

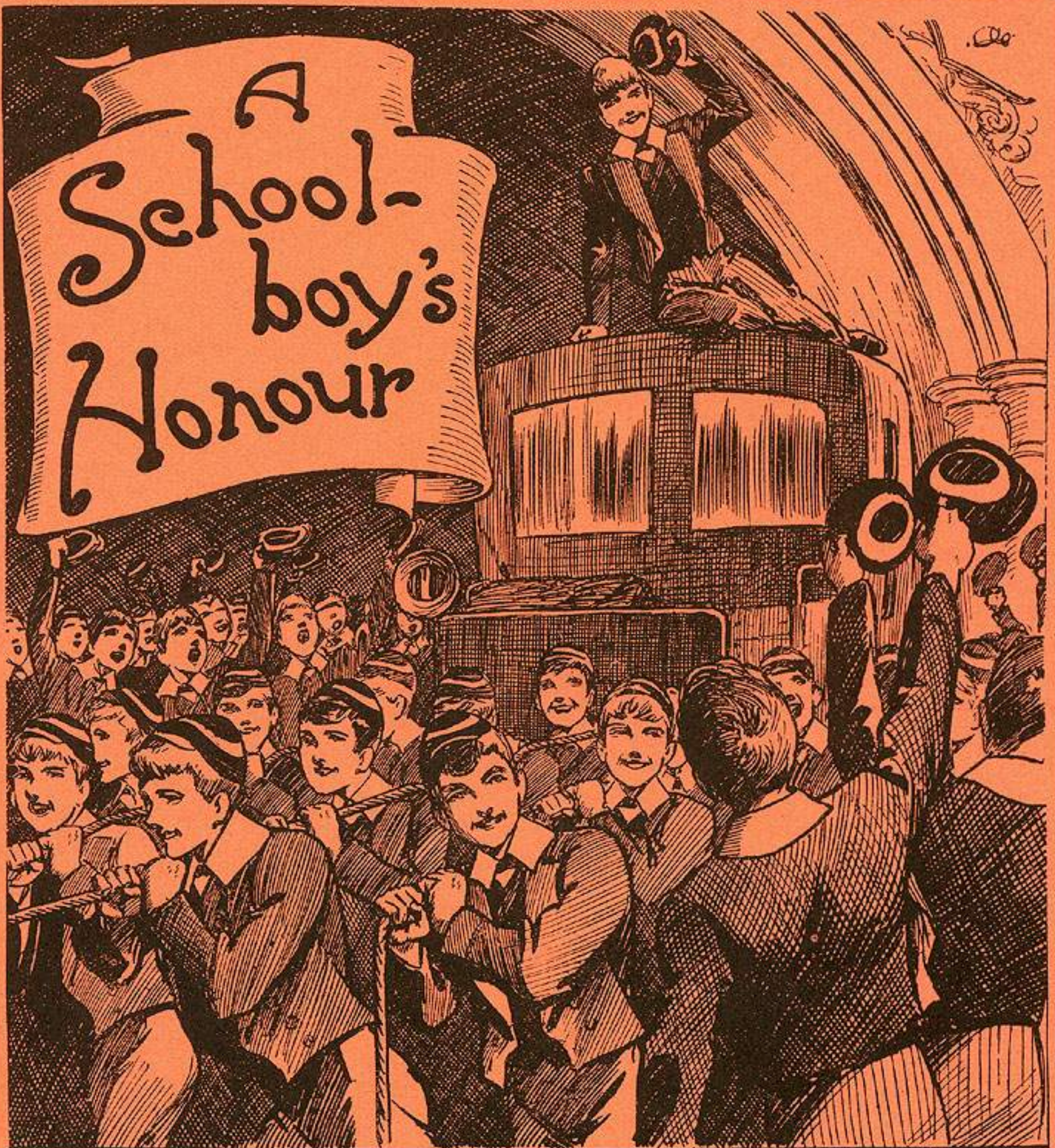
Grand School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. in this issue: "A SCHOOLBOY'S HONOUR."

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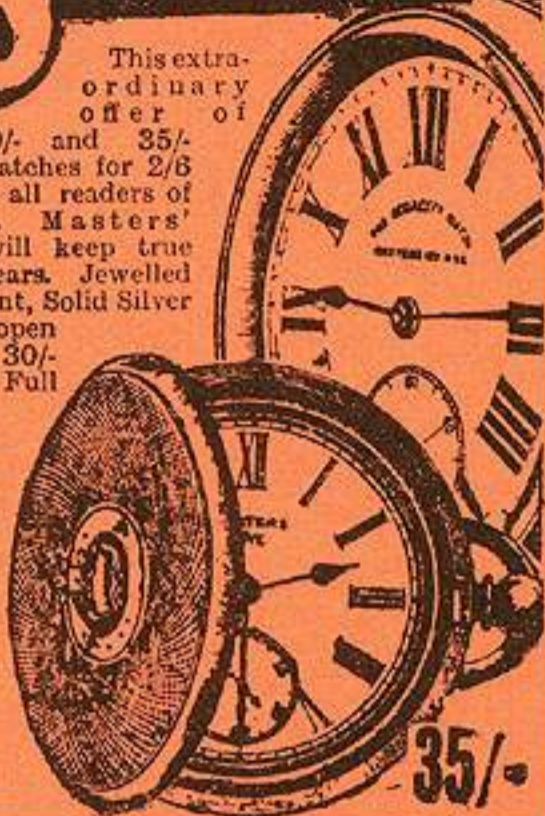


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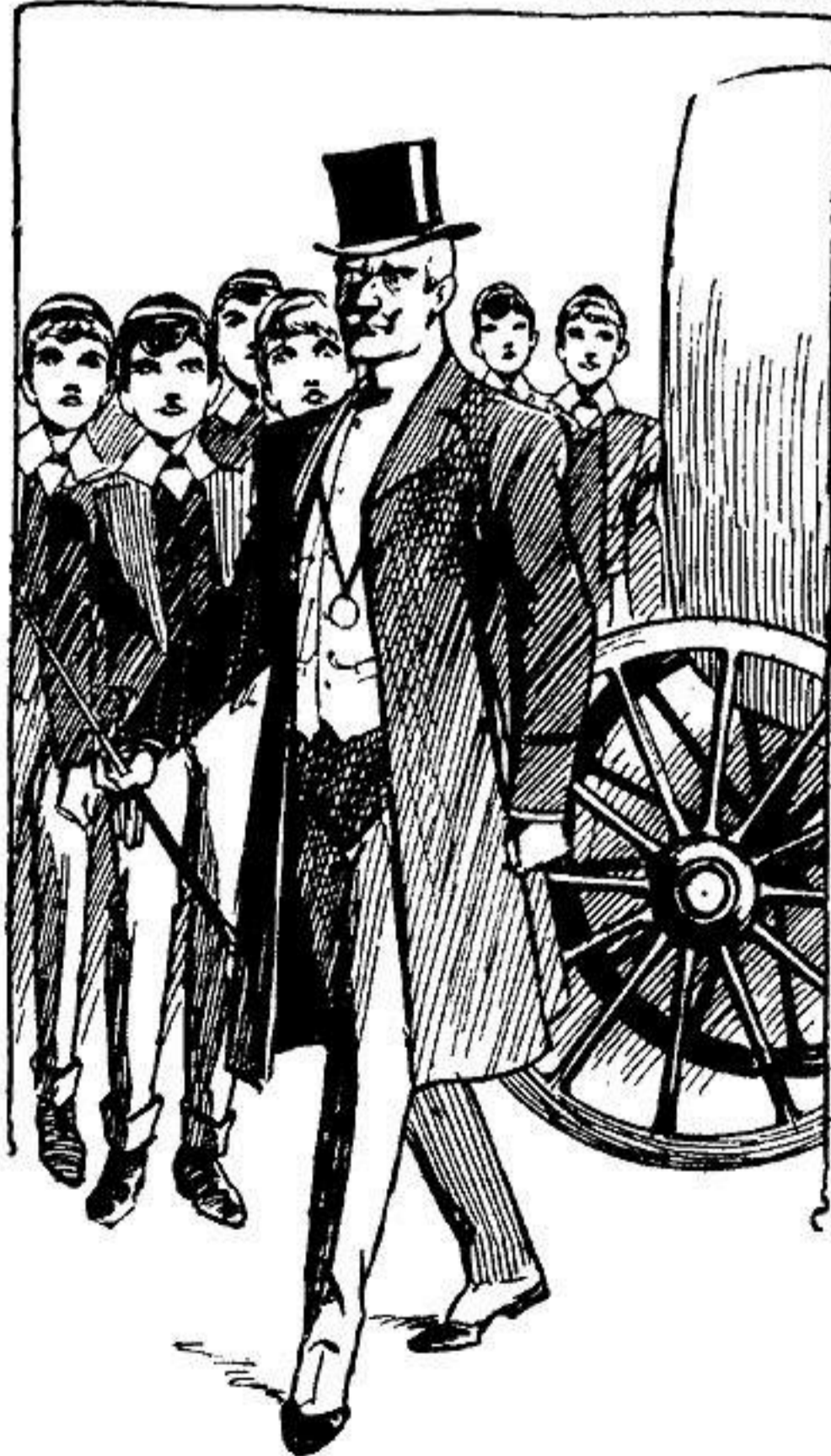
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THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Bob's Pater.

“DON'T shove!”
“Rats! Give a fellow room, then!”
“Gerrout!”
“Look here——”
“I say, you fellows!”

A Schoolboy's Honour

A Grand, Long, Complete
Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

“Order! He'll be here in a minute!” said Bulstrode. “If you make a row the prefects will come and clear the lot of us off!”

“Well, don't shove, then!”

Fellows were gathering in a thick crowd in the doorway of the School House, and on the steps, and round the steps, and along the wall. There was a buzz of talk, and keen and eager looks on all the faces. Something, evidently, was expected at Greyfriars, and three or four score of fellows were in a state of suppressed excitement about it.

There were fellows of all Forms in the crowd—mostly Removites, for the matter, as it happened, was one that concerned the Remove more than any other Form. Bulstrode, the captain of the Remove, towered with his broad shoulders over the other juniors. John Bull, and Mark Linley, and Frank Nugent, and Tom Brown, were clustered round him, and they made a compact group to resist shoving.

Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth, were wedged in the doorway, and refused to budge. Coker of the Fifth, with Potter and Bland, stood on the steps, frowning down on the fags who strove to obtain a lodgment there.

Even a few of the Sixth stood in the crowd, looking over the heads of the juniors. And as there was not nearly room enough for the fellows congregated there, the shoving and pushing and expostulating was incessant.

"Keep quiet, you kids!" said Coker, looking round.

"Quiet, I say!"

"I can't see through you, Coker!" expostulated Tubb of the Third.

"Never mind about seeing," said Coker cheerfully. "I'll tell you when Major Cherry comes in sight."

"Look here——"

"Oh, shut up!"

Skinner of the Remove looked at his watch.

"Jolly near time he was here!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, rather!"

"The train gets in at three, and it's not a quarter of an hour from the station if he takes the hack," Skinner said;

"now, it's nearly twenty past three now."

"Faith, and he may be here any minute, intirely!" Micky Desmond remarked.

"Let a fellow see, Coker! Sure, I can't see through ye're head, though I know there's nothing in it!"

"Dry up, you cheeky fag!"

"Sure, and I——"

"Here he comes!"

There was a sound of wheels on the gravel drive. Among the fellows crowded in the doorway and about it, there was a thrill of expectation.

Major Cherry was coming!

Some of the fellows there had seen him before; but most of them had not, and they wondered what he would be like. And even those who knew him wondered how he would be carrying himself upon this occasion.

For it was an extraordinary occasion.

Major Cherry's visit, under the circumstances, was an unprecedented event, and exactly what would come of it was not to be foreseen.

The major was coming to see the Head, so his wire had announced. His wire was to the Head, and the boys were supposed to know nothing about it. But long before the time fixed for the major's arrival, the whole school knew.

Dr. Locke had naturally confided the matter to the masters. Perhaps some of the masters had been heard to talk. Perhaps Trotter, the page, had seen the telegram, and talked. Perhaps Billy Bunter had nosed something out, and related it. Perhaps Heath, the new boy, an inveterate eavesdropper, had listened at the keyhole, and imparted what he had heard to others. At all events, whatever the cause, the news had leaked out. All Greyfriars knew that Major Cherry was expected by the three o'clock train that afternoon.

How would he come? In a state of stately and lofty indignation, or in a raging fury? Fellows who had seen the major inclined to the latter theory.

Nugent said that he would come ramping. And all Greyfriars was eager to see him ramp.

The major had excuse enough to ramp. Bob Cherry, of the Remove Form, had been expelled from Greyfriars, after being found guilty on a charge of theft. Bob had persisted to the last that he was innocent, and had been driven away from the school still protesting his innocence. Two fellows at Greyfriars, Harry Wharton and Mark Linley, of the Remove, believed him. But to the others the evidence had appeared too overwhelming.

But it was not to be expected that Bob Cherry's people would acquiesce. Innocent or guilty, he was certain to find believers at home. A fellow's mother and father would naturally require very, very strong proof before they believed such a charge.

And Bob Cherry, ere he left, had said that that was not the end of it; that Greyfriars would hear from his people.

Then came the major's wire on Monday morning, followed by the major in the afternoon.

The major was coming now; he had arrived! And the crowd of Greyfriars fellows watched to see him ramp.

The dusty old hack from Friardale Station had driven into the Close, and it was rolling up the drive to the House.

Every eye was fixed upon it.

"He's in it!" exclaimed Bunter. "I can see a silk topper!"

"Of course he's in it!" said Bulstrode. "You didn't expect him to be hanging on behind, did you?"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"Now watch him," said Skinner. "The fun's going to begin."

"Hullo! Clear off there!" exclaimed Wingate, of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, coming along the passage.

"What are you crowding up the doorway for?"

"We're watching for the major."

"We want to see him ramp, Wingate. Nugent says he will come ramping."

Wingate grinned.

"Well, never mind whether he ramps or not," he said.

"It's no business of yours. Where did you get your

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manners? Clear off! It's rotten bad form to collect in a crowd and stare at a visitor."

"But——"

"Clear off!"

The juniors surged away a little. Five or six fellows were pushed off the steps, and rolled over on the ground. Bunter was one of the first, and there was a yell from the fat junior as he sprawled on the earth, and Snoop bumped over him, and then Skinner.

But nobody was taking any notice of Bunter. The hack from the station had stopped, and the door had flown open and a stout gentleman with a very red face jumped out.

It was Major Cherry!

He was a stout gentleman, with a powerful form, clad in a tightly-fitting frock coat, and his face was very red, partly from the effects of Indian suns, and partly from the excitement he was labouring under. He had a white moustache, which curled at the ends, and grey hair showed under the rim of his extremely shiny silk hat. That he was a veteran of the Indian Army was apparent at a glance; and it was also apparent that he had brought some of the heat of the tropics home with him in his temper.

The major was evidently greatly excited, and in a great hurry. He jumped from the hack, and fairly ran up the steps of the House in so great a hurry that he did not see Bunter sprawling in his path. He trod on the fat junior and stumbled, and there was a terrific yell from Bunter.

"Ow!"

The major just recovered himself to save his balance. He turned upon Bunter, and his cane sang in the air.

"Begad!" he roared. "Is this a time for tricks, sir?"

Thwack! Thwack!

"Yow! Wow!"

Billy Bunter's tight trousers rang back to the lash of the cane. The major stamped up the stone steps. The fellows fell back at once to make room for him to pass. The major was a little too fiery to be trifled with.

Bunter sat up and roared. The major stamped into the House. The fellows eyed him with wonder and interest.

Major Cherry pushed his silk hat back from his perspiring forehead.

"Where is Dr. Locke?" he thundered.

"M-m-my hat!" muttered Bulstrode. "I don't envy the Head!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Rather not!"

"I shouldn't wonder if the major goes for him."

"My word!"

"Let's get out into the Close!" said Tom Brown. "We can see in the Head's window if there's a scrap!"

"Good egg!"

And the juniors crowded out and took up a position in the Close, opposite the Head's study window; some of them climbing into the branches of the elm trees to obtain a better view. Major Cherry had evidently come "on the ramp," as Nugent had declared, and it was an intensely interesting question to the juniors whether or not he would "go for" the Head.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Major Ramps!

DR. LOCKE was in his study. He was expecting the major; but it was not a state of happy expectation.

To meet a boy's father, and explain to him how his son had been convicted of theft, and expelled with ignominy from the school, could not have been at any time a pleasant task. It could not have been pleasant, even if the father had been convinced of the truth of the charge.

But it was doubly unpleasant in a case like this. For Major Cherry, so far from being convinced of the truth of the charge, scouted the mere idea of it. Any evidence which told against Bob was in his eyes no evidence at all.

It was useless to attempt to convince a man in that frame of mind. The Head looked forward to the interview with great uneasiness.

Trotter had orders to show the visitor in the moment he arrived, and the sound of wheels in the quad. warned the Head that his visitor was coming.

He coughed, and shifted a little in his chair, and coughed again.

The door opened.

"Major Cherry!"

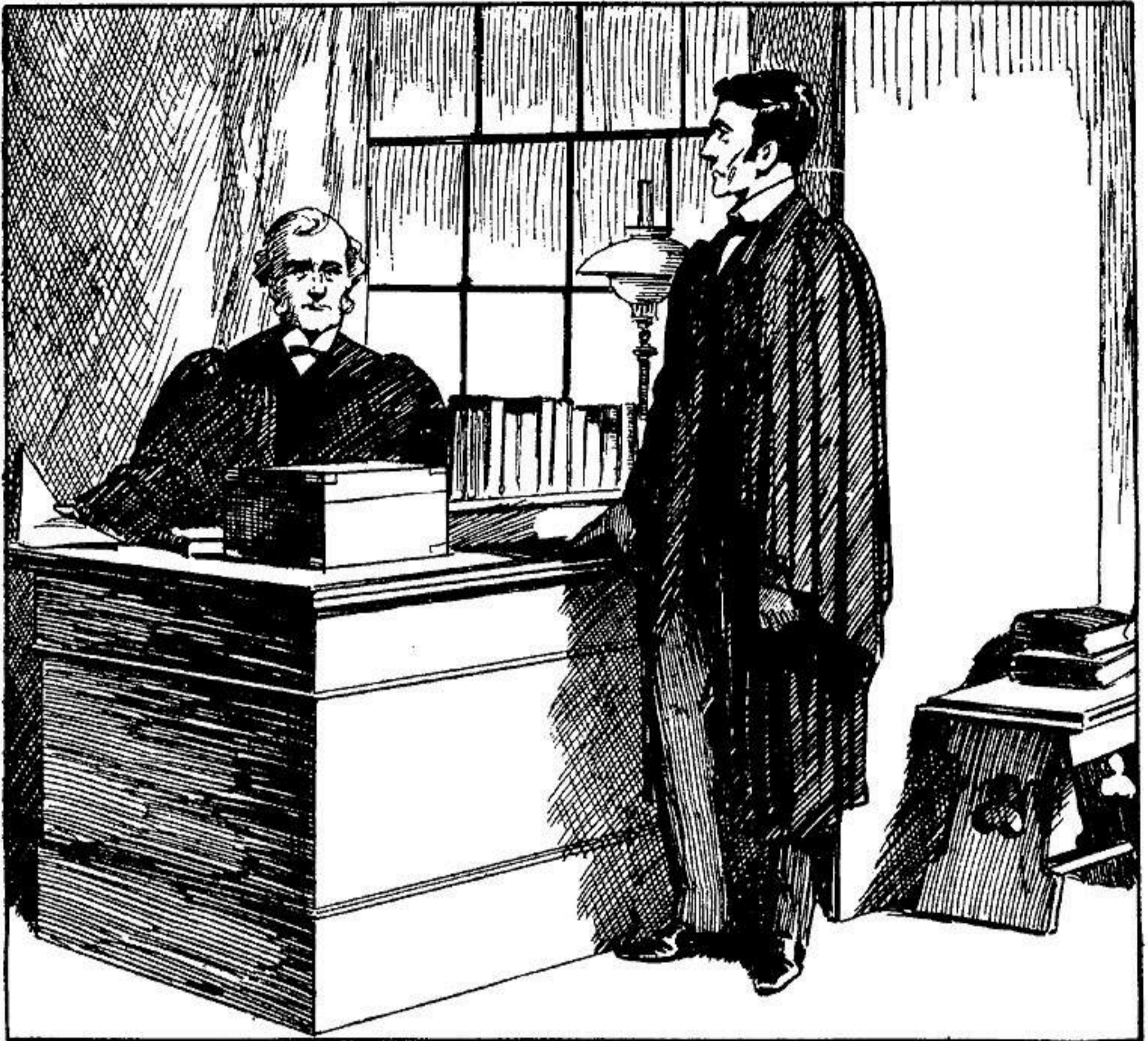
The major came in. He was so stout and powerful, and red-faced, and excited, that he seemed to breathe up, as it were, all the atmosphere in the room, and leave the unfortunate Doctor gasping.

Dr. Locke rose to his feet.

"Good-afternoon, major——"

The major waved his hand.

"I have not come here for polite formalities, sir," he said,



"I am given clearly to understand," said Dr. Locke, "that the case will be carried on to the furthest extremity—as far as the House of Lords, if necessary—and that heavy damages will be claimed. Of course, if Bob Cherry had been innocent, one could not blame his people for making the most strenuous fight." Mr. Quelch pursed his lips. (See page 6)

in a voice that could be distinctly heard at the end of the passage; "I have come here to speak about the flagrant wrong and injustice that has been inflicted upon my boy, sir!"

"My dear sir—"

"And to speak in plain language, by Jove, sir!"

"Pray be seated."

"I decline to be seated," said the major. "I have but little to say, sir, and that will soon be said. A charge has been trumped up against my son—"

"Sir!"

But the Head's most terrifying frown had no effect whatever upon the major.

He struck the table with his fist.

"I repeat it!" he roared. "A charge has been trumped up against my son. I demand to know the particulars of that charge, sir, so that I can dash it to pieces, sir!"

"If you will be calm—"

"Calm!" roared the major. "Do you expect a father to be calm, sir, when his son is branded as a thief, sir, and driven from school, sir? Calm! I am quite calm."

And the major made that statement in a voice that was far from being evidence of calmness.

"My dear major—"

"I demand to know the particulars of this disgraceful business, sir. By Jove, sir!"

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NEXT Special Complete School and
TUESDAY: Coronation Story, entitled:

"I am perfectly ready to explain, Major Cherry," said the Head. "Surely you must know that this whole occurrence is as painful to me as it can be to anyone. You do not imagine that I decided lightly, and without careful consideration, that your son was guilty of the charge made against him."

"He was not guilty!"

"The evidence was crushing."

The major snapped his fingers.

"Bah! That for the evidence. But let me hear this precious evidence. I will dash it to pieces, by Jove, sir!"

"Very well," said the Head, with a sigh. "In the first place, a postal-order was missing from the pocket of a jacket belonging to Nugent, of the Remove—your son's Form. Your son was in the study at the time it disappeared—it could only have been taken at a certain period—and during that period of twenty minutes, your son was in the study for a quarter of an hour, leaving only five minutes in which a possible thief might have entered and taken the order."

"Five minutes would have been enough, sir—five seconds, by Jove, sir!"

"Very well. The next point is, that the order was filled in to R. Cherry, the name of the payee happening to be left blank before, and was signed 'R. Cherry' by the person who presented it for payment."

"THE KING'S GUEST."

By
FRANK RICHARDS.

"I suppose it is not the first time that a forgery has been committed?"

"The post-mistress at Friardale Post Office, a most respectable lady, whose statement is unimpeachable, had positively identified Robert Cherry as the boy who cashed the postal-order."

"Stuff!"

"Cherry was placed in a row with the whole of his Form, and the post-mistress picked him out at once, without the slightest hesitation."

And the Head leaned back in his chair, as if he had thoroughly disposed of the matter now. But the veteran of Bengal was not so easily disposed of.

His white moustache curled up as he sneered.

"Do you call that evidence?" he demanded.

"I call it complete and incontrovertible evidence," said Dr. Locke tartly. "In a law-court, no further evidence would be wanted."

