billy sulkily. "My postal-order may come by any post now, and you can have your pound of flesh, you confounded Shylock!" And Billy Bunter walked away indignantly.

Linley turned red. It was not pleasant to be called a Shylock for asking for his own. He felt that he had made a mistake in lending money at all; bur, after all, it would be all right when the postal-order came. A tap on his shoulder made him turn round, and he found Frank Nugent at his elbow, with a pencil and a little book in his hand.

"Wharton says you're joining the Remove footer club," said Nugent.

"Yes, that's right."

"Three bob, please."

Linley turned red again.

"I—I'm sorry," he said. "I—I—the fact is, I haven't the tin. I had it, only I've lent five bob to a chap——"

Nugent whistled.

"You—you don't mean to say you've been lending money to Bunter?" he exclaimed, glancing after the fat junior. "My hat!"

"Yes, I've lent him some tin off a postal-order he's expecting——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the joke?" asked Linley, puzzled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's the joke? Wherefore those musical cackles, like the last notes of an expiring bullfrog?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Linley's been lending Bunter money off his postal-order!"

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

Mark looked at the two of them.

"I don't see where the funny part comes in," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Nugent wiped his eyes. "My only Aunt Matilda! Billy Bunter has been expecting that postal-order ever since he was a nipper in the Third Form! Ha, ha, ha!"

"It hasn't come yet!" sobbed Bob Cherry. "Perhaps by the time Billy is an old, old man it may arrive, but the chances are against it!"

Mark Linley's face was a study.

"Do you mean to say that I've lost my five bob?" he asked.

"Well, if you see it again I shall be surprised, and I will purchase it of you to put it in a glass case in No. 1 Study!"

"But—but I can't afford to lose it."

"Yes, it's rough, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry. "You had better give Bunty a hiding. That will give you some satisfaction. But as for your cash, I'm afraid that has vanished into the 'ewigkeit,' as Fritz Hoffmann would say!" And the chums of the Remove walked away, still chuckling.

But it was no laughing matter to Mark Linley. He was unable to pay his football subscription, and the consolation of giving Billy Bunter a licking did not appeal to him much.

He could not help feeling downcast as he went into the class-room with the rest of the Remove. Harry Wharton noticed it, and as the class came out after morning lessons he asked the new boy what was the matter. Linley told him frankly enough.

"I—I don't really mind," he said. "I suppose it seems curious to a fellow like you that I should come to a school like this with only a few shillings in my pocket; but that's how it was, you see. As we're just at the end of the term now, could the subscription be allowed to stand over till after Christmas?"

"Oh, yes, that's all right!" said Wharton. "But—but that young rascal must be made to refund it; it's too bad!"

And Harry found an early oportunity of speaking to Billy Bunter. The fat junior would rather have avoided the interview, but Wharton was not to be avoided.

"Bunter," he said sharply, dropping his hand on Billy's shoulder in the Close, "I warned you not to cadge of young Linley!"

Billy blinked at him with great scorn.

"Oh, really, Wharton, I hope you don't think I have been cadging of anybody!"

"You have borrowed five shillings of the new kid!"

"He's going to have that back out of my postal-order!"

"Look here, Bunter, don't tell any more fairy-tales about a postal-order, or you'll get bumped!"

"Well, as a matter of fact, there seems some delay about that postal-order," said Bunter thoughtfully. "Perhaps upon the whole I had better let him have it out of 'The Gem' football prize."

"You young ass——"

"I don't think you ought to call me names, Wharton, because I like paying up my debts promptly. It may not be your way, but it is mine. I am going to let young Linley have his five bob back out of the first week's pound in 'The Gem' prize. The result of the competition is announced to-day, and so he won't have to wait long!"

"Listen to this—you have got to repay Linley that five bob!"

"I am going to, out of 'The Gem' prize——"

Wharton was greatly inclined to box the fat junior's ears. But Billy Bunter's faith in his wonderful abilities as a prize-winner was touching.

"I say, Wharton, wait a minute—can you lend me a shilling?"

"No, I can't."

"Well, make it a penny then! I want to get 'The Gem,' so as to show you the announcement of William George Bunter as the winner of the pound a week for thirteen blessed weeks!"

Wharton laughed in spite of himself, and tossed a penny to the fat junior, who scuttled off with it. Wharton was pretty certain that the duffer of the Remove had not come within miles of the right answers to the football pictures in the competition. He was thinking of the five shillings as he walked away with his hands in his pockets. It was too serious a loss to Linley to be allowed to stand, but it was certain enough that Billy Bunter would never repay it. Wharton felt in a sense responsible, as Bunter was a fellow belonging to his study.

"I want to speak to you, Wharton."

It was Bulstrode, with a very disagreeable look on his face. Half a dozen fellows were with him, and they all looked "ratty." Wharton gave them an inquiring look.

"I hear that you have asked this factory chap to join the Lower Fourth Football Club," said Bulstrode savagely.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Then it's true?"

"Yes. He seems to be a decent footballer."

"Well, if he joins, I leave," said Bulstrode. "That's all. I don't intend to belong to a club with factory sweeps in it."

"Leave, then," said Harry Wharton laconically.

Bulstrode glared at him.

"Do you mean to say that you'd rather have him in the club?"

"Yes, rather. He's a decent footballer, and you are a slacker. He plays the game, and you are not above giving an opponent a sly kick. I've seen you do it. He's worth fifty of you in a footer club."

Some of the Removites chuckled. Bulstrode was white with rage.

"I knew you would take this line," he said thickly. "I told the fellows all along that you would set yourself up against the Form, out of sheer cussedness."

"Nothing of the sort. I'm sorry to see you chaps making silly goats of yourselves, that's all. Linley is a decent sort."

"A mill-hand!" said Trevor.

"Yes, a mill-hand, and a jolly decent chap. It's no good expecting me to back you up in any beastly snobbery, for I'm not that sort. I'm surprised at you, too, Trevor. You're a Lancashire chap yourself."

"Ye-e-es," drawled Trevor, "but I haven't worked in a mill!"

"You mightn't have been the worse for doing so, though. It might have taught you to stick to your work instead of slacking, and to treat a decent fellow decently, instead of playing the snob."

Trevor turned red. But he made no reply; and, in fact, Harry's words seemed to have struck him with some force, for he drew a little away from Bulstrode. But the latter was furious.

"Well, we all resign from the club, that's all," he said; "and I rather think you'll have some more resignations soon, Wharton."

"Resign and be hanged!" said Harry Wharton, turning on his heel. And so the discussion ended.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Mark Linley on his Mettle.

MARK LINLEY joined the chums of the Remove on the junior ground for football practice before dinner, and played for the first time the game of Soccer. He was very much at home on the football field. The simpler code of the Association game was easy enough for him to pick up, and he did not seem likely to want many lessons. In running, kicking, and dodging he did not want any lessons at all. The wiry Lancashire lad was "all there."

Harry Wharton smacked him on the shoulder in a hearty way as they came off the field. There had been very few at practice beside the chums of Study No. 1. The Removites generally "kept off the grass." Bulstrode and his set openly declared their intention of sending the new boy to Coventry. The greater part of the Form were undecided about the matter. They were accustomed to following Harry Wharton's lead, and yet they were greatly influenced by Bulstrode. Had Mark Linley shown any of the traits of a "rotter," they would have decided against him en masse. But the quiet and self-respecting manner of the boy won upon many. There was nothing at all bumptious about him, and, on the other hand, there was no sign whatever of any wish to curry favour. He was of a sufficiently strong nature to be able to stand alone, if they let him alone.

"You'll do, kid," said Wharton. "You only want a bit of practice at the new game, and I rather think you'll be all right for the Form eleven."