"I call it nonsense, sir," said the major. "I call it stuff, sir! Yes, sir, I call it piffle—piffle, sir, by Jove!"

"Sir!"

"My son's name was forged to the postal-order, and the rascal who presented it for payment must have disguised himself as my son, that is all, sir."

The Head made a gesture.

"I decline to entertain for a single moment such a wild supposition," he said.

"I do not call it a wild supposition," said the major. "I regard it as a wild supposition that my boy might be a thief, sir. The Cherry family are not thieves, Dr. Locke. Why should the boy steal? If he wanted money, he had only to ask for it. Do you think I would not have sent him ten shillings, sir, if he had been in need of it? And do you think he would not rather have asked his father, sir, than stolen from a near chum? My opinion is, sir, that you are not in your right senses!"

Dr. Locke flushed scarlet, and rose to his feet.

"Sir, this interview had better cease!"

"As soon as you like, sir," said the major. "I came here to speak plain English, by Jove, and I mean to speak it! This charge against my son has been trumped up."

"Do you dare to suggest—"

"Oh, I do not suggest that it was your work; I know you have been deceived!" said the major. "It is the work of some enemy of my son's, who has plotted and schemed to drive him from the school in disgrace. He has succeeded, sir, but only for the present—only for the moment, sir. The matter is going to be investigated, sir—examined into from end to end, and the truth brought to light."

"The truth has been brought to light already."

"Very well, sir. I take it that the governors of Greyfriars uphold you in the action you have taken."

"Unquestionably. I consulted with the chief governor before expelling Cherry."

"Very well. They will take the consequences."

The Head looked at him.

"The consequences! I do not understand you, sir. The matter is closed now, and ended."

"Closed! Ended!" The major trembled with rage.

"Closed! Ended! And my son's career is closed and ended, I suppose; he is to sit down quietly under the imputation of being a thief, and to have his character blackened for ever! You will shortly learn, sir, that the matter is not closed; that it is by no means ended! My solicitors are already preparing to take action, sir."

"Your—your solicitors?" stammered the Head.

"Yes, sir! You and the governors of this school will be called upon to face an action for libel, sir, for defamation of character."

Dr. Locke sank back into his seat.

"An action! Libel!"

"Yes, sir!" thundered the major. "And unless you can prove your charge against my boy, sir, prove it up to the hilt, you will have to pay damages, sir—heavy damages—and be held up to the scorn and contempt of all England, sir."

"Good heavens!"

"That is what you have to prepare for, sir; that is the warning I have to give you!" the major roared.

And he stamped out of the room, and closed the door with a bang that rang through the school.

The Head sat gasping.

He had expelled boys from Greyfriars before, but nothing of this sort had followed. An action for libel—defamation of character! The name of Greyfriars dragged through the law-courts; himself, Dr. Locke, defendant in a libel case, associated with the governors of Greyfriars—it was too terrible!

What a thunderclap to burst upon the head of the quiet, kind, scholarly old gentleman, whose life was passed in academic calm far from the madding crowd.

Yet could he blame the major?

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Evidence was evidence, but a father naturally believed his son's word against all others; that was only to be expected. What was evidence to a man who had seen his lad grow up, frank and truthful and honest as the day? What was evidence, in comparison with a glance from Bob's honest blue eyes, and the ring of his honest voice?

Outside, in the Close, disappointed juniors scrambled down from the trees.

The major had ramped, certainly, but he had not "gone for" the Head. That scene, which would have been really wildly exciting, had not happened.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Two Loyal Hearts.

MAJOR CHERRY jumped into the hack, and the driver put the old horse in motion. The major sat puffing in the hack as the vehicle rolled down to the gates. Two juniors were waiting there.

As the hack rolled out into the lane, they came towards it, and one of them signed to the driver to stop.

The major put his fiery face out of the window.

"What are you stopping for, driver?" he bawled.

Harry Wharton and Mark Linley raised their caps.

"May I speak to you, sir?" said Harry.

The major stared at him.

"Ah, Wharton!" he exclaimed. "I think I remember you. You are a friend of my son's."

"Yes, sir."

"And this lad—"

"Mark Linley, sir; Bob's best chum. We both want to speak to you, sir, about what's happened," said Harry.

"Stop where you are, driver."

"Yes, sir."

"Now go on, my boys," said the major more calmly. "Bob has told me about you—you two lads are sticking to him in his trouble?"

"Yes," said Harry. "We believe in Bob, though we can't understand yet how the thing has been done. But we feel certain of Bob's innocence."

"Quite certain, sir," said Mark, in his quiet way.

"Thank you, my lads—thank you," said the major, in a moved voice. "You are a pair of loyal, good lads, and I'm grateful to you."

"We know old Bob too well, sir, to think anything of the sort about him," said Mark.

"Exactly," said Harry. "And we're going to examine into the matter, sir, and do our best to find out what rascal it was fixed this thing on Bob. You mustn't blame the other fellows too much for deserting him, sir; the evidence is fearfully strong. It would have convicted any chap in a court of law."

"They ought to have known my son better."

"They'll be all sorry, when he's cleared, sir, and they'll tell him so. We've got a suspicion to go upon, and we hope to clear the matter up. I thought we'd tell you so before you left, sir, and you can tell Bob we're working for him."

"Thank you, lad—thank you!"

The major shook hands with the two juniors, and the hack rolled on. Harry Wharton and his companion went back into the school grounds. Wharton was looking very thoughtful, and the Lancashire lad watched him curiously.

"You say you have a suspicion to go upon, Wharton?" he asked.

"Yes, Mark."

"What is it?"

"I've been thinking of that new chap Heath," said Harry. "You know what an awful cad he is. He tortures animals, and Bob gave him a licking on his first day at Greyfriars for doing so. We all know that he hated Bob like poison. If the thing's been fixed on Bob somehow, he was just the fellow to do it."

Mark nodded.

"We've got to bring the other fellows round to think the same as we do about Bob, and all of us will have to stand together, to clear him," said Harry. "That's my idea. If we do that, we ought to be able to bring the truth out."

"I should think so."

They entered the House, and Wharton stopped at the notice-board in the hall. He pinned a paper up on it, and several fellows who saw him do so, gathered round the notice-board. Wharton passed on, and there was soon a crowd reading the notice.

"What rot!" said Skinner.

"Piffle!" said Snoop.

"Some more of Wharton's rot, of course," said Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. "Just like him to set himself up against the opinion of the whole Form. He does these things just to be talked about."

"Yes, rather!"

"What is it?" asked John Bull, joining the crowd with Nugent.

"Oh, some more piffle about Cherry!"

John Bull read the notice aloud.

It was written in pencil, and ran:

"NOTICE.

"All the fellows who are willing to help in clearing Bob Cherry from the charge made against him, are asked to meet in the Form-room at seven o'clock, when the necessary measures will be discussed. All Bob Cherry's old friends are expected to rally round.—H. WHARTON."

John Bull frowned, and Nugent bit his lip. Nugent had been Bob's close chum, and John Bull had always been on good terms with him. But their friendship had not stood the strain of the proof that appeared to be so complete against Bob. They had gone with the tide.

"It's rot!" said Frank Nugent irritably. "Why can't Wharton let the matter alone? It's finished now, and done with."

"Much better to let it drop," John Bull remarked.

"I guess so," said Fisher T. Fish, the American junior.

"I reckon I stood by Bob Cherry as long as there was a reasonable doubt left. But it was proved right up to the handle."

"Of course it was," said Bulstrode. "Wharton taking up this attitude is the same as accusing us of rounding on a fellow without any evidence."

"Blessed if I think we ought to stand it," said Esau Heath. "Who's Wharton that he's to stand up and preach to the lot of us?"

"Oh, you shut up!" said Nugent crabblily.

Heath's opinion might agree with Nugent's, but Frank was not likely to agree with Heath. Heath had been Bob Cherry's special enemy; but he had made himself thoroughly disliked by the rest of the Form, with very few exceptions. A fellow who listened at doors, and told lies, and found amusement in torturing animals, was not likely to be popular at Greyfriars.

Heath flushed angrily, but he made no rejoinder. Heath would put up with anything rather than risk being drawn into a fight, and his cowardice had become so well-known in the Lower School, that fags of the Third and the Second Forms had been seen to bully him, and crow over him, with impunity.

"Well, I'm jolly well not going to the meeting," said Hazeldene. "I stood by Bob Cherry as long as anybody; but what's the use of fighting against plain facts?"

"No use at all!" growled Nugent. "It's all rot."

"Utter rot!"

"I sha'n't go to the silly meeting, for one."

"Nor I, for another."

"Nor I, I guess."

"Faith, and I sha'n't, either."

"I sha'n't go," said Frank. "Wharton and Linley can have the giddy meeting to themselves, if they want to play the ox on the subject. I don't see why the matter can't be allowed to drop."

"Same here."

"Faith, and ye're right."

Nugent and Bull walked away, frowning. They felt Wharton's action as a reflection on themselves; and when they met Harry, a little later, they did not hesitate to say so. Wharton nodded to them cheerfully.

"You'll turn up at the meeting?" he asked.

"No," said Nugent shortly.

"Look here, Frank—"

"I think it's all rot."

"Oh, do you?"

"Yes, and I don't take it kindly from you, Harry, and that's the truth," said Frank. "You put us in the position of having rounded on a friend while you're sticking to him, and I don't like it."

"And I jolly well don't like it, either," said John Bull tartly.

Wharton flushed.

"Well, I can't help it, if you don't like it," he said. "I believe in Bob, and I'm bound to stand by him, and do all I can to clear him."

"He's guilty."

"I don't believe he's guilty."

"Oh, rats!"

Nugent tramped off irritably with his companion. Wharton looked rather dismayed. The task he had set himself at Greyfriars was likely to prove a hard one. In proportion to their previous trust in him, was the bitterness Bob's former friends now felt towards the unfortunate junior.

If Wharton and Linley carried out their promise to Bob and the major, they were likely to have to do it without assistance.

As a matter of fact, they were likelier to meet with opposition than assistance. Skinner and Snoop, and Vernon-Smith and Heath, and several more fellows of the same sort, were talking the matter over.

"It's a reflection on the whole Form," Heath said. "The

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"THE KING'S GUEST."

By FRANK RICHARDS.

EVERY
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ONE
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best thing the Remove can do is to meet in the Form-room, and jolly well rag the two bounders who are setting themselves up against the whole school!"

"Good egg!" said Vernon-Smith heartily. "Wharton's friends won't turn up, and we can get a dozen chaps at least who are wrathful enough about it, to treat those two cheeky rotters as they deserve."

"Hear, hear," said Skinner, with great heartiness.

And at seven o'clock there was a little crowd in the Form-room, waiting for Harry Wharton and the Lancashire lad, but their intentions were far from friendly.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Stormy Meeting.

HARRY WHARTON was in his study—No. 1 in the Remove passage—when seven struck from the clock-tower.

Mark was with him. Nugent, who shared the study, had not come in. He seemed to be avoiding the room, probably for the sake of having no unpleasant talk about the coming meeting. Nugent and Harry were the closest of chums, but undoubtedly the affair of Bob Cherry had come between them. Wharton took one side, and Nugent the other, and to Nugent it seemed that Harry's attitude was a reflection upon him. If there were a doubt left of Bob Cherry's guilt, Nugent indignantly reasoned, Harry might have trusted him to see it. As there wasn't a doubt left, Harry ought to have followed the crowd in condemning the lad who had been expelled. What the fellows had always said about Wharton, that he was high-handed, and cocksure, and fond of setting himself against everybody else, seemed to be coming true. Nugent felt aggrieved, and had not the patience to discuss the matter. He felt that a discussion might lead to a quarrel.

"It's seven," said Mark.

Wharton rose from the table, where he had been swinging his legs.

"May as well go down to the Form-room," he said.

"Well, we must, after arranging the meeting."

Harry laughed a little ruefully.

"I'm afraid the meeting won't amount to much," he said. "From what the fellows have been saying, it looks to me as if the mere idea of it has put their backs up. Even Nugent and Bull are ratty about it."

"They might give Bob another chance," said Mark, in his quiet way. "But they think the case is clear. Anyway, let's go down."

They descended to the Form-room. The room was lighted, and a little crowd of juniors could be seen through the open doorway.

A more hopeful expression came over Wharton's face.

"Looks as if there's going to be a meeting, after all," he remarked.

"I hope so."

But as they entered the Form-room, the chums could see that none of Bob's old friends had turned up. Vernon-Smith and Heath, and Skinner and Stott and Snoop were there. They were frankly enemies. Half a dozen other fellows had come to see the fun—whatever fun might be going. That was all.

There was a general scoffing laugh as the chums came in.

"Here they are!" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Here they come," said Heath—"the two blessed preachers who are going to bring us up in the way we should go."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton reddened.

"Have you fellows come to the meeting?" he demanded.

"Of course we have," said Vernon-Smith. "Can't you see we have?"

"We're waiting for the speech," said Skinner. "I suppose there is going to be a speech."

"We want to have the matter explained to us," Snoop remarked. "Our feeble intellects can't grasp so plain a matter, and we want to have the thing demonstrated to us. Perhaps you can work it out in Algebra."

Two or three more fellows came in.

Wharton looked at Mark Linley rather doubtfully. He had hoped for a sympathetic, or, at all events, a patient assembly. He had hoped that most of the Remove would be willing to hear anything that could be said in favour of the junior who had been expelled with a stain upon his name.

But the hope was evidently ill-founded.

More of the Remove came in, but their looks were far from sympathetic. Others gathered round the open doorway to look on. Bulstrode, the new captain of the Remove, leaned against the door, with his hands in his pockets. Bulstrode had been on very good terms with Harry Wharton lately. But he evidently did not mean to help now. The

expression upon his face matched the sneering look of Vernon-Smith.

But Harry did not think of retreating. He had come there to explain his views to the Remove, and say what could be said for the absent junior. He would have gone steadily ahead if the looks of the juniors had been ten times as hostile.

He mounted upon a form.

"I want to speak to you chaps about old Bob——"

"Hear, hear!" roared the opposition.

"I want to point out——"

"Hear, hear!"

"That——"

"Hear, hear!"

Harry Wharton paused. It was pretty clear that he was not to be allowed to make his voice heard in the Form-room. Ironical cheers and jeering laughter interrupted him all the time.

"Silence!" shouted Mark Linley. "Give Wharton a chance!"

That was the signal for a storm of hooting and jeering. They had only been waiting for the Lancashire lad to give them an excuse.

"Yah!"

"Factory cad!"

"Go back to your cotton-mill!"

"Scholarship cad!"

"Yah!"

Mark stood up, his face flushed, his eyes gleaming. There was angry scorn in the glance he threw at the excited Removites.

"You are the cads!" he exclaimed. "You've come in here to hear Wharton. Why don't you give him a chance to speak?"

"Yah!"

"Boo!"

"If you don't want to hear me," said Harry quietly, "I'll shut up. But I think you might play the game."

Skinner waved his hand to the others, and something like quiet followed. Wharton glanced over the crowd, and began again. He did not think he would be allowed to proceed very far, and he was right.

"You fellows, I want to explain to you why I believe that Bob Cherry was innocent——"

"Bosh!" shouted Heath. "Lies!"

"Rats!"

"Booh!"

Wharton's eyes blazed.

"And if you won't listen to me, you're a set of rotters, and that's all I have to say!" he exclaimed, losing his temper.

That was enough for the Removites.

Vernon-Smith and a few more made a rush towards the speaker, and in a moment the rest followed suit, and Wharton and Linley were surrounded by an angry, shouting crowd.

"Collar them!"

"Throw them out!"

"Hands off!" shouted Wharton, whose blood was fairly up now. "You'll get hurt."

"Collar them!"

Hands were laid upon the two chums from all sides. They were hustled towards the door of the Form-room.

But both of them were hitting out now. Vernon-Smith dropped like a log under the knuckles of the Lancashire lad, and Wharton knocked Skinner across him. Two or three more of the Removites rolled over before Wharton and Linley were dragged as far as the door.

But numbers told.

In the midst of an excited, shouting crowd they were whirled through the doorway, and out into the passage, still struggling furiously.

The uproar was terrific. Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, came along the passage with a frowning brow, and a cane in his hand.

"What's all this row about?" he shouted.

"Cave!" muttered Vernon-Smith.

The Bouncer and his comrades melted away. Wharton and Linley were left rolling on the flags, gasping for breath.

Wharton scrambled up dizzily. Wingate was looking at him very grimly.

"Well, what does this mean?" the Greyfriars' captain demanded.

"T-t-there's been a row," Wharton gasped.

"I can see that. There have been too many rows in the Remove lately. What have you been doing?"

"Speaking up for Bob Cherry, that's all."

"Oh!" said Wingate grimly. "You've been speaking up for Bob Cherry, have you?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd better have held your tongue."

"But——" Wharton began.

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"Oh, don't jaw back to me!" said Wingate angrily. "If you're going to champion a fellow who's been expelled for theft, you'll have plenty to do, and you'll get thrown out of more than one room, I expect. Why can't you let the matter drop?"

"Because I believe Bob was innocent."

"Nonsense! The case was proved, and you won't do him any good, or yourself either, by raking it up again like this. The sooner such a matter is forgotten, the better for all parties concerned. Don't let us have any more of this," said Wingate angrily. "If you want to hold peculiar beliefs, you can keep them to yourself."

And the captain of Greyfriars walked away frowning.

Wharton gave the Lancashire lad a rather hopeless look.

"My hat!" he said. "It will be an uphill job, Linley. The Form are against us, and old Wingate, too, and everybody!"

"Including the guilty party, of course," said Mark quietly. "We have got to stick to it, that is all, Wharton."

Wharton's jaw seemed to set squarely.

"We're going to stick to it," he said. "I'll never leave off sticking up for old Bob, unless I'm kicked out of Greyfriars, too."

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Legal Proceedings.

DR. LOCKE wore a worried look, as Mr. Quelch entered his study a few days later.

Dr. Locke had worn worried looks pretty frequently of late. There had been the revolt in the school, during his absence; then there had been the affair of the stolen postal-order, immediately following his return. Now that affair was lengthening itself out, and rising up against him, as it were, at every turn. In most cases, a boy expelled from school was expelled, and that was an end of it. But the expulsion of Bob Cherry was working out differently. Like the gentleman in the story who was dead, but refused to lie down, the Cherry case, although done with, cropped up at every moment. There seemed to be no end to it.

"You have heard, sir?" Mr. Quelch asked.

The doctor nodded.

"From Major Cherry's solicitors?"

"Yes; Messrs. Sharpe & Keene," said the Head. "I have had notice that an action for libel is about to be commenced, with myself and the Governors of Greyfriars as defendants."

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

"This is terrible!" he exclaimed.

Dr. Locke looked deeply distressed.

"It is more than terrible, Mr. Quelch. I had hoped to keep the matter entirely quiet. Now it will be in all the papers; the newspapers will not let such an item pass. I am given clearly to understand that the case will be carried on to the furthest extremity—as far as the House of Lords, if necessary, and that heavy damages will be claimed. Of course, if Cherry had been innocent, one could not blame his people for making the most strenuous fight. But——"

"But, under the circumstances, I fear it is Major Cherry's hot-headedness that is to blame. He does not reflect that by bringing this action, in the face of the strongest proof, he is simply advertising his son's guilt to every reader of the newspapers."

"True; unless——"

"Unless what, sir?"

"Unless the evidence that has satisfied us should be deemed wanting in a court of law," said the Head uncasily. "We all know that judicial decisions are—well, unexpected at times, and that the same evidence presents itself in different aspects to different judges."

Mr. Quelch nodded.

"But the proof is so clear!" he exclaimed. "It is not only that Cherry had more opportunity than anyone else for stealing the postal-order. I should not condemn or even suspect him on that alone. But if he did not sign the order, someone forged his name. To believe Cherry innocent, is to believe that there is a boy at Greyfriars capable of forgery, and that is altogether too much."

"Quite so."

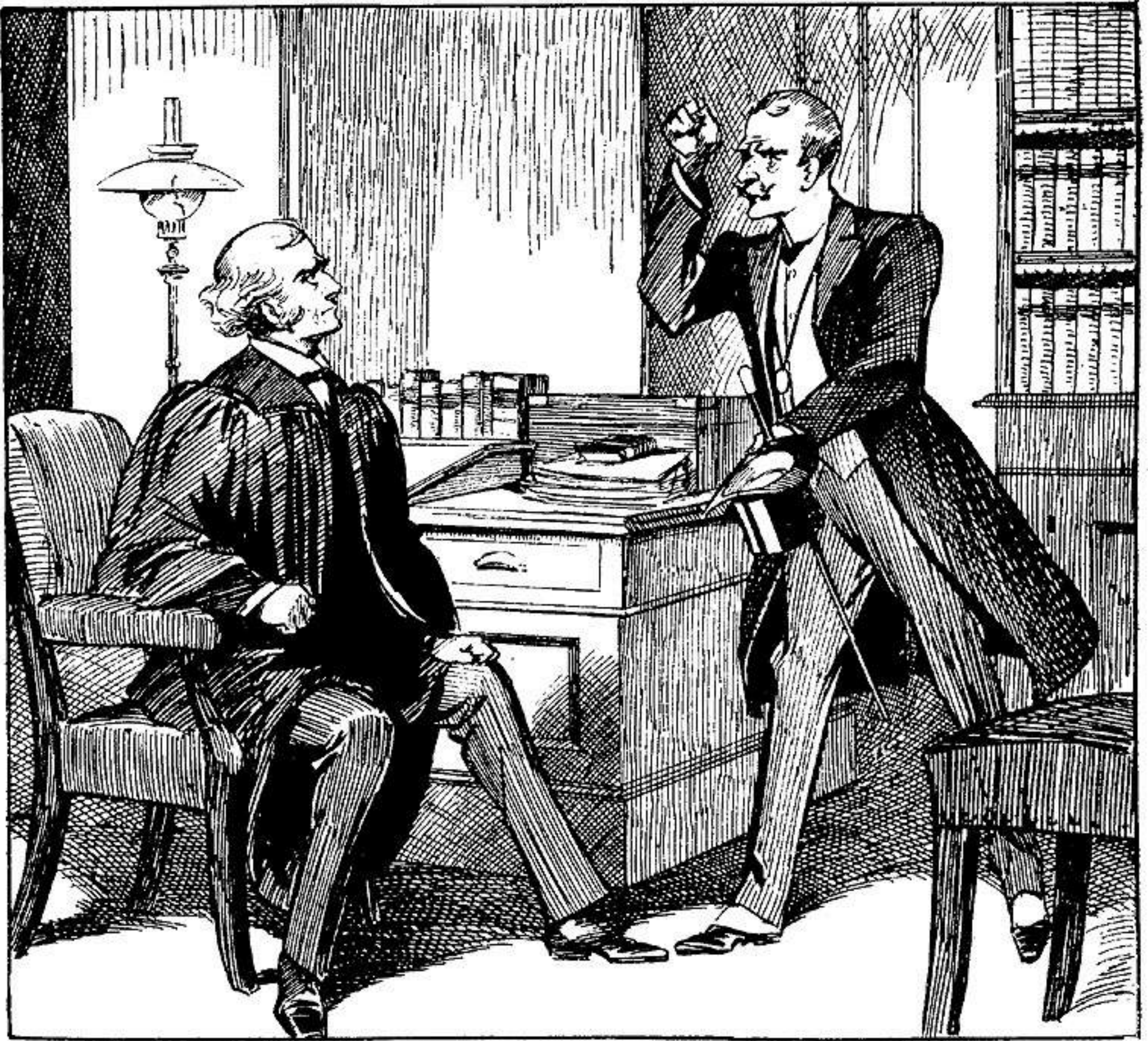
"Then the identification of Cherry by the post-mistress places the matter utterly beyond doubt."

"So it seems."

"Such a case will not occupy the court many minutes," said Mr. Quelch. "Your conduct, and that of the governors in upholding you, will be vindicated. Greyfriars will come off with flying colours."

"I suppose so; but——"

"I understand your feelings," the Remove-master remarked. "To have the name of the school dragged through the daily papers, in connection with a disgraceful case—I know it is terrible. The mass of readers will forget the cir-



"I call your evidence nonsense, sir," cried the major. "I call it stuff, sir! Yes, sir, I call it piffle—piffle, sir, by jove." The Headmaster flushed scarlet.

circumstances, but will remember that the name of Greyfriars was somehow mixed up in a case of libel and theft. I know it is terrible; but it has to be faced."

"Fortunately, the governors are upholding my action in the heartiest manner," the Head said. "They realise that I had no alternative, and they admit the utter and complete conclusiveness of the evidence. It is hard that we should be troubled like this by a man who does not seem to be able to distinguish what evidence is."

"It is very hard indeed. But Major Cherry may withdraw at the last moment. Surely his solicitors must explain to him that he has no case."

Dr. Locke shook his head.

"The major will not withdraw," he said. "The case will go on, and he will appeal, and appeal again, till it has become the talk of the entire country. I feel convinced of that."

"It is very—" Mr. Quelch paused, stepped quickly to the study door, and opened it. A junior who was kneeling outside fell forward on his hands and knees.

"Oh!" he gasped.

"Heath!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "You were listening."

"Oh, sir!"

"How dare you! Get up, you miserable boy!"

Esau Heath staggered to his feet.

His face was crimson, and his little eyes glittered like a rat's with nervousness. He had no courage, yet he was incessantly running risks of this sort. Dr. Locke rose to his feet, and took up his cane.

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FRANK RICHARDS.

"Come here, Heath."

The new boy cringed towards him.

"I have heard of this conduct of yours before, Heath," said Dr. Locke sternly. "It is so mean and cowardly a trait in anybody's character, that it amazes me that anyone should descend to it. You should learn to keep your inquisitiveness in check."

"I—I—"

"You were listening at the door."

"I—I wasn't, sir! I—I was just going to knock, when—when Mr. Quelch opened the door, sir," mumbled Heath.

"You were on your knees," said Mr. Quelch.

"I—I have just stooped down, sir, to—to pick up a stud I had dropped."

"Silence!" exclaimed the Head. "You make matters worse by telling these wicked untruths, Heath. You are a most untruthful boy."

"I—I—"

"Hold out your hand!"

"I—if you please, sir—"

"At once!"

"I—I—I—"

"Hold out your hand, boy!"

Heath obeyed reluctantly. He gave a shriek as the cane descended. Dr. Locke did not often lay the cane on hard, but in this case the utter meanness of the wretched fellow before him had disgusted him, and he laid the blow on severely.

Heath seemed to crumple up. He never could bear pain.

"Oh!" he shrieked.

"Silence, sir!" said the Head sternly, laying down the cane. "You seem to be as cowardly as you are dishonourable. Go!"

Heath slunk from the study.

"A most unpleasant boy, sir," said Mr. Quelch, as he closed the door after the whimpering Heath. "I have never seen a boy I like less. Fortunately, the other boys in my Form are fully aware of the meanness of his character, and he is not likely to be able to exert any evil influence over them."

"I am sorry there is such a boy at Greyfriars," said the Head, frowning. "I would gladly send such a boy away from the school. But that would be too drastic a punishment. I hope, however, that these ways of his will be cured."

"I shall do my best, sir."

And Mr. Quelch's face had a grim look, which boded very ill for Esau Heath, unless those ways of his should change.

Heath went limping down the passage, pressing the punished hand under his arm, and groaning to himself. Two or three juniors met him at the end of the passage, and there was a general grin. Removites, as a rule, could take their punishment without making a fuss about it, and there was general contempt in the Form for a fellow who whimpered. Heath's cowardice was well known, and he was not likely to get much sympathy.

"Licked?" asked Frank Nugent.

Heath groaned.

"Ow! Yes! Ow!"

"How many cuts?" asked John Bull.

"One!"

Nugent snorted.

"You're making all that row over one cut?" he exclaimed.

"You jolly well ought to be ashamed of yourself, then."

"I guess so," said Fisher T. Fish.

Heath squeezed his hand and muttered.

"The beast laid it on hard," he said. "All because I happened to be near his door."

"Rats!" said Bull. "You were listening at the keyhole, as usual, I suppose."

"I happened to hear—"

"What a lot of things you happen to hear!" sneered Nugent.

"Blessed if he doesn't beat Bunter hollow, and I always reckoned that Bunter was the meanest guy I ever struck," Fisher T. Fish remarked.

"You needn't hear the news if you don't want to," said Heath savagely.

"News, eh? What's the news?" asked the three juniors together, forgetting for the moment their condemnation of the method Heath had employed to learn it.

"The Cherry people are commencing an action for libel."

"Phew! Sure?"

"The Head's been informed by Major Cherry's solicitors, Messrs. Sharpe & Keene," said Heath.

"My hat!"

"The major meant business, then, I guess!"

Nugent grinned.

"I told you he would ramp," he said. "He's ramping now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess it will be trouble," said Fisher T. Fish. "Dr. Locke and the governors will have to defend the case. Bob Cherry will be giving evidence, and Dr. Locke will have to appear in court."

"My word! It will be something new in the history of Greyfriars."

"I guess I shall order the 'Daily Mail' every day and follow the case."

"Good! I'll go halves with you."

"Of course," said Heath, "there's no chance of Bob Cherry getting clear, is there? The evidence can't be upset in a court of law."

"Of course, it can't," said Nugent. "The evidence is true, and the truth can't be upset, except by very specially clever lawyers. The Head will come out of it all serene."

"I guess so."

"I'll let Wharton know this," Nugent remarked. "It may enlighten him a little. I should think even he would stop playing the giddy goat when he knows that the Head is being bothered in this rotten way."

And Frank made his way to No. 1 Study.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Clue at Last!

HARRY WHARTON was in No. 1 Study doing his preparation. Frank Nugent shared that study with him, and they had had it to themselves ever since Hurveo Jamset Ram Singh had gone back to India to attend the Delhi Durbar. Just lately Nugent had kept out of the study a great deal; relations had been a little strained. Nugent had his tea with John Bull, as a rule, and did his prep. in Bull's study.

Harry Wharton was not alone, however. Mark Linley was with him. Linley properly belonged to Heath's study; but he could not stand Heath, and Wharton was glad of the Lancashire lad's company.

Wharton looked up with a pleasant expression as Nugent came in. The breach had been widening between them, owing to the difference in opinion over the case of Bob Cherry, much against Harry's wish. He could not give up his own belief in Bob, to please anybody; but he could not induce Nugent to share that belief.

"Hallo, Franky!" he exclaimed. "Coming to do your prep.?"

Nugent shook his head.

"No. I've got news for you."

Wharton jumped up.

"About Bob?"

"Yes."

"Have they discovered anything?"

"No," growled Frank, "they haven't! What is there to discover?"

"Proof of his innocence."

"Rats!"

"Look here, Frank—"

"Oh, don't let's argue about that!" Nugent exclaimed impatiently. "We shall only quarrel. Let's agree to differ."

"Very well. But what's the news?"

"Cherry's people are beginning an action against Dr. Locke and the governors of Greyfriars."

"My hat!"

"The whole blessed case is going to be dragged through the Law Courts," said Frank. "Dr. Locke will have to appear and give evidence. They'll have the head governor up, too, and most likely I shall have to go, as it was my postal-order that was stolen. Nice, isn't it, for a decent school?"

"It's rotten!"

"I should think you'd drop backing up that blessed family now," said Nugent.

Wharton shook his head.

"No fear," he replied. "It's rotten, certainly; but Major Cherry isn't to blame. If I were a father, and my son were charged as Bob has been, I'd fight tooth and nail to clear him, and carry the case on to the very end, and spend every blessed penny I'd got on it."

"That's all very well, if the chap were innocent."

"Well, his father believes he's innocent, at all events, and he's bound to act on that belief," said Mark.

Nugent sniffed.

"I'm sick of the whole bizney," he said. "It would have been much more decent of the Cherry family if they had shut up about it, and not dragged their own name, and the name of Greyfriars, through the mire."

"I can't agree with you, Frank," said Harry. "Bob's good name and his whole career are at stake. After being expelled from Greyfriars on a charge like that, he wouldn't be admitted to any decent school. You can't expect his people to take it lying down. I know mine wouldn't."

"Oh, rats!"

"Now, look here," said Harry quietly. "Why won't you talk the matter over sensibly, Frank, and let's see if we can get to the truth of it?"

"We've got to the truth of it, and all the talk in the world won't make any difference," said Nugent heatedly.

"I was away from Greyfriars at the time," said Wharton. "If I had been here, I think I should have looked into it, somehow, and upset it. Nobody seems to have tried to take up Bob's point of view, except Mark here."

"And I couldn't find out anything to help Bob," said the Lancashire lad.

"I stood by Bob as long as I could," said Nugent doggedly. "You can't expect a chap to stand by a proved thief."

"Look here, Frank, why should Bob have stolen your postal-order?" said Wharton earnestly. "If he'd been so badly in want of money, you'd have lent it to him, if he'd asked you—or even given it to him."

"He couldn't very well ask that, I suppose?"

"Better than stealing it, I should think. That would be a last resource even with a dishonest chap, and you know Bob wasn't that!"

"He's proved that he was."

ANSWERS

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"I think he had a right to expect more faith from you, Frank. I don't believe he would ever have doubted you."

"He would never have had any reason to," said Frank tartly.

"I believe you could help me get at the truth, if you would," said Wharton. "So far as I can see, the case concentrates on this point. You hung your jacket up in this study at twenty-five minutes to one, and left it, and Bob came in at about twenty to one, and stayed in here. He was still here when you looked in your pocket for the postal-order and found that it was missing. But it would have been perfectly easy for anybody to nip in during the five minutes the study was empty."

"Easy—not likely, though."

"Did you see anybody hanging about the study when you left it, Frank?"

"There were several fellows in the passage."

"Where were you going at the time?"

"I was going down to the cricket."

"Then I suppose most of the fellows in the passage were going out, too?" Harry Wharton asked.

"I suppose so," said Nugent impatiently. "What the dickens are you getting at?"

"Patience, a minute. I think I am getting at something," said Wharton. "When you came in this study, and went out again in a blazer, the chaps in the passage would naturally know that you had left your jacket here."

"Yes, if they noticed me at all. I don't suppose they would."

"Most of the Remove had seen you put the postal-order in your jacket pocket along with Todd's letter?"

"Yes, most of the Form had been standing round, listening to my reading Todd's letter out," said Nugent.

"Good! Then we may take it that all the fellows in the passage knew that the postal-order was in your pocket, and that your jacket was hanging up here, with nobody in the study."

Nugent yawned.

"Oh, I suppose so," he said.

"Most of the fellows, too, would be going down to the cricket," said Harry. "That would leave the passage empty."

"Well?"

"Unless there was some chap who didn't go down to the cricket," said Wharton.

Nugent started a little.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Take the fellows who don't play cricket," went on Harry steadily. "Take, say, Bunter, and Snoop, and Heath, and Skinner. Any one of those, you will admit, was much more likely to steal the postal-order than old Bob was."

"I should have said so then, of course. I've changed my opinion since. As for Bunter, Fish suggested him first of all, and we investigated, and Mrs. Mumble proved that he had been in the tuck-shop all the time."

"Leave out Bunter, then. Did you see Snoop, or Skinner, or Heath about the passage on that occasion, or any other fellow of the same style?"

"I saw Heath."

Wharton gave a jump.

He had hoped to hear something of this sort—he had hoped for a clue. But he had not expected instant success—he had not dared to expect it."

"Heath!" he repeated.

"Yes," said Nugent irritably. "I remember Heath was in the passage. I remember seeing him there for a moment. I think he was going to his own study. But I suppose even Heath could be in the passage without intending to burgle a chap's study."

"Heath didn't go to the cricket-ground?"

"You know he doesn't play cricket."

"But did he come to look on?"

"So far as I remember, he didn't."

"Then he probably remained up here while all the other fellows were out."

Nugent scemed a little struck by this remark. He looked thoughtful.

"Well, it's quite possible," he said; "but I don't see—"

"And as the study was quite empty for five minutes before Bob Cherry came in, Heath had every opportunity, if he wanted, of nipping in and taking the postal-order."

"I suppose he had the opportunity; so had many others, if they had chosen to take it," said Nugent.

"I'm speaking of Heath now. Heath is a cad—a rotten cad, mean enough for anything, and he had a special feud with Bob Cherry. Bob licked him for tormenting Mrs. Kebble's cat, and we all know that Heath said he would make him suffer for it."

"Oh, fellows say those things, and forget all about them."

"Heath isn't the chap to forget a grudge."

Nugent made an impatient gesture.

"It seems to me that you're willing to suspect anybody of anything rather than Bob," he said. "You can't suspect Bob of theft; but you're ready to suspect Heath of theft, forgery, and impersonation without a shred of evidence."

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"He's that kind of chap."

"Oh, rot!"

Wharton flushed.

"Well, I can't say you're very civil about it!" he exclaimed. "I should have thought you'd be glad of a chance of helping to clear Bob."

"You can't clear a guilty chap."

"I tell you—"

"And I tell you—"

"Look here—"

"Rats! I—"

"No good quarrelling about it," Mark Linley suggested quietly. "We shall get at the truth some time; and I'm sure that's what we all want."

"I'm not going to have Wharton saying that I've gone back on a friend, and treated him badly," said Nugent angrily.

"I should have stood by Cherry if he had been innocent. Wharton's practically accusing me of slandering a chap."

"You've made a mistake."

"Yes; all the school has made a mistake, and you two are in the right," said Nugent savagely. "You two know all about it; and Dr. Locke and all the masters and all the fellows have made fools of themselves!"

"I don't say that—"

"Yes, you do! And I've had enough of it! I don't want to hear Bob Cherry's name again!"

And Frank Nugent flung out of the study, and slammed the door behind him, with a slam that rang the length of the Remove passage.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bob and His Father.

BOB CHERRY stood at the window of the dining-room in Cherry Lodge, looking out.

Bob was looking very different from of old.

He was home again now—home, with his people—but he had come home with feelings very different from those of a customary home-coming.

It was not like coming home for the vacation, with two or three Greyfriars fellows to keep him company, and nothing to worry him till the day arrived for returning to school.

Things were very changed now.

He had come home under a shadow of guilt and disgrace—a shadow that was to last his whole lifetime, unless the major's efforts succeeded in clearing it away by his action in the courts.

He had been expelled from Greyfriars—sacked from the school!

Bob had come home burning with indignation and resentment—black bitterness in his heart at the unjust sentence, fierce resentment against the friends who had not stood by him.

But he had calmed down since then.

With the major and the major's solicitors, he had gone over the matter again and again, threshing out every possible point of it.

And he had come to realise how terribly strong the evidence had been against him.

With the evidence as it was, what conclusion could the Head possibly have come to other than that to which he had come?

Against the overwhelming mass of proof there was only Bob's character to put in the balance—a character that had always been frank and free and honest and above reproach.

That had not weighed against the evidence.

But Bob, thinking it over calmly, had come to be able to make allowances for those who had found him guilty upon such proof.

The trouble had told upon the lad.

He, who had been happy, careless, the picture of youthful health and spirits, looked as if he had been through a painful illness.

His happy face had grown pale and careworn—the colour was driven from his cheeks, which were thinner than of old.

Bob missed Greyfriars—he missed the school and the fellows and the cricket and the thousand-and-one occupations of a schoolboy's life.

And the thought that they believed him guilty, that they regarded him as having been justly cast forth, was torture to the unhappy lad.

And yet—

He had entered at first with spirit and zest into the plans of the major. He had thought with keen satisfaction of forcing the governors of Greyfriars to admit before all the world that they had done him a cruel wrong.

But in discussion with the major's solicitors he had seen that even Mr. Sharpe had been staggered by the evidence.

Did even that lawyer doubt his innocence?

The major's faith was strong and firm as a rock; nothing could shake it. But unless further evidence was brought to light, how was the case to be won? What would be gained by dragging it through the courts?

Bob was thinking of that as he stood at the window, looking out.

His father was still at the table, sipping his claret. There was a Jovelike frown upon the major's expansive brow. That day, as upon every day, he had been consulting with Mr. Sharpe as to the measures to be taken to bring the Head of Greyfriars to his knees.

"Bob!"

The boy started and turned his head.

"Yes, dad?"

Major Cherry looked at him over his wineglass.

"Cheer up, Bob! All's going well—Mr. Sharpe says all is going quite as well as could be expected."

"Yes, dad."

"We'll make them prove it," said the major emphatically. "There's law and justice in this country, Bob, for rich and poor alike, and we'll make them prove their charge up to the very hilt."

"Yes, dad."

"Then cheer up!"

"Yes, dad."

Major Cherry looked at him sharply, and filled his glass again. The major was always very assiduous in his attentions to the decanter, which perhaps partly accounted for his crimson complexion and his fiery temper.

"Look here, Bob, don't keep a long face! We're going to confound them, I tell you—to smash them up from start to finish!"

"I—I say, dad—"

Bob hesitated and broke off. For some days he had had a thought in his mind that he hardly dared to utter to his father, yet he felt bound to speak it out.

"Yes, Bob? What is it, lad? Go on!"

"Must we go on with the case?"

The major started, and dropped his glass in his astonishment.

Crash!

The spilt wine splashed over the major's well-filled waistcoat, and he started to his feet.

"Bob!" he roared.

"Yes, dad? I'm so sorry! I'll get you a glass—"

"Bob! Bob!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You ask me if we must go on with the case!" roared the major. "Are you mad?"

"I hope not, sir."

"You must be, I think!" said the major furiously. "Go on with the case! Do you want to admit guilt, then, before everybody?"

"No, sir; but—"

"But what—but what?" roared the major, who generally flew into a temper first, and asked for an explanation afterwards. "But what, sir?"

"If I may speak, dad—"

"I'm asking you to speak! But what?"

"Well," said Bob slowly, "I've been thinking it over, and it seems to me that the case is awfully strong on their side. Unless we get some fresh evidence, I don't see what is to be done."

"You don't see! By Jove!"

"And—and I think the Head believed it all, sir, and he was acting from what he believed to be a sense of duty. It seems rotten to drag the poor old chap through the courts," said Bob miserably. "Of course, if it will do any good, that's a different matter. But—"

"It will prove to the public, at all events, that the Cherry family don't take insults of this sort lying down!" roared the major.

"Yes, sir; but—"

"Besides, we're going to have investigation—the post-mistress will be made to prove what she declared—and we may get at the fellow who impersonated you."

"Yes, sir. I—I—"

The major calmed down a little.

"Don't be a young fool, Bob!" he said. "Don't talk like a young ass! You're moping here, and losing your spirit—that's what it is! I don't care whether the Head of Greyfriars was mistaken, or what kind of an ass he was! I know he's expelled my son from the school, and I know I'm going to make the country ring with it, sir, unless they do justice! By Jove!"

"Very well, father!"

The major filled another glass.

"Not another word, Bob! We're going on; and if we're beaten we'll appeal, and if we're beaten then, we'll appeal again, till we get to the House of Lords! By Jove, sir, we'll make them wriggle—wriggle, sir!" said the major.

And the old soldier emptied his glass to the confusion of

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his opponents and all their works; and Bob, feeling miserable enough, held his peace. He had his misgivings, but it was not his place to argue with his father; his duty was to obey.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Cash in Advance.

HEATH was busy in his study in the Remove passage. Heath's occupation was a peculiar one, and would have surprised the fellows if they had seen him engaged as he was.

The study had belonged to Bob Cherry and Mark Linley before Heath came to Greyfriars. Bob Cherry was gone from the school, and Linley was at present in Harry Wharton's quarters. Esau Heath consequently had had the study to himself all the time.

Most of the furniture had remained just as it was in Cherry's and Linley's time, and Heath, on the easiest of easy terms, found himself provided with a furnished room. There was a bookcase and a table with drawers in it and several shelves, and a large number of old books and papers.

Heath's present occupation seemed to be in sorting them out. He was going through the books, shaking them as if to discover any sheets of paper that might have got among the leaves. He shifted the books in the case, looking behind them. He sorted out the heaps of old papers and magazines. Old numbers of the "Gem" Library and "The Boys' Herald" belonging to Bob Cherry, the new junior opened out leaf by leaf, looking into them all.

Heath might have lost an extremely valuable banknote by the thoroughness of the search he was bestowing upon the study.

He ceased at last, tired and breathless and dusty.

"Hang it!" he muttered. "Hang it!"

He stood in the study, looking round him. There was not a corner of the room he had not diligently searched, and not for the first time, either. Every day, perhaps twice in a day, Heath had been searching through his study.

More than once a fellow looking in from the corridor had found him so occupied, and wondered.

Heath had snappishly explained that he had lost a letter from his father—a letter containing a remittance.

If that was the case, he had certainly not found it. His long and frequent searches of the study had led to nothing.

He knew, he realised, that the searching was in vain. What he was seeking could not be in any nook or cranny of the room. Yet, in desperation, he had searched again and again. It might have been pushed into some nook—it might have been concealed by chance between the leaves of a volume; there was a chance. But every fresh search had the same result.

"Hang it! Hang it! Where can it be? I know I didn't destroy it—I'm certain not! Yet it must be in the study, if I didn't! Where can it be? Suppose somebody else got hold of it?"

He seemed to turn sick at the thought.

The door opened, and Heath turned round furiously. The fat face of Billy Bunter glimmered in from the passage, and Bunter blinked at the new junior through his big spectacles.

"I say, Heath—"

"Get out!" shouted Heath. "Get out, you fat cad! What are you spying here for?"

Bunter was one of the few fellows in the Remove of whom Heath was not afraid. Heath clenched his hands, and advanced towards him as he spoke.

"I—I say, hold on!" said Bunter. "I only want to speak to you! What makes you think I'm spying? What is there to spy on?"

Heath checked himself. His excitement, apparently about nothing, was the best way to cause suspicion. He knew that.

"I—I— What do you want?" he snapped.

"Have you found it yet?"

Bunter shot that question at Heath like a stone from a catapult, and held the door ready to slam if Heath made a rush at him.

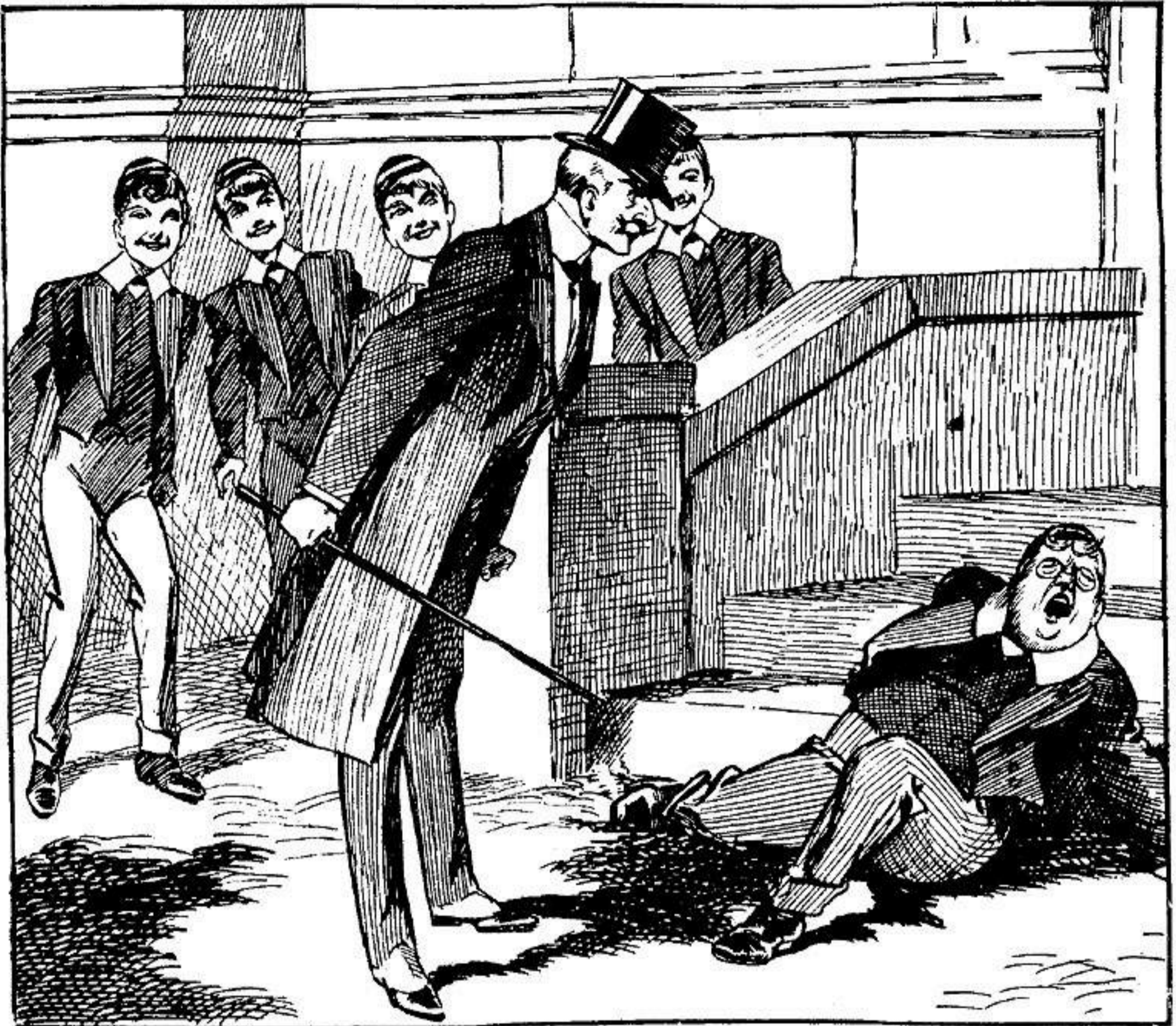
But Heath did not.