Linley's eyes glistened.

"That would be ripping!" he said.

"The rippingfulness would be terrific!" purred the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But behold the woeful countenance of our esteemed Bunterful chum."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry, laughing. "What's the matter, Bunty?"

Billy Bunter blinked at them lugubriously.

"I can't understand it!" he said.

"What can't you understand? Expound it, and we'll try to work it out for you," said Nugent encouragingly.

"It's a mystery."

"What's a mystery?"

"Of course, it must be a mistake."

"What must?"

"I'm sincerely sorry to see such carelessness, but, of course, it's a printer's error.

Bob Cherry took the fat junior by the shoulder, and shook him forcibly.

"Explain yourself, you fat duffer!" he growled. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, really, Cherry, I wish you wouldn't shake me! If you make my glasses fall off, you'll have to pay for them if they get broken. I—I——"

"What's the matter, then?" roared Bob Cherry.

"I don't mind so much on my own account," said Billy Bunter. "It's you fellows. I was depending on that pound a week to clear up all my old accounts, and start fresh. Then there's this new chap. I ought to settle up that five bob. He's a poor beggar from a coal-mine, or something ——"

"A what?" said Mark Linley.

"Oh, really, Linley, I didn't see you there," blinked Bunter. "I mean you're a ripping chap, and I like you so much that I feel I ought to settle up about that five bob. That's what I really meant to say. But there's a mistake in adjudging the prizes, and I'm left out!"

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

"It's no laughing matter, you fellows. It must be a printer's error, of course. The curious part is that in the list of answers there are a lot more printer's errors, as well, as very few of the answers given tally with those I sent in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, it's a case of carelessness. I dare say they're busy, and it will be set right in next week's number. The prize will wait till then, only I hope it won't be sent by mistake to the chap whose name has been shoved in, instead of mine, as winner of the first prize."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at," said Billy Bunter peevishly. "I suppose you don't think I've really lost the prize, do you?"

"Well, I do, rather!" said Bob Cherry. "Didn't I tell you all along that your answers to the football pictures must have made the judges weep? I don't believe you got a single one right."

"With my wonderful ability at guessing the answers, I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then you don't think it's a printer's error?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Upon the whole, I don't see how so many printer's errors could occur in one number," admitted Billy Bunter. "It must be a curious want of judgment, that's the matter. My answers were ripping, I know that. But now, what's going to be done?"

"I hope dinner's done," said Nugent. "I'm going in to dinner."

"Oh, don't be funny, you know! I'm stony, and I've entered into a good many engagements on the strength of that pound a week. How am I going to settle up all my old accounts?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Come in, you chaps," said Wharton. "I'm hungry. You'd better get up a subscription in the Remove, Billy."

Billy Bunter grunted. The chums of the Remove walked away, laughing. But Harry's face became grave presently. Mark Linley had gone in first.

"The young ass!" he said. "I don't think I ever saw quite such a duffer as Bunter. The answers he sent in to the football pictures were too idiotic for anything, and he wouldn't hear a word of advice on the subject. He thought he knew best. All the same, I don't like to see the young duffer in the dumps. Suppose we have a whip round for him? He will forget all about his disappointment if he has a good feed; and, besides"—Harry lowered his voice a little—"he has cadged five bob off the new chap, who can't spare it, and he could pay up then."

"But would he?" said Nugent dubiously.

"Yes; I'd see to it."

"The honourable idea is good," said Hurree Singh. "I shall be pleasefully gratified to contribute the august sovereign."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"No, you won't," he said. "We don't want any more than ten or twelve bob at the outside, and he can spare five out of that for his debt. As you are rolling in filthy lucre, you can stand five, and we'll make up the rest, as we're not giddy millionaires."

"The agreeableness of my worthy self is terrific."