Heath staggered away from Bunter, turning sickly pale, and sank into a chair. His hands dropped weakly to his sides, and he stared at Bunter as he might have stared at some grisly phantom.

The fat junior grinned. The utter collapse of Heath at the simple question showed even Bunter what power he had in his hands, though he was far from quick of observation. The Owl of the Remove stepped into the study, and closed the door behind him.

"W-w-what do you mean?" Heath gasped at last.

"I mean what I say," said Bunter coolly. "Have you found it?"



"Begad!" roared Bob Cherry's angry father. "Is this a time for tricks, sir?" Thwack! Thwack! "Yow! Wow!" cried Billy Bunter, as his tight trousers rang back to the lash of the cane. (See page 2.)

"Found what?"

"What you've been looking for every day since Bob Cherry left?" said Bunter coolly. "You see, I know all about it."

"I—I haven't been looking for anything."

Bunter grinned.

"I've been watching you through the keyhole for the last five minutes, and I heard what you said to yourself, too," he replied.

"You—you cad!"

"I've watched you half a dozen times before, if you come to that," said Bunter. "And I've heard Micky Desmond mention about hearing you rummaging over the room—his study is next, you know—and Bulstrode and Skinner have both found you turning the study out at different times."

"I've been looking for a letter from my father."

"Rats!"

Heath tried to recover his nerve. His little evil eyes gleamed very evilly at Bunter.

"What do you mean, you cad?" he asked.

"You're not looking for a letter," said Bunter coolly.

"You're looking for a sheet of foolscap."

Again Heath's face grew deadly white.

"How do you know?"

"Because I've got it."

Heath sprang up:

"You've got it?" he shouted.

"Yes."

Heath did not speak again. He made a rush straight at Bunter. The fat junior skipped round the table.

"Hold on, you ass!" he roared. "I haven't got it with

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me! You don't think I should be idiot enough to bring it here, do you?"

"Oh!" Heath paused. "Oh! Where is it, then?"

"Where you won't find it," said Bunter breathlessly.

"And if you go for me again, I'll jolly well hand it over to Wingate."

"You—you young villain!"

"I know which is the villain of us two," said Bunter, with a sneer. "I haven't sat down in my study making copies of a chap's signature—"

"Silence!"

"Well, you shut, then," said Bunter. "Of course, I dare say you were only amusing yourself, whiling away the time, as it were, by scrawling 'R. Cherry,' over a sheet of paper—"

"Hold your tongue!"

"But it would look jolly suspicious if anybody saw the paper. Don't you think so?" said Bunter, with a grin of enjoyment as he blinked at the trembling cad of the Romove.

"It—it was only a pastime," said Heath, and his voice trembled and stuttered. "I—I— But how did you get hold of the paper?"

Bunter chuckled.

"I found it."

"You stole it, you mean," Heath hissed. "I hid it under a heap of foolscap on my table, when I was called away suddenly; and I always lock my study door and take the key out when I go."

"You see, you're not half so deep as you think," grinned Bunter. "And you're new to Greyfriars, too. These two studies—Nos. 13 and 14, are new rooms, built out of old

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lumber-rooms that used to be at the end of the passage. The same chap put the locks on, and he put on the same pattern locks. I was in No. 14 at one time, and I had a key. That key fits this lock as well as the lock in No. 14."

"And—and you unlocked my door while I was out?"
"You see, I wondered why you locked it," Bunter explained. "I naturally suspected that you were having feeds here on your own, and you didn't want to share out. Under the circumstances, I thought I was entitled to look in the cupboard. That's why I came in. I didn't know you were amusing yourself by practising forgery."

Heath panted.
"I—I—"
"When I found there wasn't any grub, I just investigated matters," Bunter went on. "And I found the sheet of paper. As Bob Cherry had been expelled that same day, it seemed to me very odd that there should be a sheet of paper in this study covered over with 'R. Chery,' in handwriting very like his—like yours at the top of the page, and getting more and more like his towards the bottom."

"Oh!"
"And I shoved it in my pocket," said Bunter cheerfully. "You see, I didn't quite know what to make of it, but I thought it might be useful. Since then, I've kept my eyes open. When I found that you've been searching up and down the study ever since, again and again, it's not hard to guess what paper you're looking for."

Heath gave a groan.
"Of course that—that had nothing whatever to do with the case against Bob Cherry," he said.

"Of course not," agreed Bunter, with a malicious grin.
"Why haven't you said anything about it before?" said Heath slowly.

"Because"—Bunter blinked at him across the table—"you're such a cunning hound. I didn't know what to make of it at first; and when I thought it over afterwards, I was afraid to do anything. I knew you were a born criminal, and I was afraid you might be able to fix it on me if I showed it."

Heath's eyes gleamed.
"And I could—and would—and will!" he said. "You've got no proof that you found the paper in my study. I'll swear I've never seen it. My hat! I'll make you suffer if you don't give it up! I'll make out that you've written it yourself, to extort money from me!"

"Just exactly what I thought," said Bunter. "I knew you'd work up something like that, and get me served in the same way as Bob Cherry. And as lots of fellows have a prejudice against me, they'd be sooner down on me than they were on Bob Cherry. Two or three fellows I've had little loans from because—because I knew little things about them, would have come forward to speak against me. You rotter, I could see myself being sacked from the school!"

"You'll see it yet, unless—"
"Hold on," said Bunter coolly. "You've forgotten that circumstances have changed now. Major Cherry is bringing an action against the governors of Greyfriars."

"What about it?"
"I rather think his lawyers would be glad of some evidence," said Bunter. "It's all different now. If I send that paper to Messrs. Sharpe & Keene, and offer to give evidence about finding it here, I think that will settle you. You won't be able to stand up in a court of law, on your oath, and lie as you would in the Head's study. And those lawyers are so jolly sharp, they'd bowl you out in no time, and make you give yourself away. You know you would! You know you daren't stand up before a lawyer and a judge and commit perjury."

Heath's lips trembled.
He did know it—he knew it only too well. He could lie himself out of a scrape at Greyfriars, but the thought of the crowded court, the wigged judge, the stern-eyed, examining lawyer, made him tremble and feel sick.

"You young hound!" he muttered. "What will you take for the paper?"

Bunter chuckled.
"So you're coming to terms?" he asked.
"Yes, of course. I—I was only writing that paper for fun," stammered Heath. "I—I wanted to see whether it was possible to—to copy a signature, because—because Linley was saying that that was what had been done. It was only in fun, and it was after—after what happened about the postal-order."

"You can tell that to a judge and jury if you like."
"What will you take for it?"
"A sovereign," said Bunter.
"Bring it here, and—"
Bunter laughed.
"No fear! Cash in advance."
"I won't! I—"
"Very well! Will you lend me a stamp?"

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"A stamp!" said Heath, staring. "What for?"

"To stamp my letter to Mr. Sharpe."

Heath caught his breath.

"Here's the sovereign," he said. "Now bring me the paper immediately, Bunter."

And Billy Bunter quitted the study with a sovereign in his waistcoat pocket. He left Heath shaking and trembling like one with the ague. There was a smile of fat satisfaction on Bunter's face. He knew that Heath was well off, and he anticipated that the new junior would prove a regular horn of plenty for him now—at all events, so long as the case of Bob Cherry should occupy the courts. As for the utter baseness of what he was doing, Billy Bunter did not seem to realise that at all.

Bunter's idea was to avoid all trouble for himself, and make as good a thing for himself as he could. It did not seem to occur to him that there were any other considerations in the matter at all.

In excuse for the fat junior, it must be said that he was too dense, and too stupid, to know really what was right and what was wrong, and that he generally preserved the highest possible opinion of himself through his shadiest adventures.

Bunter did not go to his study for the paper now. He quitted the School House, and headed for the tuck-shop.

Heath remained in his room, waiting for the return of the fat junior, but waiting in vain. Billy Bunter was far too busy to think of returning, and he had nothing to return for. For he had no more idea of really handing the incriminating paper to Heath, than he had of paying his debts with the sovereign he had extracted from the cad of the Remove.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

On the Track.

HARRY WHARTON rose and put his books away, with a determined frown upon his face. He had been thinking over the mystery instead of getting his work done, but he could not help it. The affair of Bob Cherry was in his mind all the time; he could not get rid of it. His promise to Bob to work hard to clear his name at Greyfriars was never out of his thoughts. And, as yet, in spite of the time that had elapsed, he had done nothing—there seemed to be nothing to be done. Yet there must be some way of penetrating the veil of mystery that hung over the business of the stolen postal-order. One clue he had obtained from Frank Nugent—extracting it from him, as it were, against his will—the fact that Esau Heath had been near Study No. 1 when the postal-order was stolen. But even before that, his suspicions had turned upon Heath.

Mark Linley looked up from his Anabasis.

"Going down?" he asked.

"Yes, and out."

"Shall I come?"

"Yes, rather. I'm going to the post-office."

"About Bob?"

"Yes."

The two juniors went downstairs, and they met far from friendly looks from the juniors they passed. Harry Wharton's popularity had never been at a lower ebb. His championship of Bob Cherry seemed to be the last straw. Wharton's firm faith in him was a standing reproach to the rest of the Form, and they resented it keenly.

Nugent did not speak to him. John Bull looked another way, and Fisher T. Fish seemed to be occupied busily in studying the toes of his boots when Wharton passed. Harry did not appear to notice the coldness of his friends. He left the School House with Mark, and they walked out at the gates. Harry did not speak upon the subject in his mind till they were tramping down the leafy lane to the village.

"We've had the post-mistress's evidence at the school, and it seemed clear enough," he said. "The only explanation is that some scoundrel impersonated Bob to cash the postal-order. You agree to that?"

"It seems certain enough, Harry."

"Well, if we question Mrs. Brett about it, she may remember some circumstance about the chap which she didn't mention to the Head. She was very flurried when she was called upon to identify the chap at Greyfriars, and after she had once recognised Bob, the Head never thought of questioning her. I've got another idea in my mind, too, but we'll go to the post-office first."

Mrs. Brett greeted the juniors very civilly in the little grocery post-office of Friardale. The kind old lady regretted very much the part she had taken in the downfall of Bob Cherry, but she had been bound to speak the truth, or what appeared to her to be the truth.

"Good-afternoon, Master Wharton!" she said.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Brett! I want to speak to you about that affair," Wharton said abruptly. "Can you give me a few minutes?"

The good lady looked distressed.

"Certainly, Master Wharton! I'm very, very sorry about that, indeed I am; but I could only tell the head-master what I knew, couldn't I?"

"Of course," said Harry, "I don't blame you. But I think there must have been a mistake in the identity, Mrs. Brett."

The post-mistress shook her head.

"It was Master Cherry sure enough," she said. "I remember him specially by his hair—flaxen colour, and bunched upon his forehead. There was no other boy in all those I saw who had hair anything like it."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes, I know that sounded jolly convincing at the time," he remarked, "but since then it's occurred to us, Mrs. Brett, that the chap may have been disguised."

"Disguised, Master Wharton?"

"Yes. I believe it was in the dusk when he came in?"

"Yes, it was getting dusky."

"The shop hadn't been lighted then?"

"No, not for another ten minutes."

Wharton looked at Mark with satisfaction. The facts were certainly working out to fit his theory. An impersonator would certainly choose the half-light to effect his purpose, if he possibly could. Many little points that might be visible in the daylight, or in the lamplight, might escape observation in the dusk.

"But it was Master Cherry," the post-mistress added.

"He was just Cherry's size?" asked Wharton.

"I did not notice particularly, of course; but he was a very big lad for a junior boy."

"So is Heath!" murmured Mark.

"How was he dressed?" asked Harry.

"In Etons, with a cap."

"Cap on the back of his head, I suppose, and a mop of hair sticking out under it?" Wharton asked.

The post-mistress smiled.

"Yes, Master Wharton."

"Well, that was Bob's style, at all events. Did he talk much?"

"No; he seemed to have a slight cold."

Wharton started eagerly.

"He had a cold?" he shouted.

"He did not say so, Master Wharton, but he mumbled a great deal, and spoke very little, and kept his handkerchief over his mouth."

"My hat!"

Wharton's eyes were blazing now. His theory was correct, beyond a doubt. For a flaxen wig, and a touch of charcoal on the eyebrows would be a sufficient disguise, so long as the lower part of the face was covered. Heath's thin, spiteful mouth and sharp chin did not resemble Bob Cherry's in the least, and could hardly be made to do so. But the device of affecting to have a cold had covered up all that.

"Bob never had a cold," said Mark.

"Didn't he take the handkerchief away from his face all the time, Mrs. Brett?" asked Harry.

"I think not, sir; but he was only in here a minute," said Mrs. Brett. "He seemed to be in rather a hurry to get the money, and I served him at once."

"Did you notice his necktie?" asked Harry.

Mrs. Brett made an effort to remember.

"Yes, it was a bright blue one," she said.

Wharton nodded. The impersonator had been as thorough as he could. Bob Cherry, in spite of the rule at Greyfriars that the fellows should dress very quietly, had a taste for flaming neckties, which he frequently gratified. The unruly flaxen hair and the bright blue necktie had been quite enough to identify Bob.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Brett," said Harry. "I suppose, now, you will admit that it was possible, at least, that another chap about Cherry's size may have impersonated him."

"I—I suppose it's possible, Master Wharton. I never thought of such a thing till this minute."

"That's all right. Thank you very much!"

And the two juniors quitted the village post-office.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Unknown.

MARK LINLEY looked inquiringly at his companion, as they came out into the old High Street of Friar-dale, and stopped under the big elm outside the post-office.

"What's the next move?" he asked.

"This way," said Harry. They walked down the street.

"Look here," Wharton went on abruptly, "suppose a chap at Greyfriars made up his mind to play this trick, what do you think would be his first move?"

"To get the disguise, I suppose."

"Exactly. A flaxen wig to look like Bob's would be easy to pick up at any costumier's, of course; but it's not the thing a fellow would have about the house ready. The rascal would have to get it—and where would he get it?"

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ONE
PENNY.

We've got a lot of props, among our amateur theatrical things at Greyfriars, but not a wig of that sort. He would have to get it outside the school."

"That's so."

"It would be safest to have it from London by post, certainly; but there couldn't have been time for that. The postal-order was cashed on the evening of the day that it was stolen, I understand?"

"Yes, the same evening."

"Then the chap must have got his flaxen mop close at hand. There's a costumier's in Friardale—old Moses, who runs the second-hand clothes shop, does the costume business, too. He keeps things for the fancy-dress balls, and so on, that are given in the neighbourhood. Unless the chap got the wig there, I don't see where he could have got it. He might have gone over to Courtfield, but if we draw Moses blank, we can go over to Courtfield, too, and see."

"Good!"

"Here's Moses' place. Come on!"

A stout little gentleman of the Hebrew persuasion, with a fat, good-natured face, greeted the juniors as they entered. When the Amateur Dramatic fever had been strong in the Remove at Greyfriars, Harry Wharton & Co. had been good customers of Mr. Moses, and he was glad to see them.

"Goot-afternoons, shentelmens!" said Mr. Moses, rubbing his hands. "Vat can I do for you this afternoon, shents?"

"It's about that wig," said Harry.

Mark Linley glanced at him. Wharton was taking a bold line.

"That wig?" repeated Mr. Moses.

"Yes—you remember a flaxen-coloured wig you sold to a Greyfriars chap last week," said Wharton.

Mr. Moses nodded his head.

"My gootness!" he said. "Is not the young shentelman satisfied with that wig? I sell it to him at less than cost price, my gootness!"

Wharton's eyes glittered.

His shot had struck home.

A Greyfriars fellow had purchased a flaxen wig at Mr. Moses' place the previous week. Matters were going splendidly.

"I tink that wig was splendid," said Mr. Moses, "and I am sure that the young shent took enough of my time trying on every wig in the place, and complaining all the time if it was not curly enough. And he would have nozzing but that particular colour—no ozzer colour would suit him in the least. My gootness!"

"Have you any more wigs like it?" Harry asked.

"I have vun more," said Mr. Moses, "but not so good—not so curly. Here it is."

He brought out a wig on his dusty counter.

Wharton took off his cap, and put the wig on his head, and looked at it in the dusty, cracked mirror.

The resemblance it gave him to Bob Cherry was amazing.

He put up his handkerchief to his face, and covered his mouth and nose, and then only his eyes remained to show that he was Harry Wharton and not Bob Cherry.

"Good!" said Mark.

Mr. Moses watched them in some surprise.

"Is not the young shent satisfied with the wig?" he asked.

"I sell it to him very cheap, as low as cost price, to please a customer."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Harry. "The chap I'm speaking of—by the way, what was the name of your customer?"

"He gave me no name, sir."

"He was a junior?"

"About your own age, Master Wharton."

"H'm!" said Harry. "Was he a fellow you knew well—one of our set, I mean?"

Mr. Moses shook his head.

"No, sir, I had never seen him before, but I knew that he came from the school, of course. He had a Greyfriars cap."

"Had he a thin mouth, with a sort of spiteful look?"

Mr. Moses grinned.

"I don't know, Master Wharton. I tink tat he had a cold, for he keep his mouth covered with a handkerchief."

"Good!"

"You do not vant the wig?" Mr. Moses asked, as Wharton laid it on the counter.

"Thank you, no; as a matter of fact, we want to find who it was bought that wig of you," said Harry frankly. "There's been a rotten trick played, and we want to get at the chap. Would you know him again?"

Mr. Moses hesitated.

"I tink so," he said. "Yes, perhaps, I suppose. But he keep his mouth cover all zer time, you see. Perhaps he not want me to know him."

"Very likely," said Wharton drily. "What day was it?"

"Friday."

"In the afternoon or evening?"

"In the afternoon."

"How did he take the wig away—in a parcel?"

"No, in a bag," said Mr. Moses—"a bag with a lock and key, and he was very careful to lock zer bag, I remember."

"Thank you very much."

"Not at all, young shents, always pleathed to see you and do bithneth," said Mr. Moses, with a wave of his hand.

The chums could not contain their satisfaction as they went into the street again. Harry Wharton had thought out the matter thoroughly, and he had decided upon this line of investigation—and it was yielding unexpected results.

"It's splendid," said Mark.

"Gorgeous," said Harry. "I wonder what the Head would say if he knew that a Greyfriars chap had bought a wig in Friardale, just like old Bob's mop, on the afternoon of the day the postal-order was cashed."

"It would make a difference."

"Yes, rather; but we've got to get the proof complete before we talk," said Harry. "I feel certain it was Heath—but whether it was Heath or not, we've got to unearth that wig. The question is, where is it? A wig isn't so jolly easy to get rid of, you know. It would make a smother burning it in his study, and there's nowhere else he could burn it, so we can take it, I think, that it isn't burnt. There's the value of it, too; and Heath, though he has plenty of money, is the meanest rotter in Greyfriars, and awfully keen after getting value for his money. I should say he's keeping the wig."

"Then if we can't find it—"

"That ought to settle him. If he's keeping the wig, we'll find it; if he's hidden it, we'll rout it out. If it's destroyed, that will be a bit of a set-back; but I don't suppose it is."

Mark nodded cheerfully.

"Even then we can have Mr. Moses down to see Heath, and see if he's the chap that bought the wig," he said. "Heath can explain then what he bought it for, and what he's done with it."

Wharton laughed.

"Yes, we can have a new identification scene, with Heath in the principal part instead of Bob Cherry. Ha, ha, ha!"

In much more cheerful spirits than of late, the two juniors entered the gates of Greyfriars. There seemed to be some little excitement going on in the direction of the school shop in the corner behind the elms, and they turned in that direction. Nugent minor, of the Second Form, and Tubb, of the Third, met them, both the fags eating jam tarts from paper bags under their arms. Nugent minor greeted them with a jammy grin, and jerked his thumb in the direction of the tuck-shop.

"Better go and have your whack," he said.

"What's happening, Dicky?"

"Bunter's in funds."

"Bunter!"

"Yes. His postal-order's come at last, and he's standing jam tarts to all the Remove," said Dicky Nugent.

And he marched off munching jam tarts.

Bunter was standing by the counter in Mrs. Mimble's little shop when Wharton and Linley looked in. The shop was crowded—not to say crammed—and the new-comers had some difficulty in getting a look-in.

Bunter was popular now, undoubtedly, his popularity probably lasting exactly as long as his funds. Bunter might be, as Ogilvy remarked, an unpleasant beast, but there was no fault to find with the jam tarts. And they had come there to eat jam tarts, not Bunter.

Jam tarts—Mrs. Mimble's best—were being handed round with amazing liberality. As every tart cost a penny or twopence, and they were going round in dozens, it was pretty clear that Billy Bunter was in great funds.

The fat junior blinked round as Harry Wharton came in, and waved his fat, jammy hand.

"Come in, you fellows!" he called out. "Jam tarts and ginger-pop going strong!"

"What's the matter, Billy?"

"I've had a—a postal-order," said Bunter. "I believe I mentioned to you that I was expecting a postal-order."

"Ha, ha! I believe you did—about a hundred times."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And it's come, has it?"

"Yes, it's come. It's only a sovereign," said Bunter loftily, "but I expect more to follow. They're from—from a titled friend of mine."

"Rats!"

"H'm! Hand out the tarts, Mrs. Mimble."

Mrs. Mimble shook her head.

"You have had them all, Master Bunter."

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"Exactly one sovereign's worth," said Mrs. Mimble decidedly. "I have been keeping a careful account all the time, Master Bunter."

Mrs. Mimble's expression was grim. She was very glad to sell a sovereign's worth of her goods at one fell swoop. But she knew Bunter, and she did not mean to let him overrun the sovereign. Billy Bunter would gladly have cleared out the whole shop, and would have owed the money with the greatest cheerfulness.

"Now, look here, Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter persuasively, "I'm expecting another postal-order to-night—"

"Very well, Master Bunter! When it comes—"

"You'd better let me have the sovereign now, in things, and take the postal-order when it comes, ma'am."

"Nonsense, Master Bunter!"

"I tell you I'm certain—quite certain—of getting another sovereign this evening—"

"Nonsense!"

"Oh, really—"

"You owe me an account already, and I have not deducted it from this sovereign," said Mrs. Mimble, with asperity.

"Yes, but I'm expecting—"

"Any more tarts coming on?" bawled Skinner.

"I'm sincerely sorry, Skinner, but—"

"Any more ginger-pop?"

"No. I'm sincerely—"

"Then I'm off!"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

Skinner walked out. Most of the other fellows followed him. The feed was over, and they were done with William George Bunter.

The fat junior blinked after them indignantly.

"Beasts!" he murmured.

"Fancy turning your backs on a chap immediately his money's gone! Beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Have you really been busting a sovereign, Billy?"

Wharton asked in surprise. Bunter blinked at him.

"Yes, I have. And I'm going to bust a good many more, too. I expect to be in funds for the future."

"Come into a fortune?" asked Mark Linley, smiling.

"Not exactly that, but I'm expecting continual remittances now from—from a titled friend," Bunter explained. "I shall be in great funds for—for weeks. I'm going to get another sovereign this evening."

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Great Funds.

BILLY BUNTER was in all his glory. The fat junior was one of the meanest and most unpleasant characters possible, yet he had a great desire to be popular. He was not willing to do anything to deserve popularity; he never even thought of that. But he wanted to be popular, to be conceded to and thought much of. Bunter was very far from being generous, but he liked to stand in a crowded shop and order things in a princely fashion for an admiring crowd. Whenever Bunter was in exceptionally high funds he gratified himself in that way. The money—generally someone else's, by the way—simply flew.

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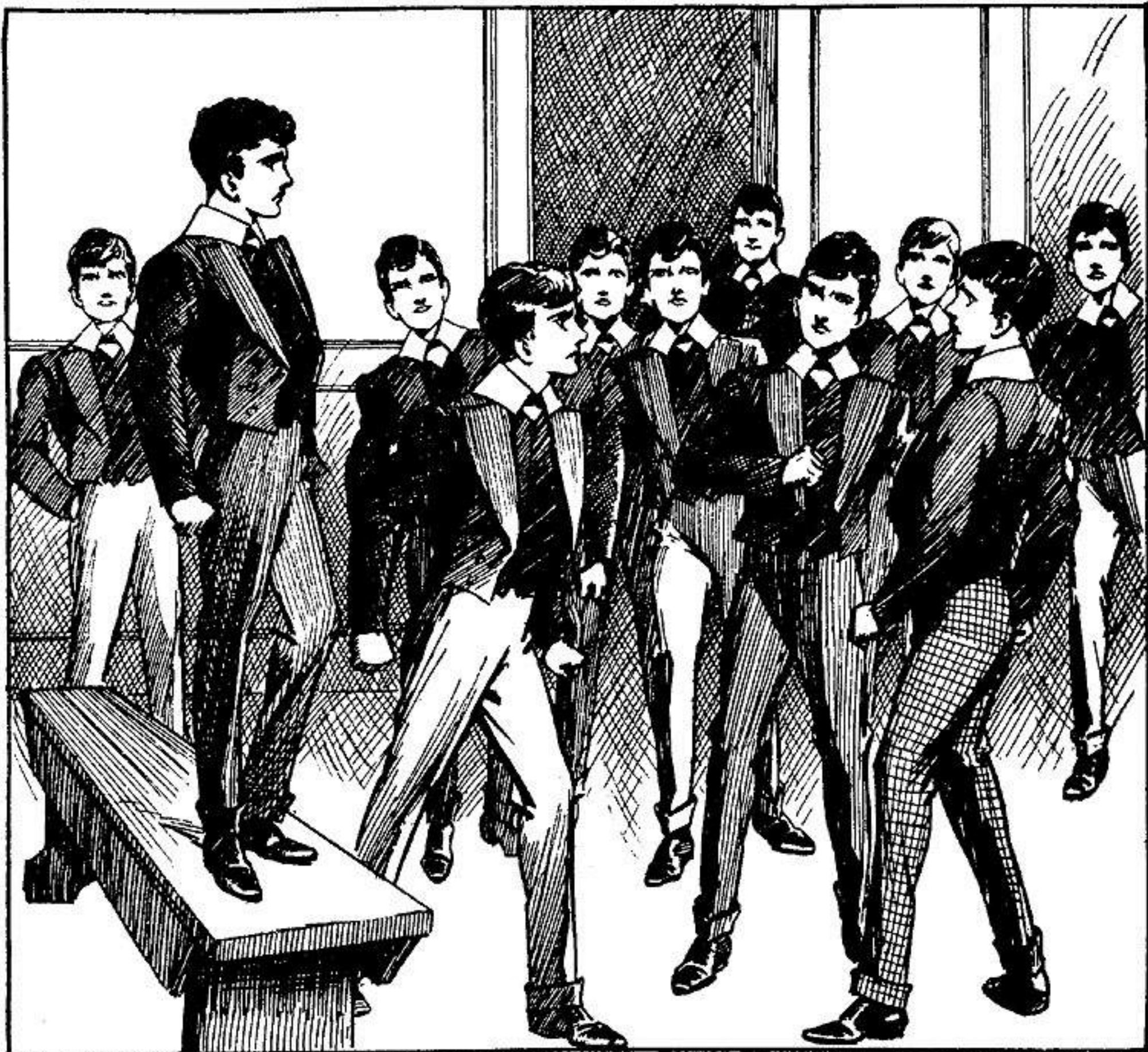
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"Yah! Factory cad!" yelled the Removites. Mark Linley stood up, his face flushed, his eyes gleaming. "You are the cads!" he exclaimed. "You've come here to hear Wharton. Why don't you give him a chance to speak?"

(See page 6.)

"Rats!"
 "Look here, you fellows—"
 "Bosh!" said Wharton.
 "I tell you—"
 "And I'm blessed if I know how you got that one you've spent, either!" said Harry Wharton. "We've been fed up on stories of postal-orders, but they never seem to come along. Where did you get that sovereign?"
 "Oh, really—"
 "Did you pick it up?"
 "Look here—"
 "If somebody's lost it, and you've found it and kept it, you'll get into trouble. Findings are not keepings, you know, excepting among thieves."
 "I never picked it up—"
 "Where did you get it, then?"
 "A postal-order from a titled friend—"
 "Oh, rot!"
 "Well, you needn't believe me if you don't want to!"
 "Thank you! I won't, then."
 "Some fellows can trust me with money," said Bunter loftily. "A fellow of high principle like me can always get trusted by people who understand him. Besides, my titled friends are awfully rich!"
 "Oh, cheese it!"
 "I'll jolly well prove it to you!" said Bunter wrathfully.
 "You think I'm not going to get another sov. to-night?"
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"I know you're not."
 "Then I'll show it to you."
 "I'll believe it when I see it," said Harry Wharton; and he quitted the tuck-shop with the Lancashire lad.
 Bunter shouted after him:
 "I'll bring it to your study and show you, Wharton!"
 "Rats!"
 And Harry Wharton laughed and walked away. By the time he was doing his prep. in his study he had forgotten all about the matter. Bunter's stories of great wealth in the shape of postal-orders found no believers, excepting sometimes among very innocent new boys. But there was something more than romance in Bunter's statements this time.
 An hour later Wharton's door opened, and the fat junior put his head in and blinked round the study.
 "I say, you fellows—"
 "Oh, buzz off!" said Harry. "We're busy, and we can't cash any mythical postal-orders in advance, anyway."
 "Oh, really, Wharton—"
 "Shut the door after you."
 "I told you I was going to get a sov. this evening—"
 "Yes; and I told you you were fibbing. So clear out!"
 "Look at that, then!"
 Billy Bunter held up his hand. Between fat finger and fat thumb a gold coin glistened and glimmered in the light.

It was a sovereign!

Harry Wharton and Mark Linley stared at it in astonishment. There was no doubt that it was a sovereign—a real sovereign. Where had Bunter obtained it?

Wharton rose to his feet.

"Bunter, you young ass! Where did you get that sovereign?"

"I've had a postal-order——"

"Don't tell lies, Bunter! Where did you get that sovereign?"

"A remittance from a titled friend——"

"You young idiot!" said Harry quietly. "Nobody will take that silly story in. You have either found an utter idiot who will trust you with money——"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Or you have stolen it!"

"Look here——"

"I know you're too big a fool, Billy, to know how to keep out of trouble. If you've been silly enough to take what doesn't belong to you, take it back at once, before there's any more harm done."

"Oh, really——"

"As for the sovereign you've spent, I suppose that came from the same source. Look here! I'll help you to make it up if you want to take it back to the person it belongs to," said Wharton earnestly.

"You—you insulting beast!" spluttered Bunter. "It's my money—mine, I tell you! How dare you call me a thief! I'm not like your friend Cherry!"

"Hold your tongue!" said Wharton sharply. "Look here, then! Where did you get that money?"

"I've had a postal-order from a titled friend."

"Oh, shut up!"

Wharton sat down again. It was evidently impossible to get the truth out of Billy Bunter; and if he was getting himself into serious trouble, there was nothing for it but to let him do it.

Billy Bunter gave Wharton an angry blink, and quitted the study, the sovereign still in his fat fist. In five minutes the gold coin was in the process of liquidation in the school shop.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Above Board.

PREP. was over, but Harry Wharton and Mark Linley were still in Study No. 1. The feeling against them in the Remove was so strong that they did not care to go down to the common-room. And Harry Wharton's plan with regard to a search for the flaxen wig remained to be carried out. Harry was very much exercised in his mind over that matter. To find the wig, if it was hidden in Heath's quarters, meant a search of Study No. 13. Heath, of course, would oppose the search, if he knew of it. Indeed, the mere suggestion of it would make him resort to any desperate measures to destroy the wig, if it was still in existence. It must be done without his knowledge—but the idea of searching through a fellow's quarters without his knowledge was utterly repugnant to both Wharton and Linley.

"It's rotten!" said Wharton restlessly. "It seems such an utterly caddish thing to do, to look through a chap's room when he's away."

Mark nodded.

"I don't like the idea any more than you do," he said. "It's horrible—it seems like spying—it's the kind of thing Heath himself does. And we despise him for it."

"The question is, whether the end justifies the means," said Wharton. "We have jolly good reason to suspect that Heath impersonated Bob——"

"True."

"If he did, the wig would be the most incriminating evidence possible, and it ought to be found."

"True again."

"And it can only be found by searching for it without Heath knowing what we're up to."

"Quite so."

"And so it comes to this, that we must sneak into a chap's room when he's not there, and look through his belongings like a pair of blessed thieves," said Harry, biting his lip.

"They say that the end justifies the means—and it really seems fair to use any method of clearing Bob. But——"

"But there's a but," said Mark, with a rueful smile. "I don't feel as if we ought to do it, Wharton, and that's a fact."

"Yet for so jolly good a purpose——"

"I don't want to preach," said the Lancashire lad, in his quiet way. "But we are told in the Good Book that we should not do evil that good may come of it."

"Quite right. If people generally started doing rotten things with good intentions, I suppose it wouldn't do."

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"It wouldn't."

"I suppose a blessed detective would do it—but then, we're not blessed detectives," said Harry restlessly. "We can't do it."

"I'm afraid we can't."

"But we've got to find the wig. We've got to look for it. The only thing is, to do it openly and above board, in an honest way."

"I suppose so. That will place Heath on his guard at once."

"It can't be helped. It's no good thinking we can do mean things with good intentions," said Harry. "Better to open about it. We'll tell Heath just what we're going to do, and wring his neck if he tries to stop us."

Mark laughed.

"Very well."

"We'll jolly well have it out before all the Form, too," said Harry, his eyes flashing. "They sha'n't be able to accuse us of being underhanded."

"Good!"

They left the study. Heath's study was dark, so he was evidently not there. The chums went down into the junior common-room. It was crowded with fellows chatting before going to bed.

Most of them looked round when Wharton and Linley came in. The two were coming to be very marked personages in the Greyfriars Remove.

"Here they come, the champions of injured innocence!" sang out Skinner.

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Look out for your pockets!" said someone.

And there was a fresh roar of laughter.

Wharton turned red, but took no notice of the taunt. He recognised Heath's voice, but it was not his cue to quarrel with the cad of Greyfriars just then.

"Keep near the door, in case he tries to bolt, Marky," he whispered. "He may dodge off to the study to get the wig, if it's there, when I begin."

"What-ho!" said Mark.

The Lancashire lad leaned on the doorpost, in a careless attitude, but quite ready to dispute Heath's passage if he tried to get out. The cad of the school was not likely to be able to pass the sturdy lad from Lancashire.

Wharton looked round at the hostile, mocking faces.

"Get on with the cackle!" he said disdainfully. "When you've finished, I've got something to say."

"Hear, hear!"

"How to back up burglars, by Harry Wharton—instructions to budding criminals!" said Skinner.

"Ha ha, ha!"

"I think there's a criminal in this room," said Harry. "It may interest some of you to know that I've made a discovery!"

"Rats!"

Harry Wharton's eyes were fixed on Heath as he spoke. Heath had turned a sickly colour.

Wharton's hand rose to point at him.

"What is the matter with Heath?" he asked. "Look at him!"

All glances swept round at Heath.

"Hallo, sick?" asked Bulstrode.

"N-n-no," stammered Heath. "I'm all right."

"You look jolly sick."

"I tell you I'm all right!"

"Perhaps it's a case of guilty conscience," said Wharton coldly.

"It's a lie!" said Heath. "What have I got to have a guilty conscience about? If you've got some trick you're going to play on me about Bob Cherry's case, the fellows will know what to think of it."

"What are you getting at, Wharton?"

"I have a theory——"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"A theory that a fellow impersonated Bob Cherry in cashing the postal-order at the post-office in Friardale——"

Heath burst into a scornful laugh. He had recovered his nerve now.

"So that's it, is it?" he exclaimed. "And you're going to accuse me of having passed myself off as Bob Cherry?"

"What rot!" said Bulstrode.

"Utter rot!" said Hazeldene. "Why, Heath isn't anything at all like Bob Cherry. He's about the same size, only he's got short, dark hair, and you all remember Bob Cherry's light-coloured mop."

"Yes, rather!"

"If you haven't anything better than that to suggest, Wharton, you'd better shut up," said Vernon-Smith. "I suppose you got that idea out of some blessed newspaper serial story."

"I thought it out," said Harry. "I knew Bob didn't cash

the postal-order, so I worked it out that he had been impersonated."

"Rats!"

"But Heath isn't in the least like Bob Cherry," said Bulstrode. "I really think you must be right off your rocker to suspect such a thing!"

"Not quite. He was disguised, of course."

"Oh, this is a six-shilling novel!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Chaps don't disguise themselves in real life."

"Shut up a minute, please. A chap who put a wig on his head, and kept a handkerchief over the lower half of his face, could pass himself off as Bob Cherry, in the twilight, to a short-sighted old lady."

"Ahem!"

"It's too steep, really, you know!"

"Oh, let him prove it!" said Heath. "He's brought this accusation against me out of sheer spite. Let him prove it."

"That's right!"

"Prove it!"

"Prove it, Wharton!"

"That's what I want to do," said Harry. "Is Heath willing to let a party of fellows search his belongings, to see whether there's a wig hidden away there?"

"Phew!"

"What do you say, Heath?"

And all eyes were fixed upon the cad of the Remove.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Rag.

HEATH did not falter for a moment. Guilty or innocent, he had his nerve in control now; and he did not flinch before the general gaze that was turned upon him.

"Are you willing, Heath?" asked Bulstrode.

Heath nodded carelessly.

"Quite willing," he said.

Wharton's face fell for a second. If Heath was willing for his study to be searched, it was pretty certain that the wig was not hidden there, at all events.

Heath saw his expression, and sneered.

"I'm quite willing," he repeated. "Perfectly willing. You can turn my study inside out, and upside down, if you like. You can take up the floor-boards if you like, and send a fag up the chimney."

"Ha ha, ha!"

"If you find any wigs, or false beards, or revolvers, or anything of that kind—"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"I'll undertake to eat them!" said Heath.

"Well, that's fair enough," said Bulstrode, "and if nothing is found, I should think that Wharton would have the grace to apologise."

"Yes, rather!"

"Let's look through the study first," said Harry. "I could have searched it myself, without saying a word, but I wanted everything to be fair and above-board."

"I'm ready," said Heath.

"Come on, you fellows!" said Bulstrode.

Quite a crowd of fellows accompanied Heath and Wharton upstairs. Wharton was feeling a keen sense of disappointment. He meant to go through with the search of the new boy's study; but he had little hope now that it would yield anything.

The juniors crowded into the study.

The fun of the thing rather appealed to them—and Heath had always been so secretive, keeping his study door locked on most occasions, that many of the fellows were keen to lend a hand in turning it out.

There was no doubt that the search would be a thorough one.

Skinner started by pitching the books out of the bookcase in a heap on the floor, and Snoop dragged out the drawers of the table, letting them, with their contents, fall in a heap on the floor.

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Heath. "I didn't bargain for that sort of thing. You needn't wreck the place!"

"Yes, cheese that, Skinner! Stop it, Snoop!" said Bulstrode.

"Oh, rats!" said Skinner. "We're going to search the place, ain't we? There's nothing like being thorough in a matter of this sort."

"You can rake up the chimney with this umbrella!" said Stott.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Turn those boxes out."

"Clear the shelf there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Heath had expressed himself quite willing to have his study turned out, probably strong in the knowledge that the wig was not concealed there. But he might have hesitated, all the same, if he had known the form the turning-out would take.

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As a matter of fact, the juniors did not like Heath, and they were glad of the excuse of serving him a trick.

The search of the study rapidly developed into a rag.

Bulstrode walked out, and left the others to do as they chose, and they chose to make the proceedings decidedly uproarious.

It was in vain that Heath protested. He was an unpopular fellow, and he had no friends. There was no one to stand by him.

Wharton and Linley remained at the door, looking on. They did not take part in the rag. But they kept their eyes open to see if any discovery was made.

There was no doubt that the search would have unearthed anything that was in the study. A fragment of paper, a loose hair from the supposed wig, would hardly have escaped it.

But no wig was found.

Even after all hope of discovering anything had passed, the juniors continued to wreck the study, amid shouts of laughter.

Heath turned to Harry Wharton with fury in his face.

"I've got you to thank for this!" he exclaimed.

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"You've got yourself to thank," he said.

"You can see that there is nothing of the sort you expected here," said Heath.

"I can see there is nothing of the sort here, certainly. That only proves—"

"What does it prove?"

"That you have hidden it somewhere else, or destroyed it."

"It is false!"

"We shall see."

"Oh, hang it, Wharton," said Ogilvy, "you might tell Heath you're sorry now, now that we've proved it isn't here!"

"I'll tell Heath I'm sorry when he's proved that he's not guilty."

"Punch his head, Heath," said Snoop.

Heath did not take the advice. He was a larger-built fellow than Wharton, and might easily have done so. But such methods were not his. All hope of saving his study from wreck was gone, and he stamped out of it in a black rage, gritting his teeth.

The juniors tired of their amusement at last; but by that time the study was in a hopeless state of disorder and wreck.

The noise of bumping furniture brought a prefect along the passage by the time the raggers had finished.

It was Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars. He looked into the disordered study in blank astonishment.

"What on earth are you kids doing?" he exclaimed.

"Searching," said Skinner.

"What are you searching for?"

"A wig."

"A—a—a what?"

"A wig!"

Wingate stepped into the study, took Skinner by the ear with finger and thumb, and squeezed.

There was a howl from Skinner.

"Ow—ow! Yow! Stop it!"

"Don't be funny, Skinner."

"Ow! Yow! Leggo!"

"What are you turning out the study in this way for?"

"I've told you," howled Skinner, rubbing his ear.

"Wharton thinks that Heath impersonated Bob Cherry at the post-office—"

"What?" shouted Wingate.

"And he thinks he wore a wig, and keeps it hidden here. Heath's given us permission to search his study."

"But not to upset it in this way, I should think."

"Well, the things were bound to get a little disturbed."

Wingate turned to Wharton. There was a deep frown upon his brow, and an angry light in his eyes.

"Look here, Wharton," he exclaimed, "you're keeping up this rot too long! Bob Cherry's guilt has been proved, and you're doing no good to anyone by keeping the matter alive in this way. How dare you bring such an accusation against Heath!"

"I believe it's true."

"Have you any evidence against Heath?"

"Not very strong evidence. But—"

"I think you should be ashamed of yourself," said Wingate. "You seem to be willing to bring the wildest accusations against anybody, rather than admit the plain truth against Cherry."

"I—"

"Hear, hear!" said the juniors in chorus.

"You'd better let this matter drop, I warn you, Wharton," said Wingate. "You'll get into trouble if you don't, and that's flat."

And, with a warning frown to Wharton, Wingate strode away.

The juniors crowded out of the study. They had searched every inch of it, and certainly proved that the supposed wig was not there. And they had left it in a state that it would take Heath hours to put right.

Wharton and Linley went along to No. 1. They had received a check, and it was a bitter disappointment. But they were far from losing hope.

"I don't believe the wig is destroyed," Wharton said. "I believe the rascal has hidden it somewhere. When you come to think of it, Marky, he wouldn't hide it in his study. It might be found there by the maid—or Bunter might rummage about. He's put it in a safer place than that."

"But now he knows that it's being searched for I think he is very likely to attempt to destroy it," the Lancashire lad remarked.

"Yes, very likely."

"In that case, he will have to go to its hiding-place—"

"Certainly."

"And if we watch him—"

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Good! We'll take it in turns to watch the cad, and never have our eyes off him—night and day. If he's got the wig hidden somewhere, he's most likely to try and get at it by night. You see, he may have hidden it immediately after using it, and not dared to go near the spot since. We'll watch the cad!"

And after that always one or the other of the chums was within easy distance of Esau Heath, keeping an apparently careless eye upon him—but never allowing him to escape observation.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER. A Financial Mystery.

"IT'S a giddy miracle!" said Ogilvy.

"It must be."

"I can't understand it."

"You see," Ogilvy went on, "his people are not rich. We know perfectly well that his people are jolly poor."

"Quite so."

"His yarns about receiving postal-orders are all bunkum, we know that."

"I guess so."

"Then where is he getting the money from?"

"It's a mystery."

"He can't be boning it, or someone would be complaining of losing money," Frank Nugent said thoughtfully. "But he's had three pounds in one day."

The juniors were discussing Bunter.

Billy Bunter had often surprised and exasperated the Remove. But he had never surprised them, never puzzled them, so much as now.

Bunter's stories of great wealth and titled friends were a joke in the Form. But the fat junior was really in funds at last.

That was the amazing part of it.

He really had money—real money—that could be exchanged for tarts and ginger-pop at the tuck-shop.

Mrs. Mimble was all smiles now for the fat junior. What was utterly unheard-of—but true—was the fact that Bunter had paid up his account to Mrs. Mimble. He did not owe her a penny now, and he was still spending ready money.

It was astounding.

Where was Bunter getting the money from? The supposition that he was stealing it was quite a natural one, for everybody knew that Billy Bunter's honesty was not of a particularly scrupulous kind. But it was an impossible supposition, for no one could have had so much money stolen in a single day without missing it.

Bunter had had three pounds!

The Owl of the Remove had never had so much money before, excepting on the famous occasion when he had used Wingate's banknote by "mistake." Another mistake of the same sort might naturally be expected; but no one had missed any banknotes.

The juniors were utterly puzzled.

They joined in the feeds at Bunter's expense—and there was no doubt that Bunter was standing feeds right royally. He was not generous; but he liked very much to swank. And he apparently regarded his new source of income as unlimited.

"It's simply staggering," said Tom Brown. "I can't catch on to it at all."

"Let's ask him," said Hazeldene.

"I've asked him. He says he's had postal-orders."

"That's a whopper, of course."

"But where can he have got it?"

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"Stolen it," said Snoop.

"But nobody's missed any money."

"He might have borrowed it," Frank Nugent suggested, a little more charitably.

"But from whom?" said Bulstrode. "How many fellows are there in the Form who could lend three pounds? And how many would?"

"Few could, and none would," said Ogilvy.

"Exactly!"

"We can ask all the chaps who have money," suggested Tom Brown. "It isn't you, for instance, Bulstrode—"

The Remove captain laughed.

"No," he said. "I've lent Bunter only a shilling this week. And it wasn't you, Vernon-Smith?"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"No fear!" he said.

"It might have been Wun Lung—that Chinese is rolling in money," said Nugent. "But he doesn't like Bunter."

"Let's ask him. Wun Lung! Where's the heathen?"

"Me here."

Little Wun Lung, the Chinese, blinked in his simple way at the juniors.

Bulstrode shook him by the shoulder.

"Have you been lending Bunter money, Wun Lung?"

The Chinese junior shook his head.

"No lendee," he said.

"Quite sure?"

"What you tinkee?"

"You haven't lent him three pounds to-day?"

Wun Lung grinned.

"Me no lendee, not muchee. Me knowee Bunttee."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, if it wasn't Wun Lung, who the dickens was it?" said Bulstrode. "Bunter generally manages to get some money out of new chaps, but—"

"There's Heath."