And the whip round was promptly made. After dinner, Wharton looked for Bunter, and ran him to earth in a quiet corner. Bunter looked uneasy; he never quite knew what to expect when Wharton interviewed him. But the glistening of twelve shillings in the Removite's hand made his eyes sparkle.

"If you'd like to lend me a few bob, Wharton——"

"I wouldn't," said Harry, in his direct way. "We've had a whip round for you, to stand you a feed, and to help you pay your debts."

"Well, that's awfully decent of you, I must say, Wharton. How much is it? I suppose it's a sort of testimonial."

"Yes, a kind of a sort of one, I suppose," said Wharton. "There's twelve bob. We've subscribed it between us in Study No. 1."

"You might have extended it a little, so as to take in the whole Form, Wharton. I would rather have had a sovereign."

"Young pig! Look here, you're to pay Linley his five bob, and keep the rest for yourself."

"Oh, bosh! Linley is going to have his five bob out of my postal order."

"He's going to have it out of this."

"I don't see why you should dictate to me what I'm to do with my own money, Wharton," said Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"But it's not your money till I give it to you. I can still return it to the subscribers if I like."

"Oh, really, Wharton! Of course, I should like to pay

back Linley, and you can trust me to do so; that was what I really meant to say."

"I'm glad of that," said Wharton grimly, "because I'm going to see that you do it. You're to pay Linley before you spend any of the tin. I shall ask Linley about it, and so I shall know whether you have or have not paid him. Mind, if you fail to do so, you shall never have anything from me again so long as you stay at Greyfriars. I think you know by this time that I'm a fellow of my word."

Billy Bunter looked greatly injured.

"I think you ought to know by this time, too, that I'm a fellow who can be trusted with money," he said. "Of course, I shall pay Linley at once. You can ask him if you like."

"I intend to ask him, so remember!" said Wharton significantly; and he placed the twelve bright shillings in Bunter's hand, and walked away.

Bunter looked at the glistening coins, and looked across at Mrs. Mimble's shop. But irresponsible as Bunter was, he had a glimmering of common-sense, and he knew that it would not do to trifle with Wharton when he was in earnest. He heroically turned his back on the tuck-shop, and looked for Linley. He found him in the Close, and tapped him on the arm. Linley looked round.

"Here's your five bob," said Bunter, with great dignity, "and I hope you regret now having hinted that I was not likely to repay you."

Mark slipped the money into his pocket.

"Have you had the postal order?" he asked.

"No; there has been some delay in that. But I have other sources of income," said Bunter, with dignity. "Look here, if you like to come to the tuckshop, I'll stand you some tarts. I'm in funds. I don't mind you being a chimney-sweep, or whatever it is you are, and I don't see why I shouldn't associate with you, so long as you realise the difference between us. I say, Linley, I wish you wouldn't walk away while I'm talking. I say! My word! He's gone! Well, of all the ungrateful rotters, I think that fellow takes the cake!"

And Billy Bunter went off by himself to the tuckshop. Mark Linley walked towards the football ground, a shade on his face. A group of fellows were standing by the pavilion, and Bulstrode's voice was heard in strident tones:

"Here comes the factory sweep!"

Linley took no notice, but his heart was heavy. He had been sent to Greyfriars at the end of the term so as to break the ice, as it were, and have a chance to start clear after the Christmas holidays. But the boys of Greyfriars showed no sign yet of becoming used to him. If he commenced the new term on the same conditions, his life at Greyfriars was likely to be harder than it had ever been in a Lancashire factory. But it was only for the moment that he allowed himself to be downhearted. Then his courage rose. He inwardly resolved that nothing should ever scare him from the course he had marked out for himself. He had won his way to Greyfriars, and he wanted only his rights. And, after all, he had a sturdy north-country form, and a pair of hard fists, and he could look out for himself.

"What's the price of cotton just now, young factory?" called out Snoop.

"Shut up!" said Trevor.

Snoop stared at the speaker.

"What's the matter with you, Trevor?"