"Heath isn't the chap to lend money. I know he's got plenty," Bulstrode said thoughtfully. "I remember seeing him take a fiver out of a registered letter this very morning."

"He cashed it with Mrs. Mimble when I was in there," Snoop remarked.

"But he wouldn't lend Bunter money."

"Here comes Bunter! Let's make him explain."

"Good! Bunter! Bunter!"

The fat junior was rolling up, with a very self-satisfied expression upon his fat face. He was enjoying the excitement he was causing in the Remove. For the present he was the cynosure of all eyes. He was Bunter—the rich Bunter—the character he had always wanted to assume. That he was injudicious in thus attracting attention to his ill-gotten wealth was a consideration that never even occurred to the fat junior.

"I say, you fellows—" he began.

"We were just wanting to see you, Bunter—"

"Good! I was looking for you, too. Who says ices?"

"Ices!"

"Come on, then," said Bunter. "Mrs. Mimble's got a fresh lot of ice-cream, and it's simply ripping. I'm standing treat."

"You are?"

"Yes, rather! Come on, every one of you."

"So you've got some more money?" said Nugent.

"Yes," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I've just had a postal-order."

"You've just had a postal-order?" repeated Hazeldene.

"By post?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"A sovereign."

You blessed fibber," said Hazeldene. "The last post isn't in yet, and your last sovereign came by the other post. The postman hasn't been since."

"My hat! So he hasn't," said Bulstrode. "Where did you get that postal-order?"

"I—I—I—"

"Let's see it," said Nugent.

"I've cashed it," said Bunter. "Here's the sov., if you don't believe me."

He held up a sovereign between his fat finger and thumb. There was no doubting the genuineness of the sovereign, and the juniors could only stare at it.

"That's real enough," said Tom Brown.

"I guess so; that's the right article, sonny."

"Look here," said Bulstrode, "this is getting serious. Where did you get that sovereign, Bunter?"

"I've had a postal-order—"

"Don't tell crammers. The postman hasn't been."

"I—I meant to say that there were two in my last letter, and I cashed only one or them then," said Bunter. "Now

I'm using the other, as I expect to have some more in the morning, you see."

"Oh!" said Bulstrode.
"Who cashed this order for you, then?" asked John Bull suspiciously. "You certainly haven't been down to the post-office."

"I—I asked a fellow to cash it for me."
"What fellow?"
"I—I—I don't see that that matters."
"It matters this much," said Bulstrode; "you haven't had a postal-order at all, but you've got that sovereign from somebody. If you haven't borrowed it, you've pinched it. Now you'd better tell the truth."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"
"If you're thieving, the sooner you're stopped, the better," Bulstrode said. "We've had enough thieves in the Remove lately."

"Yes, rather!"
"Now, you'll either tell me what chap cashed your postal-order, so that we can ask him, or I'll march you straight before a prefect, to explain where you're getting the money."

Bunter turned quite pale.
He had not, in his crass stupidity, anticipated anything of that sort. He had thought only of swanking, without considering that none of his statements would be believed, and that the fellows would become suspicious.

The thought of being questioned by a prefect terrified him. He had not, of course, had any postal-orders; and he could not explain that he was extorting money from Heath for keeping his secret. Yet how could he account for the money now?

Bulstrode's iron grasp closed upon his shoulder.
"Come on," he said.
"W-w-where?"
"To Wingate's study."
"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"
"You can explain to us, or you can explain to a prefect," said Bulstrode. "That's your choice. Don't you fellows agree with me?"

"Yes, rather," said John Bull.
"I guess so."
"I—I say, you fellows, I—I think this is rather ungrateful, when I was going to stand treat," said Bunter. "I—I really had a postal-order, you know, and a—a fellow cashed it for me."

"Give us his name, then."
"You see, I—I——"
"His name!" exclaimed Bulstrode, shaking the fat junior.
"It was—was—was Hazeldene."
"Hazeldene!"
"You young crammer!" exclaimed Hazeldene indignantly. "I never did anything of the sort."

"Oh—oh, really——"
Bunter blinked at Hazeldene in dismay. He was extremely short-sighted, and he had not seen Hazeldene.

"I—I mean, it was Tom Brown," he said.
"Was it you, Brown?"
"Of course it wasn't," said the New Zealand junior. "He's lying!"

"Oh, really, Brown——"
"And he's lying because he's pinched the money," said John Bull. "He would tell the truth if he came by it honestly."

"Oh, really, Bull—— I—I say, you fellows, I—I forgot, you know. I remember now. It was Heath!" shouted Billy Bunter desperately, as Bulstrode marched him off towards the study of the captain of Greyfriars.

Bulstrode paused.
"Heath?"
"Yes."
"Will he say so himself?"
"Oh, really, of course he will! Just you ask him."
"Well, we'll give you one more chance," said Bulstrode. "We'll ask Heath. Is Heath here?"

Heath was not there. But two or three fellows volunteered to fetch him; and they went in search of him, and Billy Bunter waited, with Bulstrode's hand on his collar, for Heath to appear.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER. The Upper Hand.

HEATH came in a few minutes, with Micky Desmond and Frank Nugent on either side of him. They had not told him what was wanted of him; he had merely been told that Bulstrode wanted to speak to him. Heath was naturally suspicious, and he felt uneasy; but he had no choice about coming. His little eyes were scintillating like a rat's with anxiety as he joined the crowd of juniors in the Form-room passage.

Bulstrode beckoned to him.
"Come here, Heath," he said. "I want to ask you a question. Bunter says that you cashed a postal-order for a pound for him. Did you?"

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NEXT TUESDAY: Special Complete School and Coronation Story, entitled:

Heath's eyes gleamed on Bunter.
"You remember, Heath," panted the fat junior. "I came to you in your study about ten minutes ago, and—and asked you to cash an order for a pound, as—as it was too late to go down to the post-office."

Heath nodded.
"Yes, I remember," he said.
Bulstrode started.
"Then it's true," he said.

"Yes," replied Heath.
"You cashed a postal-order for Bunter—an order for a pound?"

"Yes."
Bulstrode released the fat junior.
"Well, if that's the case, it's all right," he said. "If you've really had the postal-orders, Bunter, I suppose the money belongs to you."

"Of course it does," said Bunter, in a very injured tone.
"Of course it does, Bulstrode! I really think you might take a fellow's word for it—especially such an honourable chap as I am. I don't like having my word doubted, you know."

"Oh, rats!"
"Look here! The offer's still good," said Bunter. "Any of you fellows that would like to have some ices, can come along——"

"What-ho!"
And the juniors thronged off towards the tuck-shop. Heath made a sign to Billy Bunter to stop.

"I want to speak to you, about—about that postal-order, Bunter," he said.

"Can't stop now, Heath——"
"It's important."
"Oh, all right; I'll join you fellows in a minute!" said Bunter. "Tell Mrs. Mimble to put it down to me."

"Right-ho!" said Skinner.
Harry Wharton and Mark Linley had been spectators of the scene, without taking part in it. They walked away now, as Heath's suspicious eye turned upon them. They did not desire to play the part of eavesdroppers. Heath drew Bunter into the recess of a deep window, and there, out of the general view, he grasped the fat junior by the shoulder, and shook him till he gasped.

"Ow! Oh, really, Heath!" stammered Bunter. "Leggo! Yow!"
"You fool—you fat fool!" said Heath, in low, savage tones. "You mad idiot! Can't you see that you're making this matter the talk of the Form?"

"Oh, really——"
"You've had four pounds out of me now, altogether——"
"I'm going to repay it all, when my postal-orders come," said Bunter. "I'm expecting several remittances from some titled friends——"

"Stop that rot!" said Heath savagely. "You're getting this money out of me because you've got that paper. Each time you're promised to give it up, and you haven't done it."
"I've mislaid it——"

"Liar!"
"Oh, really——"
"Are you going to give it to me?" demanded Heath, in low, cautious tones, but with an accent of concentrated rage. An obstinate look came over Bunter's face.

"Wait till I find it," he said.
"You lying rat! You know where you've hidden it."
"Well, when I find it, I'll think about it," said Bunter. "Look here, you're jolly rich. I've heard you swanking about your father having a yacht, and a villa at Cannes, and so on. You can afford a pound or two to oblige a friend."

"A friend!" said Heath bitterly.
"Well, I'm your friend, ain't I?" said Bunter. "I'm standing by you. Suppose I were to send that paper to Major Cherry's lawyers——"

"Hush!"
"Well, I'm standing by you," said Bunter. "I'm going to see you through. As for these few paltry pounds, I can repay them, when—when my remittances arrive. They're bound to come soon. I'm going to write to the Postmaster-General about it."

"Will you give me the paper?"
"Look here——"
"You cad! Will you give me the paper? Look here," said Heath desperately. "I've got a whole fiver, that my uncle gave me. I'll hand it to you in return for that paper."

"All right. Give me the fiver now, and——"
"Fool! Do you think I would trust you?"

Bunter blinked at him with cool self-satisfaction. He was master of the situation, and he knew it. He liked to make his power felt.

"You'll have to," he said coolly. "You can't do anything else. At present, however, I decline to waste time

discussing the matter. My friends are waiting for me in the tuck-shop. And as a matter of fact, Heath, you're not really the kind of fellow I care to be seen talking to."

Heath made a low sound of rage. He could have taken the fat junior by the neck, and dashed his head against the wall, with the keenest of pleasure. But he dared not lay hands on the Owl of the Remove. Fat and lazy and cowardly as Bunter was, he held the plotter in the hollow of his stodgy hand.

"Then you won't give me the paper?"

"I'll think about it," said Bunter carelessly. "No hurry, anyway."

"You won't get any more money from me until you do."

"Oh! I shall be wanting a small loan in the morning," said Bunter. "A sovereign will do. I shall expect it."

"You won't get it."

"Then you can look out for squalls," said Bunter. "Come to think of it, it's my duty to expose such an awful rascal as you are. And I've always tried to do my duty. It's a great comfort to me to reflect that I've always played the game."

"If you won't give me the paper," said Heath, in a choking voice, "will you be a bit more careful about keeping up appearances? It will be as bad for you as for me, if the truth comes out. You are making the whole Form excited and curious by swanking about with all that money."

"Oh, that's all right. It's supposed to come from my titled friends."

"Do you think anybody believes those rotten lies?" said Heath savagely.

"I decline to listen to language of this sort," said Bunter loftily. "And I've said before that I don't care to keep up your acquaintance in public, Heath. If I want to speak to you, I'll come to your study."

And he rolled away, leaving Heath trembling from head to foot with rage and fear. The way of the transgressor is hard, as the schemer of the Remove was beginning to find out.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Caught.

"MARKY, old man, what do you think of it?"

Harry Wharton put the question to the Lancashire junior in suppressed, eager tones.

They had gone into the common-room after the scene in the passage. The room was nearly deserted, and they could speak quietly. Most of the juniors, fags and all, had gone to the tuck-shop with Bunter's party, to take part in the unexpected feed.

It was past Mrs. Mimble's usual time for closing, but the good dame was pretty certain to keep her little shop open longer, till Bunter's fourth sovereign was expended.

Four sovereigns in one day, expended upon tuck, made Billy Bunter a great man in the eyes of Mrs. Mimble, and she was always ready with beaming smiles when the fat junior came in. Bunter was coming out very strong now. So long as his money lasted he seemed likely to be able to swank to his heart's content. And his money showed no sign of coming to an end. Four sovereigns in one day! It made the fellows' mouths water. And Heath, having backed up Bunter's statement about the postal order, the Remove were satisfied at last that Bunter had come by the money honestly. And many of the Form declared that Billy Bunter wasn't such a bad chap, after all. Snoop, indeed, said that he had said so all along, though no one remembered ever having heard Snoop say so.

That Bunter had had postal-orders, and that Heath had cashed them for him, Harry Wharton did not believe for a moment. Why had Heath backed up Bunter's statement, then? It was certainly not out of kindness or friendship.

"What do you think, Marky?"

"I think the same as you do," Mark Linley said. "Bunter hasn't had four pounds sent to him in one day. That's all nonsense."

"Then where did he get it?"

"From Heath."

Wharton nodded.

"That's what I believe. Heath would not have backed him up unless he had had a reason. The reason is, that he's given Bunter the money."

"That's it."

"And why has he given Bunter four pounds?"

Mark smiled.

"Not because he likes him, you may be sure, and not because he thinks it will be repaid," he said. "You can take that as certain. He hasn't lent him the money—he knows Bunter. Besides, if he had he could say so, instead of telling that lie about the postal-orders. He's given him the money."

"For what?"

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"There's only one possible explanation—Bunter knows something about him, and Heath is paying him to hold his tongue."

"Just what I believe. It's the only possible thing," said Harry. "The question is, is Bunter screwing this out of Heath over Bob Cherry's affair, or over something else. I dare say Heath is in more than one disgraceful scrape, if you come to that."

"We must find out."

"By the way, where's Heath?" Wharton exclaimed. "We were going to keep an eye on him."

"He was in the passage just now."

The juniors went out into the passage. Heath was not there. Temple of the Fourth was near the door, talking to Dabney and Fry, and Wharton asked him if he had seen Heath.

"Just gone upstairs," said Temple.

"Thanks!"

The two Removites went upstairs. There was no light in Heath's study, as Harry Wharton glanced at the door. But there was a light under Billy Bunter's door, and Wharton started as he observed it.

He pointed to the streak of light under the door, glimmering out upon the dimly-lighted passage.

"Somebody's in Bunter's study," he said.

"Heath!"

"Well, we know it isn't Bunter, as he's in the tuck-shop with the fellows, and we know Bunter has no study-mate," said Harry. "Bunter has that study to himself."

"Heath," repeated Linley.

"Suppose," said Harry, in a low voice—"suppose Bunter had found something—say the wig, for instance—that might be the reason—"

"The reason for the four pounds."

"Exactly."

"I shouldn't wonder."

Wharton paused outside the door. There was a sound within the study that was unmistakable—a sound of rummaging. Shelves and drawers were being turned out by an eager searcher; the sounds proved it clearly.

"It's Heath," said Harry, setting his lips. "He's looking for something in Bunter's study. Something that belongs to him, perhaps."

"Open the door."

"Good!"

Wharton flung open the door of the study.

There was a startled cry from within.

Heath was bending over the drawer of Bunter's table, going through the contents with eager, quick fingers, when the door opened.

He started up, his face becoming chalky white, and his startled eyes gleaming upon the two juniors like a frightened cat's.

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed Harry Wharton sternly.

"Oh, I—I—"

"What are you doing?"

"Mind your own business!" cried Heath angrily. "You can get out! This isn't your study, is it? Mind your own business."

"What are you looking for?" asked Harry.

"Nothing."

"You are turning the study out. What are you searching for?"

"Find out!"

"I am going to," said Harry quietly. "I'm going to find out how you have succeeded in blackening Bob Cherry's name, and driving him from school. You're getting to the end of your tether, Heath."

"Hang you—hang you! Leave me alone!"

"Marky," said Harry quietly, "go and tell Bunter that Heath is searching his study. I'll keep the rotter here while you're gone."

"Right-ho!" said Mark.

He ran quickly along the passage. Heath clenched his fists convulsively.

"I'm not going to stay here," he said.

"You are!"

"I won't! I—I refuse! Let me pass!" shouted Heath, coming towards the doorway.

Harry Wharton stood in the open doorway, his hands up. His eyes were fixed upon the furious, passionate Heath.

"You are not coming out," he said. "You came here of your own accord, and you are staying here till the owner of the study returns. You can explain to him."

"Let me pass!"

"You shall not pass."

Heath made a rush to force his way out. Wharton caught him by the shoulders, and, with a single swing of his strong arms, sent him spinning across the study.

Heath fell against the wall, and slid to the floor. He lay there, gasping and panting, his eyes glittering like a rat's.

"Oh, hang you!" he groaned.
 "I don't want to handle you," said Wharton quietly; "but you don't leave this study. You have been searching it. You can explain to the owner what you've been searching it for."

"I—I had Bunter's permission."
 "Then you can stay and see Bunter."
 "I tell you, I—I won't stay! Look here!"
 Wharton squared his shoulders. He stood in the doorway, truly a lion in the path. Heath could no more have moved him than he could have moved the solid walls.

The cad of the Remove threw himself sullenly into a chair to wait. Bunter, apparently, was not in a hurry to come. Perhaps the tuck-shop held him with a peculiar fascination. But there was a sound of footsteps on the stairs at last.

Heath started to his feet.
 "Will you let me pass?" he hissed.
 "No!"

The new junior caught up the chair he had been sitting upon, swung it into the air with both hands, and rushed furiously at Wharton.

Harry started back a pace.
 But he did not flinch further. As Heath brought down the chair with desperate force, the active junior dodged the sweeping blow, and caught the chair by the rail, and jerked it out of the other's hand.

The chair went to the floor with a crash, and the next moment Wharton's clenched fist was planted upon Heath's jaw, and he rolled on the carpet.

"I—I say, you fellows!"
 Bunter had arrived. He came running up the Remove passage with three or four other fellows. He blinked into the study through his big spectacles. His little round eyes were glimmering with rage behind his glasses.

"Heath, you worm! You've been searching my study, have you?" he exclaimed. "Has he found the paper, Wharton?"

"What paper?"
 "The—the—I—I mean, I don't mean a paper!" stammered Bunter, realising that he was speaking too freely. "Has he found anything?"

"I don't know."
 "I wasn't searching the study," said Heath. "I—I was looking for—for a postal-order—one you said you wanted me to cash. I've got a sovereign ready to give you for it."

Bunter blinked at him.
 "Hand over the sovereign," he said.
 Heath handed it over.

"I'll look for the—the postal-order myself, and let you have it," said Bunter, slipping the sovereign into his pocket. "Now get out of my study."

Heath slunk out.
 The other fellows followed, and Bunter locked the door after them. In the passage, Wharton and Linley exchanged glances.

"So it's a paper," Wharton muttered.
 Mark nodded.

"Yes, some paper that Bunter holds, that Heath pays him to keep quiet. What on earth can it be?"
 "If it's nothing to do with Bob Cherry," said Harry, "it's no business of ours. But if it concerns this case, we're going to know all about that paper."

"Yes, rather."
 "After this, I don't think Bunter will trust it in a hiding-place. He will carry it about with him," said Harry in a low tone.

"I should say so, and that—"
 "That's where we come in," said Harry Wharton.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Dark Hours.

HEATH, as a rule, was able to keep a mask of indifference upon his face; but just now the anxiety he was labouring under could not be concealed. When the Remove went up to bed, Heath was pale and harassed-looking.

He had surely enough on his mind to worry him. Bunter had extracted five sovereigns from him, in all, in the course of a single day. Heath's people were rich, and he had lately had several liberal tips, and was very flush with money. But he could not stand such a strain for many days. At the present rate, Bunter would clear out all his resources in another twenty-four hours. What would happen then?

When he had no more money to give the fat junior, what would Bunter do with the paper? It was pretty certain what he would do? His fat conscience would wake up, and he would realise that it was his duty to do what he could to clear a schoolboy's honour of a foul and false charge. He would hand out the paper containing the forged signatures, and Heath's very senses swam at the thought of it.

To have his villainous plot brought home to him, to be expelled from Greyfriars with the blackest ignominy, and to have his victim return in a blaze of triumph—that was what would happen to him then!

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NEXT Special Complete School and TUESDAY: Coronation Story, entitled:

"THE KING'S GUEST."

By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

His hatred of Bob Cherry—the hatred of a cowardly and cruel nature for a strong and frank and manly one—had led him into this wretched plot. But once committed to it, he was bound to go on, from slander to slander, and lie to lie, to save himself from the punishment of his wickedness.

During the night and the day following, he had to regain possession of that paper, or else face the consequences of what he had done. He realised that very clearly.

It was enough to worry him.
 All the time, too, he knew that he was under suspicion, and that Harry Wharton and Mark Linley, if no others, suspected the whole of his cunning plot, and were determined to find out the facts and bring them to light.

The way of the transgressor was, indeed, proving very thorny.

Heath watched Bunter as he went to bed. Bunter put his waistcoat under his mattress, so that he would be lying on it all through the night. That was enough to convince Heath that the paper was now in a pocket of the waistcoat. But there was little likelihood that he would be able to get at it during the night without waking the fat junior.

Still, Bunter was a heavy sleeper, and there was a chance; and that chance Heath meant to try, as soon as the Remove were all asleep.

As a matter of fact, the Remove were not likely to be all asleep at any time that night. Wharton and Mark Linley were going to watch the cad of the Form, and they had arranged to take it in turns.

Loder, the prefect, saw lights out, and the Remove, after the usual chatter, settled down to sleep.

There was a glimmer of moonlight in at the high windows of the dormitory, and it was possible to see objects dimly. If a fellow should leave his bed, Harry Wharton knew that he would see him.

Wharton did not sleep. He was sleepy; but he was keenly alive to the necessity of keeping awake. The clearing of Bob Cherry's name might depend upon it.

An hour passed—and another.
 Occasional low sounds in the dormitory warned Wharton that at least one of the Form was awake, and moving restlessly while the dull minutes crawled by; and he had little doubt that it was Heath.

Half-past eleven!
 Heath sat up in bed.

"You fellows asleep?" he asked, in a low voice.
 There was no reply. Wharton had been expecting it, yet it thrilled him strangely to hear the low-cautious voice in the darkness.

There came no sound but regular breathing in answer to Heath, and after a pause of a minute or more, the new boy stepped cautiously out of bed.

Wharton lay on his elbow, breathing hard.
 Dimly he saw the form of the junior move towards Bunter's bed. Heath knelt down beside the bed, and a faint rustling sound showed that he was trying to insert his hand under the mattress without waking the fat junior.

But Bunter's ample weight was upon the waistcoat, and Heath had little chance of extracting it.

Wharton lay and watched.
 There was a grunt from the Owl of the Remove. Heath had stirred him. Another grunt, and then Heath drew back from the bed, terrified, waiting for Bunter to settle down again.

Bunter snored on.
 Five minutes or more elapsed before Heath made a fresh attempt. Then, as he approached Bunter's bed again, Wharton rose silently to a sitting posture.

He reached out towards his washstand, and grasped the sponge, and raised his hand in the air. As Heath bent towards Bunter's bed, Wharton hurled the sponge. In spite of the gloom, the aim was unerring.

The sponge struck Heath on the back of the head.
 The blow was, of course, not severe; but coming suddenly and totally unexpectedly as it did, it hurled Heath forward, and he sprawled across Bunter's bed with a startled cry.

There was a yell from the fat junior.
 Startled out of his sleep, he leaped up in bed, and his head came in contact with Heath's head with a terrific crack.

"Ow!"
 "Yow!"
 They yelled together.

Wharton lay laughing quietly. Bunter threw out his arms, and grasped Heath as he scrambled back from the bed. Heath, hurt as he was, thought at once of getting back into bed and lying quietly there, but he had no time.

"Ow!" yelled Bunter. "Help! Burglars!"
 "Hallo!"
 "What's the row?"
 "Help! Burglars!"

"Let go!" muttered Heath, in a stifled voice. "It was only a lark! It's not burglars! Let go! You ass, let go!"

"Help! Help!"

Frank Nugent jumped up and lighted a candle. Heath was striving to tear himself away from Bunter's grasp, and he was nearly dragging the fat junior out of bed in the effort.

Bunter relaxed his grasp as the light flared out.

"Help!" he gasped.

"What's the matter?"

"What are you doing, Heath?"

"What the dickens—"

"It's—it's only a jape!" stammered Heath. "I—I—I was going to mop Bunter with a sponge, that's all! It was only a lark."

"It's a lie!" roared Bunter. "He was going to rob me."

"What rot! I—"

"He was trying to get at my waistcoat under my mattress!" snorted Bunter. "I know that jolly well. He's a thief!"

"I—I—I—"

"Here, draw it mild," said Bulstrode. "What have you got in your waistcoat for anybody to want to steal? A wad of postal-orders?"

"N-n-no!"

"What is it, then?"

"A—a—a paper."

"A paper! A newspaper?" asked Bulstrode.

"No!" snapped Bunter. "A—a paper, that's all."

"What on earth should Heath want to steal a paper from you for?"

"Well, he jolly well does," said Bunter. "It's a very valuable paper. That's what he was hunting in my study for, the rotter!"

"I—I was only larking," stammered Heath. His face showed as white as chalk in the light of the candle.

"Well, you'd better stop larks of that sort at this time of night," said Frank Nugent drily. "Get back to bed, and don't play the giddy goat."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"But, look here—"

"Shut up!" roared a dozen voices.

And Bunter grunted, and shut up. Heath got back into bed, and he did not stir from it again that night. But there was little sleep for him through the long hours of darkness.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Triumph of Truth.

HEATH was the first out of bed in the morning. The rising-bell had not yet clanged when he rose and dressed himself. Wharton watched him from his bed quietly. That Heath had intended to leave the dormitory during the night, if Bunter had not caused an alarm, Harry felt sure. It was not like Heath to rise before the others in the morning; he was generally an utter slacker, and stayed in bed till the last possible moment.

There was one explanation of his unusual early rising. He had something on hand which could only be carried out while the other fellows were not about. He had not succeeded in getting that mysterious paper from Bunter. And Wharton guessed shrewdly enough that what Heath was now concerned about was the hidden wig.

Heath had been under observation the previous evening, and he had known it. During the night he had not ventured out. The way Bunter had been awakened had shown him that someone was on the watch in the Remove dormitory, and he could guess that it was either Wharton or Nugent.

The expression of the junior's face showed how worry and

stress of mind were telling on him. He was feeling driven into a corner, with his cowardly plot in danger of falling about his ears at every moment.

He glanced along the line of white beds. No one was stirring. Heath left the dormitory quietly, and closed the door behind him.

Wharton leaped out of bed.

"Marky!"

Mark Linley started out of a doze.

"Yes, Harry!"

"Up you get!"

The Lancashire lad did not stop to ask questions. He rose quickly, and began to dress. Harry Wharton ran to the window, and dressed with one eye on the Close. The figure of Esau Heath appeared in sight.

He was tramping away from the house across the Close.

Wharton watched him while he dressed. Where was Heath going, if not to the hiding-place of the disguise he had worn when impersonating Bob Cherry? From the window Wharton could observe without being observed.

Heath disappeared at the ruined chapel—that relic of ancient times which was the pride of Greyfriars. He passed in at the little low door, and vanished. Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed. That place, of all at Greyfriars, was fullest of odd nooks and crannies where any small article might be hidden in perfect safety.

"Come on, Marky."

Bulstrode sat up in bed.

"Hallo! Where are you fellows going?"

They did not stop to reply. They left the dormitory, and ran down the passage and the stairs. An early housemaid was the only person about. Through the open doorway, the keen, fresh air of morning blew in from the Close.

Wharton and Linley ran across to the ruined chapel. They reached it in a minute or less. They could guess how Heath was occupied, and they wanted to arrive before he had time to destroy what he had unearthed. They reached the low, oaken doorway, and entered quietly. The chapel was mostly in ruins, doorless and windowless apertures gaping on all sides. The stone stair that led down to the crypt was before them. The opening had been covered by a modern wooden trapdoor for safety's sake. The trapdoor was raised now, and from below came a glimmer of light.

Someone was down there with a candle or a lantern. The juniors did not need telling whom it was.

Even as they looked down the stairs, Esau Heath came into sight. He was carrying a bicycle lantern in one hand, and in the other he had a parcel wrapped in brown paper.

The two juniors stepped back quickly.

Heath was coming up the stairs from the crypt, and he had not seen them. They drew back into the cover of the shattered masonry, and waited for the new boy to emerge from the crypt.

Heath came up, and extinguished the lantern, and concealed it in a crevice in the stonework.

Then he turned to the door of the chapel.

At the same moment, Wharton and Mark Linley stepped from their cover, reached him, and pinioned him by either arm.

Heath started convulsively.

He had been pinioned so suddenly that he had no chance whatever of resistance, and he could only stare at his captors with white face and haggard eyes.

His hand closed tightly on the parcel he was carrying. He struggled slightly, but it was useless, and he knew it, and desisted. He was not nearly a match for either of the juniors who had grasped him.

"You—you—" he muttered. "Oh!"

"Caught!" said Wharton grimly. "What's in that parcel, Heath?"

"The—the parcel?"

"Yes. What's in it?"

"Some—some things belonging to me," said Heath, with white lips and stammering voice. "Nothing of any value—it's of no importance."

"Very well, come on."

"W-w-what do you mean? Why should I come with you?"

"Because you've got no choice," said Wharton grimly.

"You're going to open that parcel in public, and show the contents. If they're of no importance, as you say, they won't hurt you for being shown."

"I—I—"

"Come on."

Heath resisted feebly. Wharton and Mark Linley took no notice of his resistance. They marched him on forcibly towards the School House. The rising-bell was clanging out now, and a few early risers were already up. Heath was marched by sheer force into the House, up the stairs, and to the door of Wingate's room.

Wharton knocked at the door.

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DON'T MISS the special new story of the "TOM MERRY'S TREASURE ISLAND," in this week's "GEM" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"It's all right!" called out the captain of Greyfriars. "I'm up!"

"Want to speak to you, Wingate?"

"Wait till I'm dressed."

"Buck up, then."

In a few minutes Wingate opened the door. He was in shirt and trousers, and he stared in blank astonishment at the juniors and their prisoner.

"What the dickens does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Is this a jape?"

"No," said Harry.

"Then what—"

"You remember I told you I suspected that Bob Cherry was impersonated at the post-office, by a chap who got himself up in disguise?"

"Well?" said Wingate irritably.

"We've inquired in Friardale, and Mr. Moses is willing to give evidence that he sold a flaxen wig to a Greyfriars chap last Friday."

"Oh!" said Wingate.

"We suspected Heath, and we've watched him. He fetched this parcel out of the old chapel crypt just now. We want you to see what's in it. We suspect that it's the wig. Then we want Mr. Moses to be brought here to see if he can identify Heath as the chap who bought the wig."

Wingate looked hard at the white-faced, shivering Heath. If ever guilt was written in a fellow's face, it was written in Esau Heath's then.

"Are you willing for the parcel to be opened, Heath?" Wingate asked sternly.

Heath panted.

"No," he said, "I—I—I'm not willing. It contains some private things, and—and I don't care to show them to everybody."

"What things?"

"Some—some papers, and—and—"

"You refuse to have the parcel opened?"

"Yes," said Heath, gaining courage a little, "I—I refuse."

"Then," said Wingate sharply, "I shall open it by my authority as head prefect, and I'm willing to answer to the Head for what I do."

He took the parcel from Heath's nerveless hand, cut the cord, and opened the paper. A tightly-rolled wig of flaxen colour rolled out.

Wingate's eyes gleamed.

"So that's the private papers you didn't want to show?" he exclaimed scornfully. "It is a wig—a wig just the colour of Bob Cherry's hair."

Heath licked his dry lips.

"I own up to that," he said. "I—I got it for private theatricals. I—I was scared when I heard Wharton suggesting that—that a chap had worn a wig and impersonated Bob Cherry. I—I knew he would bring some accusation against me if he could. So I—I hid the wig in the crypt. That's all."

Wingate's hard glance never left his face. It was an ingenious lie, but it was evidently a lie on the face of it.

"You admit buying the wig of Mr. Moses?"

"Ye-e-es."

"On Friday, before the postal-order was cashed at Friardale's post-office?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Very well. I am afraid you will find it a little difficult to convince the Head that you bought it for private theatricals," said Wingate drily. "Wharton!"

He looked round. Wharton had disappeared. Mark Linley met his glance.

"Wharton's gone for Bunter," he said.

"Bunter! What has Bunter to do with this?"

"I believe he knows a great deal."

Heath's knees knocked together.

"He—he doesn't!" he exclaimed, in a hoarsely shrill voice. "What could Bunter know? You know what a liar Bunter is! You know—"

"We know that you gave Bunter four or five pounds yesterday," said Mark Linley coldly. "We know you did not do it for nothing."

Wingate gave a start.

"You gave Bunter such a sum as that, Heath?"

"I—I cashed postal orders for him," stammered Heath.

"Oh! You are asking me to believe that Bunter had postal orders for four or five pounds in a single day?" said Wingate drily. "Well, if Bunter can give me the names of the senders, and they can answer inquiries, I will believe it—net otherwise."

Heath groaned.

There was a squeaky voice heard from the passage.

"Ow! Oh, really, Wharton! I'm coming quietly—I tell you I'm coming! You might let a chap fasten his beastly braces! Ow! Leggo my ear!"

"Come on, then," said Wharton angrily.

"Oh, really—Ow!"

Billy Bunter, with evident reluctance, was marched into Wingate's room. He stood there half-dressed, palpitating with anger and fear.

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NEXT Special Complete School and TUESDAY: Coronation Story, entitled:

"THE KING'S GUEST."

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

"We want you to question Bunter, Wingate," said Wharton. "It's better for you to do it; you can't be suspected of working things for Bob Cherry. We might. Bunter has a paper about him, and Heath has been paying him sovereigns to keep it dark. I don't know what it is, but I feel pretty certain it bears on this case. I think you ought to make Bunter show you the paper."

"What is the paper, Bunter?"

"I—I haven't one."

"I'll jolly soon find it," said Harry.

"Ow! Yow! Hands off! I—I—I— It's only an I O U, Wingate, but I don't care to show it to anybody, if you don't mind."

"What has Heath been giving you money for, Bunter?"

"He—he hasn't! He's cashed some postal orders—"

"For four or five pounds?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Where did you get them from?"

"F-f-from some titled friends of mine," stammered Bunter.

"You young jackass!" said Wingate. "Hand me that paper at once, and stop telling lies!"

"Oh, really, Wingate—"

"Take it from him, Wharton, and give it to me."

"I—I—I'll give it to you with pleasure, Wingate. I—I meant to all along," Bunter stammered. "I'm sure I always had a most sincere friendship for Bob Cherry, and I'm very anxious indeed to clear him. When I found that Heath had been committing forgery, I—I was afraid to tell anybody, in case he should fix it on me somehow. You know what a deep villain he is, from the way he's served Bob Cherry. I—I meant to show the paper to the Head, though, when—when—"

"When you'd extracted all Heath's money, I suppose?" said the Greyfriars captain, with stern contempt.

"Oh, really, Wingate—"

"Give me the paper."

Bunter handed the paper over. Heath flung himself into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. All was over now, and he knew it. Wingate opened out the paper, and he and the juniors looked at it eagerly.

"R. Cherry!"

Bob Cherry's name was scrawled on the paper over and over again. At the top it was unmistakably in Heath's writing, but as it progressed down the page it grew more and more like Bob Cherry's, till at the bottom it was a very fair imitation of Bob's own signature.

Heath had evidently been practising from a copy of Bob's signature, and he had certainly shown great aptitude for the peculiar work of a forger.

Wingate's face grew as black as thunder.

"You young hound!" he said. "You unspeakable worm! I don't think we need any further proof that Bob Cherry's name was forged, and that he was impersonated at the post-office—and that you did it! You utter cur, come with me!"

His strong hand on Heath's shoulder dragged the wretched boy to his feet. Heath looked at him with a face like death.

"I—I suppose it's all up now," he said, in a husky, broken, whispering voice. "I—I did it because—because he licked me, and I hated him! I said I'd make him suffer, and—and I did! I—I suppose I shall be expelled."

"You're not likely to be allowed to remain at Greyfriars," said Wingate drily. "If you don't go to prison, you will be lucky. Come with me—to the Head."

Heath groaned, and followed the captain of Greyfriars.

Of that interview between the Head of Greyfriars and the wretched boy whose sins had come home to him, we need not speak. Heath's grovelling terror, and his half-sincere repentance now that punishment was about to fall, did not make a pleasant spectacle. His confession, which was hardly needed now to establish the truth, was full and complete. It more than exonerated Bob Cherry. The whole wretched plot was exposed to the light of day. Greyfriars heard it and wondered. Heath could not save himself, and he did not spare Bunter. Bunter's well-known stupidity saved him from sharing Heath's fate—expulsion from the school. The Head reasoned that the fat junior had been hardly conscious of the full wickedness of his conduct, and he was sentenced to a flogging instead. That flogging was administered severely, and Bunter did not forget it soon. For hours afterwards groans were heard proceeding from Bunter's study; but as no one took any notice of the groans, they ceased at last. Bunter seemed to be surprised when he found that no one in the Remove would speak to him afterwards. His discovery of the paper bearing the forged signatures had certainly helped to clear Bob Cherry; and the fat junior seemed to expect that a great deal of credit would be given him. He was disappointed!

And Bob Cherry?

Needless to say, that, when Bunter had been flogged, and Heath expelled from Greyfriars, Bob Cherry was recalled. Dr. Locke wrote immediately to Major Cherry, explaining the matter, and asking Bob's pardon in the most sincere manner—in a way that even the fiery and exacting major could take no exception to.

Major Cherry arrived with Bob the same afternoon. And then, when nearly the whole school had been to see Bob's father off from the station later in the day, Bob Cherry was drawn back to Greyfriars on the top of the old station "growler." Never had such a scene been witnessed in Greyfriars before.

The libel action, of course, was stopped. The question of damages—and the major had, in his wrath, intended to claim enormous damages from the governors of Greyfriars—was waived. The fullest compensation was made for the expenses he had been put to, and there the matter was suffered to drop.

As for Bob, he was too happy at having his name cleared to care for anything else. He seemed to be walking on air when he came back to the school.

In his bitterness at the injustice that had been done him, Bob had thought he would never be able to forgive the friends who had failed to stand by him in his hour of need. But in this joyous hour, he could realise that they were not wholly unjustified, at all events, in being swayed by so strong

a mass of evidence. And their repentance was frank and sincere.

Nugent and John Bull, and Fish and Tom Brown, and the rest, gathered round Bob as he came into the junior common-room with Wharton and Mark Linley.

"We've been a set of silly asses, Bob," said Nugent humbly. "You can kick us all if you like, and we won't say a word."

"I guess not," said Fisher T. Fish. "Kick away."

Bob Cherry laughed.

"It's all right, kids," he said. "When you come to think of it, the evidence was awfully strong, and you haven't so much sense as Wharton and Marky, so what could a fellow expect?"

"Ahem!"

"It's all over now—by-gones are by-gones—and I dare say we shall all get on famously now that boulder is gone."

"Hear, hear!"

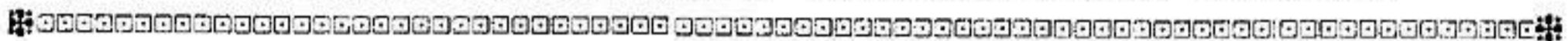
Fish held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said.

And Bob "shook." And with a hearty handshake all round, the past was buried. Never again were the juniors likely to waver in their faith in Bob Cherry's honour.

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled "The King's Guest," by Frank Richards. Order your copy of the MAGNET in advance. Price One Penny.)



[Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Serial Story are purely imaginary, and contain no reference or allusion to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.]

A NEW ADVENTURE TALE OF ABSORBING INTEREST!

LION AGAINST BEAR.

A Thrilling Story of the Further Amazing Adventures of
FERRERS LORD, MILLIONAIRE.

By **SIDNEY DREW.**

READ THIS FIRST.

Rupert Thurston, friend of Ferrers Lord, the millionaire, and commander of the latter's wonderful submarine, the Lord of the Deep, receives mysterious orders to sail for the Chinese seas. While on the journey the engines break down, and Thurston and Horton the diver, while waiting for the repairs to be completed, rescue a mad castaway. Meanwhile Ching-Lung, the Chinese boy, livens things up on board. He catches a conger-eel and places it in the cook's galley ready for the person who had been stealing the provisions of late. At night the whole ship is awakened by yells proceeding from the galley. Ben Maddock, the bo'sun, rushes to the scene, shouting, "Now I've got you. Come out you thieving lubber!"

(Now go on with the story.)

The Cook and the Conger-eel Cause More Excitement, which Makes Ben Maddock Sign the Pledge.

Maddock stood transfixed. Beside the galley fire was a big zinc tank, from which monsieur drew his water for culinary purposes. Over the edge of the tank appeared the horrified face of the cook. His eyes, dilated with terror, were fixed upon the floor. The moment the door opened he uttered one last wild shriek, and, leaping from the tank, he dashed the bo'sun aside and ran madly away.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" said Ben Maddock, as he watched the flying figure vanish. "That takes the biscuit, Ching! Now, just imagine the low-down, frog-eatin' thief pinchin' the grub hisself and accusin' honest men!"

"De ole villain!" squeaked Ching.
"I'll break every blessed bone in the rascal's— O-oh! Hi!"

Ben Maddock sprang back with a roar of fright as a huge eel wriggled weakly out of the galley.

"What's de mattel, Mr. Maddock?" inquired Ching-Lung.

The bo'sun's knees knocked together.

"Matter?" he gasped. "It's a snake! Kill it! Ow—here!"

"A snake?" squeaked Ching-Lung. "Where? I no see snake."

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It was Ching-Lung's conger-eel, fresh from its interview with the cook in the tank. The horrified bo'sun turned to fly, but Ching-Lung gripped him by the arm and dragged him back.

"Thunder!" roared the bo'sun. "Lemme go! It's coming after me!"

Ching-Lung only held him the tighter.

"You velleo illee, Mr. Maddock!" he squeaked. "You bettel letee me fetchee de doctol."

"What!" panted the horrified bo'sun. "Can't you see a snake?"

As it happened that the snake was an eel, Ching-Lung did not exactly lie when he answered:

"Me no see snake. You velly ill."

The bo'sun tore his hair.

"Ching," he wailed, "you ain't spoofin' of me, are you?"

"Certainly notee."

"Then it's the drink. Oh, mother, mother, come and kiss your dying boy! I've finished with booze. I've—"

At this point the bo'sun's knees gave way beneath him. He fell back against the bulkhead as a second horrible apparition appeared before his bulging eyes.

It was Whiskers, the cat. All cats have a weakness for fish, but with Whiskers it was not a weakness but a wild, frightful craving. Whiskers scented the conger from afar. Though the conger was a monster, Whiskers had no fear, for an eel is certainly a fish. He sprang upon it joyfully, and Maddock quaked with terror.

He had seen cats of every size and every colour, but never such a weird, awful, blood-curdling cat as this. Most cats have smooth, glossy hair, but this monster was as curly as a toy lamb. Ching-Lung had spent a good deal of time curling its fur with the cook's moustache-tongs, but he had got his reward.

"Hele," said the Chinese boy, "you going to faintee. What's de mattel now?"

"Two-o of 'em!" wailed the bo'sun. "Oh, I've finished—"

DON'T MISS the special new story of the Chums of St. Jim's, entitled: **"TOM MERRY'S TREASURE ISLAND,"** in this week's "GEM" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"I've finished! Take me away! Snakes and imps! Oh, mother, mother! I ain't had much, either."

He staggered to his feet and bolted away. Ching-Lung hugged himself with pure delight—it was too delicious. Then, taking out his knife, he killed the eel, gave Whiskers an ample share, and removed the string that had tripped up the unhappy cook.

He lighted the galley fire and feasted royally. When he had finished eating he cut up the remains of the eel and burnt them.

After that, wearing the self-satisfied smile of a man who has more than done his duty, he went to bed.

The Castaway Tells a Strange Story—A Second Mysterious Breakdown—Attacked in the Yellow Sea.

Surely in all the fifteen hundred millions of souls who inhabit the globe Ching-Lung was the craftiest of all. The midnight mystery of the conger-eel ought to have made a sensation; but it didn't.

At dawn Ben Maddock interviewed the cook, and threatened to expose him.

Monsieur Pierre, who looked about as limp as a wet towel, had only a dazed idea of what had happened. He decided to keep a perpetual silence.

Then Maddock approached Ching-Lung, and presented him with a couple of cigars.

Not for the wealth of all Lombard Street would he have allowed the story of his strange attack of visions to leak out.

Ching-Lung was so polite that he approached the subject boldly.

"Don't you be afraid," said the Chinese boy, "me never bleath a wold. Me keepee it dalk."

And Ching-Lung did, for he hadn't forgotten Rupert Thurston's riding-crop.

Little by little the castaway got better.

He said his name was Martin Rogers, and that he was second mate of the steamer Minnie, bound from London to Nagasaki with explosives for the Japanese Government.

The Minnie was only a "tramp" steamer—too poor to pay the enormous Suez Canal dues, and therefore they had come round the Cape. On the ninth, at midnight, the vessel was eighty knots north-east of the Seychelles, going at her best speed. Suddenly a shot was fired across her bows, and a searchlight was turned upon her.

The startled crew poured upon deck. Beside them was a strange conical vessel, carrying neither spars nor funnels. She was crowded with masked men armed with rifles.

They boarded the Minnie and ordered her crew into the boats. The castaway said he was mad enough to offer resistance, and he was at once stunned with a blow from a revolver-butt. As he struggled back to his senses the pirates were taking the last box of explosives on board their mysterious vessel. Then they fired two shells into the Minnie, and left her to sink.

The shots were carelessly aimed, and she filled slowly. Rogers had time to build, provision, and launch his flimsy raft. After that he could remember nothing. He spun his yarn in the state-room.

Rupert dismissed him, and then looked at the diver.

"Michael Scaroff, for a thousand pounds, sir," said the diver.

Thurston paced the room with uneasy strides.

"I don't like that fellow's face," he answered; "and, somehow, I can't bring myself to be sorry for him. If his story is true—and it must be true—the Tsaritsa is not far away. By Jove, Ned, what a stroke of luck it would be if we could find her!"

"It wouldn't be such a stroke of luck if she found us first, sir, and put a torpedo into us. It's Scaroff, sure enough; and he's ahead of us. That puts a new light on things. Either Scaroff has got wind of our destination, and has been dodging around us for a chance to strike, or else Mr. Ferrers Lord knew Scaroff was making for these waters, and accordingly sent us here. There's another thing, too, sir. China is in a regular blaze. No doubt the millions of cartridges on the Minnie were intended for use against the Chinese. Now, it strikes me, sir, that Scaroff is in league with those yellow devils the Boxers! If not, he's a Russian, and he wants to do Japan a bad turn. They not only hate the Japanese, but they're afraid of 'em."

There was sound sense in Ned Horton's argument, and Rupert could not offer a better one. He could not bring himself to believe that Prince Michael Scaroff, fiend though he had proved himself, could have any dealings with the Boxers. But Japan is the greatest foe of Russia.

The castaway's story made Rupert vaguely uneasy. He ordered a double watch, and told Horton to keep the powerful searchlight going. Steel torpedo-nets, worked automatically from the engine-room, were drawn over the whole of the vessel. Then Rupert sat down and spread out the Admiralty chart.

The Lord of the Deep was running south-west of Leong-soy Bay, off the island of Hainan. He pricked and timed the

chart, and then lay back in his chair to light a cigarette. There was a sudden jarring shock that nearly flung him backwards to the ground. He ran to the telephone.

"What's the matter down there?"

Rupert could hear shouts and a clatter of feet in the engine-room. After a time he got an answer.

"Another accident, sir—a bad one, I fear! One flywheel gone to bits. Two men badly hurt."

Rupert rushed down. There was a little panic in the engine-room. It is not a very uncommon accident for a flywheel running at great speed to break, but the consequences are often terrible. The whole wheel had broken out of its bearings, torn through the steel bulkhead like a knife cuts butter, and broken the billiard-table beyond. One man was crushed beyond recognition, and the engines wrecked.

They could be repaired—for the Lord of the Deep carried duplicates of every part of its machinery—but it would take days. The head engineer could not explain the disaster. The bearings were quite cool, and no human skill could have turned out a better wheel. There was a gloom over the ship.

Thurston and Horton talked together, and decided to bring the ship to the surface until dawn. With the shattered engines standing idle, the store of electricity would soon be exhausted, and that must be saved for the guns in case of an attack from Michael Scaroff. They had plenty of candles and lamps, but candles and lamps exhaust a tremendous amount of air, and air was precious. Once on the surface air would be exhaustless.

The Lord of the Deep was a cripple. To force the water from the tanks the pumps had to be worked by hand. As the vessel rose slowly, Rupert went to the conning-tower, low-spirited and dejected. Prout was at the wheel. Inch by inch the glass dome emerged.

"Hallo, sir," said the steersman; "ain't that a craft, sir?"