"Nothing," said Trevor, "only shut up, that's all."

Snopp shut up. He wasn't the kind of fellow to quarrel with anybody bigger than a Third Form fag. But Bulstrode was made of sterner stuff. Bully as he was, he had plenty of obstinacy and pluck, too.

He picked up a clod, and threw it at Mark with a deft aim, and knocked the new boy's cap off. The clod caught Mark a clout on the head in addition, and he spun round with blazing eyes.

"Who threw that?" exclaimed the Lancashire lad.

The juniors laughed mockingly. Mark, leaving his cap where it had fallen, ran towards the group, his fists clenched hard. He had been very patient, but the time of patience was past.

"What coward threw that?" he cried.

"I threw it," said Bulstrode promptly. "Got anything to say about it?"

"Yes. Put up your fists."

Bulstrode stared. There was no fellow in the Remove who could stand up to him, excepting Harry Wharton. The Lancashire lad did not look anything like a match for the burly Bulstrode. But he evidently meant every word he said.

"Put up your fists! Do you hear?"

"Oh, don't be funny!" drawled Bulstrode. "I say, chaps, let's bump him!"

"Right-ho! Bump the cad!"

"No, you won't!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, coming up in time. "Linley has challenged you, Bulstrode, and you can fight him! There won't be any bumping just now."

"Mind your own business!"

"That's what I'm doing. My business is to come down heavy on bullying, and I'm doing it. Why don't you fight him?"

"I could knock him into the middle of next week!"

"Do it, then; we'll see fair play."

Linley took off his jacket, and Bob Cherry held it. The Lancashire lad's eyes were burning, and his lips were white and hard set.

"Now come on!" he said.

"Oh, very well!" drawled Bulstrode. "If you'd rather have a licking, I'll give you one."

And he came on.

But there was a surprise waiting for the bully of the Remove. He did not walk over the new boy with scarcely an effort, as he expected. He found a pair of hammerlike fists too hard to pass, and those fists came home on his features with blows that made him stagger.

Bulstrode sprang back, tore off his jacket, and then, breathing fury, rushed upon his foe again, realising at last that the combat was serious.

And now the bully of the Remove put all his "beef" into it; but he had found a foeman worthy of his steel.

The Removites stood round, watching with keen delight. It was a fight such as had not taken place in the Remove since the historic encounter between Bulstrode and Harry Wharton. In amazement they watched the form of the Lancashire lad. Mark Linley received plenty of punishment from Bulstrode's heavy drives, which he could not always stop. But punishment had no effect upon his spirit. His left eye was closed up, his nose was swelling visibly, his mouth was contorted with pain, with a thin stream of red running from the corner. But he was game to the backbone. And hard as his punishment was, Bulstrode's was harder.

"Hurrah!" roared Bob Cherry. "Lancashire wins!"

Bulstrode had gone down under a terrible right-hander, and he did not come up to time. He sat up, blinking and dazed. Snoop tapped him on the shoulder.

"You're not licked, Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode snarled.

"Get away, you whelp! Hang you! I'm done!"

Mark Linley turned away. He was staggering himself, half-blind, his senses reeling. But a firm hand supported him. It was Harry Wharton's.

"Well done, well done!" said Harry. "That's a lesson to Bulstrode, and I think it will be a lesson to the Remove! Come on, you want looking after now, by George!"

Bob Cherry helped Linley on with his jacket, and he walked unsteadily away, leaning on Wharton's arm. Bulstrode glared after him sullenly, through half-closed eyes; but the looks of the other Removites were changed. Pluck will always tell, and prowess in the fistical line appealed to the Greyfriars Remove more than anything else. A fellow who could lick the bully of the Form was a fellow to be respected. And, strangely enough, but very pleasing to Mark Linley's ears, a cheer followed the Lad from Lancashire.

THE END.

GRAND TALE OF ARMY LIFE.

READ THIS FIRST.

On the death of his father, Jack Dashwood finds to his astonishment that he has been practically disinherited in favour of his Uncle Dominic and Cousin Leonard. He consequently enlists in the 25th Hussars, under the name of Tom Howard, and soon becomes a corporal. Unfortunately for Jack, however, his Cousin Leonard is attached to the 25th as second lieutenant, and, with the aid of a bullying trooper named Sligo, succeeds in getting Jack deprived of his stripes. Dominic Dashwood's death occurs just as the 25th are sailing for India. On their arrival there, Leonard transfers into the Ploughshires, while Jack is soon reinstated favourite, and becomes once more full corporal. A frontier war breaks out, and the 25th receive orders to mobilise for the front. Sligo is bribed by Dashwood to drug Tom Howard one night while the young corporal is on picquet duty. Tom falls asleep at his post and is told that in due time he will be court-martialled. In the meantime, a detachment of the Ploughshires, which includes Dick Vivian and Leonard Dashwood, finds itself cornered by tribesmen, under Jamra Rhan, in the courtyard of an ancient monastery. A squadron of the 25th, with a troop of Bengal Lancers, come to their rescue, and a fierce fight takes place in the vaults of the monastery. The Pathans hold a stone staircase, which cannot be stormed except with heavy loss.

(Now go on with the story.)

"A Miss is as Good as a Mile!"

"Take cover, men!" cried Sir Ponsonby, as two or three of the Hussars rolled back, wounded. "Get behind those statues, and let them waste their ammunition. Upon my soul, this is as hot as the Secundar Bagh! There must be some other way up to that place; some of you see if you can find it."

And Tom Howard and Clavering, spying a little door in the wall, went cautiously through, and stole along to discover where it led. Tom came within an ace of breaking his neck by suddenly falling down a flight of broken stone steps, but fortunately landed on a bed of soft sand below.

"Look out, you chaps!" he shouted.

And, taking warning, the others came down in more orthodox fashion, and joined him.

The passage narrowed considerably, and they had to stop.

"I think we are on the wrong scent," said Clavering.

"There are some more stairs going up here!" cried one of the men.

"Hold hard!" said Tom. "I see something like a ray of light at the end of this place. Stay where you are, and I will go forward."

He crept along cautiously, holding his carbine in front of him; and all at once, from the sand at his feet, a dim figure sprang up and aimed a furious blow at his head. Tom dropped to his knee, firing as he did so; and the figure, which was that of a lurking tribesman, turned and fled towards the ray of light, which now became brighter.

"That was a narrow shave," said Tom to Clavering, who was close behind him. "Try a shot, Jim!"

"Not so," said the sergeant; "we will see where the beggar goes." And they pursued as fast as they could through the sand, which was loose and nearly knee-deep there.

The light at the end of the passage was suddenly obscured. The fugitive had evidently reached some opening; and then a hideous wail came back to them.

"What is that?" said Tom, pausing.

"I don't know; get ahead and see," said Clavering. And ploughing his way through the loose drift, Tom emerged with surprising suddenness into the full glare of the morning sun.

A cry burst from his lips, for his helmet was torn from his head, and there was a hoarse chorus of shouts in Hindustani. Looking up, he found himself surrounded by a circle of fierce, dark faces, with astonishment depicted upon them. An inch lower, and those lances would have pierced his brain, for he was in the circle of Bengal Cavalry that guarded the exit from the ruins. So close to him, that he grasped it to steady himself under the first shock of surprise, was the body of the fugitive Pathan, who had met with the fate he himself had so narrowly missed.

"Allah be praised, sahib!" said the black-bearded duffardar. "You were within a hairbreadth of the gates of Paradise."

"Well, a miss is as good as a mile," said Tom, considerably startled, all the same. And, disengaging the battered helmet from the lance-points, he crawled back into the passage, pushing Clavering before him.

"Get ahead, Jim; we will try those stairs," he said. "We cannot be very far from the enemy. There goes another volley!"

They had reached the head of the stairs, a narrow, rock-hewn stair, when their last candle went out, and as it did so someone gave a startled cry in the darkness before them, and they heard a man running for his life.

"We have headed the beggars off, anyhow," said Clavering.

"We had better inform Sir Ponsonby, and get some of the other chaps along here," said Tom, "then we shall have them nicely. Those Lancer fellows will keep the opening right enough."

"I believe you're right, youngster," said the sergeant. "About turn, you chaps!" And they scrambled down the stairs into the sandy passage once more.

After some groping they found their way back into the hall, and a hearty British cheer greeted them as they entered it.

Jamra Khan, alarmed by the man who had fled before Tom and the sergeant, had suddenly retired from the gallery, and the Hussars were springing up the great stone staircase after their active general. But once again they were foiled by the marvellous intricacies of these subterranean passages, and though they searched high and low, not a trace could they find of the enemy. They did not see a square stone trap-door in the floor of one of the rooms, and the Pathan chief and his men were in the vault beneath, listening to the trampling overhead. Half a dozen of their number had been shot in the gallery, and they represented the result of an hour's hard work in the darkness.

"One thing is pretty certain," said Sir Ponsonby, sheathing his sword, "they must be somewhere in this confounded hole. We will have a cordon of Lancers round the hill, and send the Engineers over here with some powder. That'll do their business for them, I fancy. But now, the sooner we are out of this place the better."

When they struggled out, keenly disappointed, into the courtyard once more, they found the six dead men of the Ploughshires laid side by side in a trench; and, removing their helmets, Sir Ponsonby and the officers stood in solemn silence while the Hussars fired the three sad volleys, and a

bugler sounded the "Last Post." Then, sending a galloper to the Lancers with orders to watch the hole and patrol the ruins, the party mounted, the Ploughshires fell in, and they marched back to camp, in time to meet the two companies who were coming out to look for Captain Montgomery and his men.

Four Against Nineteen—and the Sequel.

"Corporal Howard!" cried a voice. And Tom, saluting, turned round, and saw Sir Ponsonby Smithers beckoning to him.

Tom and Bill Sloggett had been watering their horses, and were leading them back to the cavalry lines. Tom approached the general, who was talking to Colonel Greville, and he wondered what was about to happen.

"Howard, Sir Ponsonby wishes you to guide a party of Engineers back to the Buddhist ruins that you have just left," said Colonel Greville. "Take that trooper with you. You've both been into the place, and may be useful to them."

Tom waited a moment, but the colonel turned to Sir Ponsonby and continued his conversation.

"Was that all?" thought the corporal. "Nothing about the Victoria Cross that I've really earned, then. Pardon, sir, are we to go now?"

"Yes, that is the party yonder. Get along!" And Tom, saluting, sprang into his saddle, and signed to Sloggett to do the same.

They placed themselves at the disposal of the officer commanding the Engineers, and soon left the camp behind them. The Engineers, who were dark-skinned Bengalese, carried powder-bags and time-fuses and dynamite cartridges, so that if Jamra Khan and his followers were still concealed in the vault, it was evident that they were going to have a bad time. Round the hill, on which the temple stood, the cordon of the Bengal Lancers circled slowly, their blue and red pennons fluttering, and round the exit from the subterranean gallery were six of their number still keeping watch, with their lance-points lowered.

Just about the moment when the dust on the plain marked the approach of the Engineer party, duffardar Lalah Singh looked into the eyes of the sowar opposite him.

"Bolar Din," said the duffardar, "you are my mother's sister's son, and we have fought side by side these many years. Will you come with me into this place?" And the duffardar pointed to the crevice in the ground. "I am weary of waiting like a mongoose for a cobra. The Pathans within mock us and throw dust on our beards, knowing that we shall be withdrawn by the general sahib, and leave the way clear for them."

"I am with you, Lalah Singh," said the sowar, with a laugh. And, springing from his Arab steed, he handed his lance to one of his comrades, and drew his tulwar.

A guttural chorus of approval went round the little circle, for the adventure was one after their own hearts; and then the duffardar bent down and crawled into the opening, Bolar Din following him.

They had been gone, perhaps, ten minutes, when Corporal Howard and Trooper Sloggett rode up to the gate of the temple, followed by the Engineer party.

"It seems altogether a shame," said the Engineer captain in charge of them, "to blow all this antiquity to smithereens, but I suppose there's no help for it. We will have a look inside first of all, if you will act as guide, corporal." And Tom and Sloggett dismounted.

They had brought plenty of lanterns with them, and leaving the native sappers to unpack the explosives, the Engineer captain followed the Hussars into that mysterious interior, loosening his revolver as he went.

"You know, sir, there are supposed to be some of the enemy lurking about," said Tom, over his shoulder.

"It might be just as well to have a few men with rifles, in case of attack."

"That's a good idea of yours, corporal. Wait here a moment." And the captain returned.

They stood there watching his retreating figure as he strode towards the square patch of sunlight and disappeared. Their lanterns threw two wavering circles on the ground, and, turning on his bullseye, Tom shot the light far into the interior, and started as he did so.

It revealed a human face, the eyeballs glistening, and the little skull-cap on the shaven head left no doubt as to its identity.

"Did you see that?" he said to his companion.

"D'yer 'ear that?" replied Sloggett. "The beggar's running like steam. He's gone to warn the others, so they're still 'ere."

Tom and the trooper had brought their carbines with them, and they stood listening to the dull echoes of the flying feet which died away, and then all was silent.

"That captain bloke is a long time comin'," said Sloggett. "I wish we'd spied that chap before; I believe I could 'ave dropped him with a shot."

Still they waited, and the captain did not reappear, and, growing impatient, the two Hussars wandered farther into the interior, almost unconsciously at first, flashing their lanterns hither and thither, and revealing strange, sculptured faces, and mysterious doorways that led into even deeper darkness.

"Hallo! Hold on!" said Tom, looking back and finding that the entrance was no longer in view. "He will never pick us up unless we wait for him. Come back a bit."

And he retraced his steps.

"Where is it?" cried Tom, after they had gone back some little distance.

"Dunno. What's this passage 'ere?"

And Sloggett pointed to an opening on their left hand.

They went into it and strode quickly along, but, from the carvings on the walls, they saw that it was a gallery they had not traversed before, and they both came to a stand.

"I begin to fancy we have lost our way, Bill," said Tom Howard. "Here, where does this lead to?"

And they hurried their steps into another gallery that branched off at right angles. Still the silence and blackness of night; and then the head of a stair plunging down.

"Shall we shout?" said Bill, his voice a little husky, as he thought of the cobras he had previously disturbed.

"What! And bring the Pathans down on top of us? That won't do."

The corporal paused, nonplussed. He had heard of men being lost for ever in the catacombs of Paris, and in that mysterious subterranean vault that extends beneath old Constantinople, and the knowledge that somewhere in the darkness Jamra Khan and his fierce tribesmen were in hiding made the situation very serious.

They seemed to be perfectly acquainted with the place, and could see in the dark like cats.

"Listen!" said Sloggett, grasping the corporal's arm. "There is someone moving at the bottom of those steps!"

And he turned off his lantern.

A faint, musical ring came to their ears—the ring of a steel weapon that had struck against the masonry. And, stepping aside into a recess, they waited breathlessly, and the man, whoever he was, began to ascend the stairs.

They could hear him coming up step by step, feeling the wall, stealing along with a stealthy, Oriental tread.

"If he tries this," whispered Tom, "creep into the first corner you can find."

And they felt with anxious fingers along the wall, which preserved an unbroken face for about thirty paces.

(Another long instalment of this story next Tuesday.)

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