"Yes," said Rupert. "Only a beastly junk."

The steersman was looking in quite the opposite direction.

"Why, sir," he roared, "there's four of 'em!"

And four of them there were, not thirty fathoms away. Big, square-nosed, square-rigged junks, each with a big crimson eye painted on its prow, for, as the Chinese say, how can a ship see where to go if it hasn't got an eye? Rupert shrugged his shoulders.

"But," he said, "they're only beastly Chinese. I don't mind them. They'll take us for some monster or sea-dragon."

Tom Prout dropped his pipe.

"Why, they're launching boats!" he roared. "Tumble up, there—tumble up!"

A flash of red leapt from one of the junks, followed by the roar of a gun. A ball, fired from an old-fashioned smooth-bore, whizzed over the torpedo-nets. Four boats, packed with armed men, were leaping towards the ship. Prout, who loved a fight, danced with joy. His bellow made the very plates quiver.

"Here's a game!" he roared. "Arms! Arms! Tumble up there, boys, there's a whole blessed China-shop a-top of us!"

In Which, After a Grim Struggle, the Pirates are Beaten Off—Ching-Lung Captures Many Pigtails—Eric Hagensen also Captures a Prisoner, Who Takes a Great Dislike to Mr. Prout, and Shows It.

Tom Prout's bellow acted like an electric shock. The steel torpedo-nets, made of the toughest wire, still encircled the vessel, and could not be removed, owing to the breakdown of the engines. It was possible to draw them back by hand; but Horton, who took command, did not think it necessary. For it was a three-inch mesh, and gave plenty of room for rifles.

The men swarmed up, every soul of them itching for a fight, and poured out, waving their rifles. Ching-Lung came first of all, armed to the teeth. A bullet whistled past him, and a man behind pitched down the ladder with the bullet in his shoulder, overturning several of his comrades.

The nets were held up by iron uprights eight feet high, which lay flush with the deck when the nets were not in use. Rifles cracked from the advancing boats.

"Fire!" cried Ned Horton.

The four separate volleys sounded like one. Shrieks and cries rose from the boats. Then there was a crash from the stern as a shell from the nearest junk exploded. It tore a gaping hole in the torpedo-net, and killed two men. Monsieur Pierre, the cook, who had rushed upon deck in his excitement armed with a carving-knife, dived down the hatch like a rabbit. Rupert dashed forward to examine the covered deck-gun. It was broken.

"A Maxim, Maddock!" he shouted. "Take six men!"

The boats halted before the withering fire, spun round, and

scuttled away. One of them filled and sank, and the sea was specked with bobbing heads. The others pulled round into the shelter of the junks.

"We must get the bow-gun to work quickly, sir," said the diver to Rupert, "or they'll sink us. Look out!"

An old-fashioned round shell, with sputtering fuse, struck the water and ricocheted past. The decks of the junk swarmed with men, who looked as active as ants. They were lowering more boats, and were within easy range. Tom Prout was the best marksman on board the Lord of the Deep, and his aim was deadly. But the crew were suffering from the Chinese rifles also. Eight men were down.

Horton ran forward, brandishing an axe, and cut through the torpedo-net. As if working for their lives, the men tore away the indiarubber covering, and the gun went round.

"Why not use the electric gun, Horton?" shouted Rupert, as the shell slid into the breach.

"We daren't, sir. We've only got about enough electricity for half a dozen charges, and we can't make any more until the engines are put right. We must save that for Scaroff. Here, Prout!"

Tom Prout was in no hurry. He emptied his rifle, mopped his shiny, bald head, put his pipe carefully away, and approached the gun. Eight or nine boats had been lowered, ready to make a rush, covered by the fire of the junks. Prout seized the lanyard and grinned.

"I guess we're goin' to have another Chinese horror," he said. "How much is the charge, sir?"

"A full charge!" answered Horton impatiently. "Why don't you fire?"

Prout calmly shook his head and smiled.

"Too much for the distance, sir. There ain't no hurry. One shot that hits is better than a million misses."

There was no chance of hurrying the steersman. He extracted the shell as calmly as if opening an oyster, and selected another with a white cross painted on it.

"Be kind enough to tell 'em I'm coming to see 'em myself later on," he said to the shell.

Then he spat on it for luck, and the gun exploded with a deafening roar. "Bravo, Prout!" bellowed Horton.

"You've blown the inside out of her!"

The shell struck the centre junk amidships, tearing away her bulwark. There was a brilliant flash as it exploded. The mast heeled over and fell, bringing down the huge square sail, and the smoke rolled aside. They could see the terrified Chinese leaping overboard by scores.

A mighty cheer was raised by the crew of the Lord of the Deep.

"You getee leathel medalee fol dat, Thomas!" said Ching-Lung gleefully. "You biffee dem dat timee!"

"Well, I'm blessed!" roared the steersman. "You ought to be sorry. Ain't they your own countrymen?"

"No," answered the Chinese boy. "Me not ownee dem. Dey dirty pilates. Exclusee me."

He vanished for a few moments and dived below.

Ben Maddock and his men had brought up a Maxim. The three remaining junks were sheering off in the light breeze, and the boats were picking up the swimmers. Horton felt secure now, and passed the word to cease firing, not wishing to take life unnecessarily. There was some grumbling at the order, which was rapidly changed to laughter as Ching-Lung stole softly up behind the unconscious Mr. Prout.

Prout was lighting his pipe. From his pocket Ching-Lung produced a medal, made of gilded cardboard, nearly a foot in diameter. On it was painted in straggling letters, "For Valler," and the picture of a man in full flight, pursued by a lady with a rolling-pin. Below the lady was scrawled "Mother-in-law"; below the gentleman departing hurriedly, "Thomas Prout, Esq." Ching-Lung deftly pinned the medal on the steersman's back, and then fervently wrung Mr. Prout's hand.

"Exclusee me," squeaked the Chinese boy, "but I must congratulatee you againce. You vandleful good shotee. He, he, he! You biffee dem allee lightee. Me lite a lily note to my friend Mr. Chambellain to-nightee, and tellee him to give you de Victoria Cross. He, he, he! Exclusee me, you mal-vollous chap!"

There was a shriek of laughter that made the steersman turn.

"What are you chuckling at, you pack of apes?" he roared, looking at Maddock.

The bo'sun grinned like a Cheshire cat.

"Well, of all things," he answered, "I warn't laughin'. I war only coughin'. Carn't a chap cough nowadays?"

"I tell you you was laughing!" roared Prout. "I seed you. Why, you're laughing now! Ain't he, Ching?"

"He certtainly smilee!" squeaked Ching-Lung blandly.

The steersman looked round him and roared:

"Why, they're all— Hi! Well, I'm—"

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A puff of wind blew the cardboard over his shoulder. He snatched it, almost tearing it in half, stared at it open-mouthed, and then made a rush at Ching-Lung. Ching-Lung was just as alert as ever. He dived forward between the steersman's legs, and Prout sat down with a thud that seemed to shake the ship.

"I'll have the pigtail of the yellow monkey!" he bellowed. "Mother-in-law—eh? Who told him I'd got a mother-in-law? That's you, Maddock. You're the only man as knowed!"

"I never told him, Tom," said the bo'sun, holding his sides.

"Then how did he know—eh?"

"Very likely by the frightened look in yer heye," said a voice from behind.

Purple with rage to the very crown of his bald head, Prout arose. The laughter was loud and long.

"If I could find the one wot said that," he roared, "I'd black both his eyes for him, so I would! Very good, Mr. Ching-Lung! I'll have the pigtail off you yet, and hang you up with it! Mother-in-law—eh?"

Horton, who had been watching the scene, highly amused, now strode up.

"That will do, Prout," he said. "It was only a harmless joke. It was an excellent shot you made, and even if Ching-Lung has made fun out of it, we must all congratulate you. Mr. Thurston has been kind enough to double the prog. Will you take command of a squad to work the lift-pumps? I want the launch."

Prout had a hasty temper, but it seldom lasted. Ching-Lung's pigtail was just vanishing down the ladder when Rupert seized it, and dragged its grinning owner back.

"Go and apologise to Mr. Prout at once," said Thurston.

Ching-Lung was quite agreeable. He advanced with a low bow.

"Exclusee me, Mr. Prout," he squeaked. "Me velly solly to causee you painee. You'll mothel-in-law velly chalm-ing lady. When you see hel againce, pleasee tellee hel she only sendee me tle shilts homee flom de wash instead of fivee. She always do my wash—"

For once in a way Ching-Lung was beaten. His keen little yellow eyes were watching the steersman's fists and right leg. The unexpected happened. Prout's left leg came into action with amazing suddenness, and with a yell Ching-Lung limped away.

"Got him that time!" roared Prout, shaking his fist after the retreating Chinaman. "Call my mother a washerwoman, would he? I'll burst him into pulp! Chuck your grinning, you hyenas, or I'll murder you! Talk about cheek! It's marvellous—just marvellous!"

The pirates were in full retreat. No doubt they had expected an easy conquest, but they had been taught a grim lesson. Their huge square sails were vanishing into the haze. The mastless junk was still afloat, drifting slowly to the south, and apparently deserted. Prout took his men to the lift-pumps, while Rupert went to look what damage the vessel had sustained.

The conning-tower had suffered most. The glass was tremendously thick, tough, and clear, but it was chipped and splintered by bullets. The torpedo-net was useless, and the stern-gun ruined beyond repair. Four men were dead, and seven more injured. All the wounds were dangerous, for the pirates had used old-fashioned weapons, carrying heavy balls.

He was watching the disappearing sails when Eric Hagensen came to him.

"Well, my boy," said Rupert, "what do you want?"

"Dank you very mooch," answered the little Norwegian.

"Can I go on dot launch?"

"To be sure. I'll tell Ching-Lung to keep an eye on you."

Hagensen grinned his delight, for Ching-Lung was his idol. When the launch was afloat, ten men got into her. Horton took the helm, and put her head towards the disabled junk. Eric clambered on board it like a cat, and Ching-Lung followed. Horton shouted a warning that she might not be wholly abandoned, and Ching-Lung waved his revolver in reply and plunged below.

Eric did not follow him. His ears caught a strange "Babaa," and he ran forward. It was a goat—a splendid goat, with horns thirty inches high and a coat like silk. Trembling with joy and excitement, Eric unfastened its tether. The goat followed him like a dog.

"Hallo, youngster!" said Horton. "What's that you've got? What are you going to do with it?"

"Me him take back, dank you."

Horton shook his head as he admired the animal. Every goat diffuses an unpleasant odour, and a goat could hardly be tolerated 'tween decks on the Lord of the Deep. He saw the tears come into the lad's eyes.

"I'm sorry you've come across it, Eric," he said kindly. "But I'm afraid we can't manage a goat. I don't mind myself, if you can keep it out of sight; but you must ask Mr. Thurston. We've nothing to feed it on, either."

He turned away, and the boy's heart sank. The goat must either be shot or left to starve. Several of the sailors came up, among them the bo'sun.

"My word," said Maddock, "ain't he a picture! Won't they let you have him?"

"Dere's no food," answered Eric tearfully.

"Wot a pity! He's a gem, ain't he? Why, there must be food here somewhere! I'd like to take him along. Here, lads, spread out and look for some fodder! We'll have him, and chance it if we find some."

They scattered eagerly, and found plenty of fodder. Then a chorus of wild shrieks echoed from below, followed by the crisp crack-crack of a revolver. The yells came from behind a closed door. Horton dashed his full weight against it, and it broke from its hinges and fell inwards.

Six terrified Chinamen were huddled in a corner, shrinking before Ching-Lung's revolver. A seventh was kneeling on the ground. His pigtail was stretched out before him, held down by Ching-Lung's foot. The Chinese boy had a knife in his left hand. As the door crashed inwards the knife flashed down, and Ching-Lung secured the seventh pigtail.

"What are you doing?" cried the diver.

"Me just setee up a balbel's shop, sil!" answered Ching-Lung. "Dese yallel chaps so handsome, me falee in lub wid dem allee at fist sightee! I askee de fat chapee who squeak in de colnel fol a lock of hims hail to weal nextee my healt. Him yelle 'No!' and kick and squeal. Den I takee it allee de lest. He, he, he! Exclusee me!"

The horrified Chinamen howled and moaned. Any Chinaman would readily sacrifice both legs rather than lose a pigtail. He is taught by his abominable priests that the god he worships pulls him up to heaven by his pigtail.

"What are we to do with them?" asked the diver.

"De best thing is chopee-chopee off dele yallel heads. Dey only beastly pilates!"

"You bloodthirsty imp," said Horton, "we can't do that! I saw a few spare spars, and there's plenty of food. Seven men ought to be able to rig a jurnmast. You speak their lingo, Ching. Tell them we're not going to kill them. They look about as happy as fowls in a duckpond."

Ching-Lung hurled himself at the moaning group of dejected pirates, and rained a shower of kicks upon them that roused them up. Then he told them they were going to be left behind. They brightened up considerably at the news.

"And don't you folget," added the Chinese boy, "dat if you showee one of youl yallel noses on deck befole two houls gonee, me comee back and chopee out de stumps of youl pig-tails by de loots. He, he, he! Goodee-bye. Kiss me!"

He tied the pigtails up in a bundle, and, gaily kissing his hand, tripped away. The crew of the Lord of the Deep had not gained much booty. The guns and muskets captured were thrown overboard. There were a few live fowls in coops, a few pigs, some fodder for Eric's goat, and a case of rockets and crackers, which Ching-Lung pounced upon. Then the launch sped back to the ship.

Eric, aided by Ching-Lung, smuggled the goat below, and placed it in Monsieur Pierre's locker-built cabin. The sound of hammers filled the air, for all hands were busy repairing damages. As the two passed the galley Ching-Lung peered in.

"Gleatee Scott, Ellic," he chuckled, "lookee at dose!"

The Norwegian put his eyes to the chink of the door. A huge square wicker-basket, used for holding the soiled table-linen from the saloon, stood in the middle of the galley. The lid was closed as far as it would go, for it was prevented from shutting by a pair of ankles encased in dirty white socks. A pair of slippered feet protruded—the feet of the cook.

Alas, for the vaunted bravery of the son of France! Sometimes monsieur absolutely waded in blood—usually the blood of a chicken or a duck which he had to kill for dinner. The exploding shell had knocked the last bit of pluck out of him. He had sought refuge in the basket, and, though all the fighting was over, he still was there, moaning and shivering, with a tablecloth wrapped round his head.

Ching-Lung hopped about, grinning with delight.

"Dot dirty ole coward!" muttered Eric indignantly.

"He, he, he!" tittered Ching-Lung. "You waitee lily bit, Ellic. Comee 'long. I makee you laugh fit to bustee soon!"

Ching-Lung ran lightly up the ladder. Prout was mixing cement for the broken panes of the conning-tower.

"Here, turnip-face," he roared, "I'll have none of your skulking!"

"Me bogge youl palding, sil," said the Chinese boy. "De doctol wantee some beef-tea for de pool chapees wot gottee hult, and we no can findee de cook. I tink him skulk in hims cabin."

Tom Prout flung down the trowel.

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NEXT Special Complete School and
TUESDAY: Coronation Story, entitled:

"THE KING'S GUEST."

By
FRANK RICHARDS.

"What," he bellowed, "the old frog-eater skulking! I'll break him wide open!"

Swelling with righteous indignation, and turning up his sleeves as he went, he hastened towards the fore-castle. Ching-Lung, winking at Eric, made a dash for the galley, and softly opened the door. The ankles of Monsieur Pierre still protruded from his hiding-place. Silently and quickly Ching-Lung attached an enormous jumping cracker to each foot. He had found them in the box of fireworks brought from the junk. He applied a match to the fuse of each, and then, seizing Eric by the wrist, whispered:

"Lunec likce mad!"

Just as Tom Prout reached the cook's berth, two eager heads appeared at the entrance of the fore-castle. The cook's sleeping-place, as we have said, was built of lockers, the entrance screened by a curtain. The irate steersman raised the curtain; but Ching-Lung and Eric had built the doorway up with lockers also, to keep the goat from escaping. Prout heard a scraping sound that told him someone was inside.

"Come out of that, Bovril!" he roared. "You miserable, cowardly skulker, come out!"

From behind the wall of boxes came a muffled answer:

"Ba-a-ah!"

Prout banged his clenched fist against the lockers.

"Come out," he howled, "or I'll fetch you out, and mop the fo'e's'le with you! Don't talk none of your beastly French to me! You're curling your whiskers, are you, while wounded men are wanting beef-tea? Poof! I can smell the grease you're putting on 'em! Come out!"

It was not Monsieur Pierre's moustache that the steersman smelt, but the goat.

"Ba-a-ah! Ba-a-a-ah!" said the goat.

It was nearly dark. Ching-Lung and Eric were writhing with laughter, and Tom Prout was writhing with red-hot wrath. He imagined that the goat's bleat was some defiant French oath. With one heave of his shoulder, he sent the barricade of lockers crashing down.

The next instant something dark shot forward like an arrow from a bow, and the steersman collapsed like a punctured bicycle-tyre. It was the goat, and Prout's body was in the way.

"Ow, ow, ow! Murder!"

For a moment or two the goat danced on him, butted him, waltzed round him, and pounded him with hoof and horn. Prout was paralysed with horror. The gloom was too dense for him to see his weird assailant, and he was ignorant that there was a goat on board. With a wild yell of horror, he scrambled up and fled, the goat in hot pursuit.

Monsieur Pierre, lying in the basket, was shivering and shaking. He could hear a muffled ring of hammers, which he fancied, in his dread, were rifle-shots.

"Mort de ma vie!" he moaned. "Zis ces terrible! Ah, my poor France, shall I evair zee you any mores?"

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang!

There was a frightful tugging at his ankles and a succession of awful reports. Shrieking, the gallant son of France sprang from his refuge.

"Oh, I am dead!" he wailed. "Zey are shells. Oh-oo, zey are shells! Oh-oo, zey are shells! Oui, I am dead—dead—dead!"

Bang, bang, bang, bang!

The crackers flashed and cracked and squibbed round his feet. With his hair standing on end, and his heart in his mouth, Monsieur Pierre bolted headlong down the corridor, Ching-Lung's crackers going with him.

"A moi!" howled the cook. "I am dead—I am murdered—I am assassinated! Help, help! I am kill all over!"

Help came at once, though not in a pleasant way. As Monsieur Pierre dashed up the corridor, accompanied by a series of explosions, Tom Prout dashed down it towards the galley, accompanied by the goat. The two men collided with a thud that brought both to the ground.

Each thought the other had attacked him, and they writhed and rolled, fighting with each other like maniacs. Both the crackers and the goat divided their attentions eagerly.

"Now our chance, Ellic!" giggled Ching-Lung.

Eric slipped forward in the gloom, and, seizing the goat by the horns, dragged it away, and shut it in the empty cabin which had belonged to Nathan Trethwick. The crackers ceased to bang, but the men still kicked and fought.

"Good gracious!" cried Ching-Lung, lifting his hands in horror. "Wot dis meancee? Dis most disgraceful! Mr. Plout fightee wid Mr. Bovril. Good gracious, melcy me! Wot it allee about?"

He dragged the struggling men apart, slipped the fragments of exploded crackers from the cook's ankles, and gasped.

"Mostee awful!" he squeaked. "Wot will Mr. Thulston sayee? You bofe goee to de cells!"

Prout stared dumbfounded at his antagonist, and shook his fist.

"I'll murder you yet!" he roared. "Wot d'yer mean by hitting me in the stomach with a handspike when I go to fetch you, you skulker? Wot d'yer mean by jumping on me chest, and walking on me face with yer great feet—eh? Wot d'yer mean by dancing on me chest? Oh, I'll—I'll—I'll cremate yer!"

Monsieur sobbed feebly and shuddered.

"I'll massacre yer!" bellowed Prout. "I'll scalp yer! I'll flay yer! I'll—"

Ching-Lung wiped a couple of tears from his eyes.

"Hush," he said—"hush, Mr. Plout! You make my tender heart bleed like a cut beetroot to listen. You, a gleece big, stiong Englishmans, and he only lily weak chapee! Kissee him, Mr. Plout, and makee friends; den I not tellee Mr. Thulston you fightee."

"What!" roared the steersman. "Kiss that?"

"Why nootee? Him allee lightee except him face."

"I'll see you shot and boiled first!"

"Den," said Ching-Lung sadly, as he turned away, "me mustee do my duty. Me velly solly. Good-bye!"

He had not gone a dozen paces when Tom Prout called him back.

"Look here, Ching," he pleaded, "you wouldn't go back on a pal. We'll both get cells if you split. Be a true blue, Ching, old man, and let me off. I couldn't kiss him without dropping dead. Let us off with a handshake."

The Chinese boy shook his head decisively, and Prout groaned. It had to be a kiss or nothing.

"You're a hard-hearted brute!" sighed Prout. "Ugh, I suppose I've got to do it! Here, Frenchy, shove your mug over, and let me find a clean part. Oh, I'd sooner kiss a gorilla!"

"Or your mothel-in-law!" squeaked Ching-Lung.

Five minutes later Monsieur Pierre, white as chalk, crawled back to the galley. It took two stiff glasses of rum to bring the steersman to himself. He went back to the conning-tower with a decided limp, and commenced to work. About twenty men filed in and surrounded him with folded arms.

"Hallo, you lazy lubbers!" he roared, glancing up. "Why ain't you at work?"

He recoiled as the bo'sun advanced, brandishing an axe.

"You're a blessed houtcast!" said Maddock.

"A blessed wot?" howled the steersman.

"A houtcast, sir—a low-down tramp! Listen to me, sir, and remember as how I speaks for all these fellers 'ere. Me and you has been good pals, Tom; but that there is past. I've a good mind to whack you over the 'ead with this 'ere haxe. You've disgraced yourself and the ship. We thought you a white man and a Britisher, but we was sadly mistook. This 'ere ship won't 'old a man wot 'ugs and kisses a dirty Frenchy, and you was copped in the hact!"

Tom Prout clapped both hands to his head.

"Oh, oho-oo!" he groaned. "I'll scalp that yaller imp yet! Oh, I'll skin the hide off him! Give me a chance to clear myself, boys. Great Scott, I'll murder that Ching-Lung!"

The Repairs are Finished and the Vessel Proceeds on Her Journey—Ching Lung Keeps His Eyes Open.

For three days the Lord of the Deep lay like a log on the placid sea. Rupert and Ned Horton were mightily proud of the crew they commanded, though they chafed at the delay. Night and day the men toiled at the shattered engines. It was a heavy task, but they responded gallantly, and worked like demons. The only idlers were Martin Rogers, the castaway, and the wounded

men. The madman mooned about, spending most of his time scrawling affectionate letters in chalk on the bulkheads to the Prince of Wales, the Shah, the Sultan of Turkey, the Tsar, and any other notabilities he could think of.

All the men were kind to him except Ching-Lung. The Chinese boy would give no reason for his dislike, but it was clear he detested the luckless castaway. Once, when he found Rogers on deck playing with the breech of the bow-gun, he had thrown a bucket of water over him. Maddock caught him in the act, and sent him straight to Rupert. Ching-Lung went meekly enough.

"Well, Ching, what do you want?" asked Thurston.

"Me sentee for punishment, sil," squeaked the Chinese boy. "Me see madman Rogers playing wid gunee. Him balmy, and balmy man no lightee play wid gun. Me sayee, 'Let dat alone!' Him sayee, 'You be hang!' Den I sling watel ovel him."

"Don't you think that was a cruel thing to do?"

"No, me don't, sil. He no lightee to touchee gun," answered Ching-Lung gravely. "Him not so balmy as you tink, sil. Chinese boyee no flustee him. Bad man, sil. You givee me punishment, sil."

Rupert did not like the lunatic either, and he was perplexed. He sent Ching-Lung for the riding-crop, and the Chinese boy did not wince, though Rupert thrashed him soundly.

"Me muchee obliged, sil," he said, turning to the door.

"A moment, Ching, and listen to me. What I have thrashed you for is for taking the law into your own hands. Please go to Mr. Horton. Tell him to order Rogers to touch neither guns nor machinery, and not to go either into the engine or stores-rooms. If you saw Rogers meddling with the gun, you should have informed the man on duty. Frankly, though I am sorry for the poor fellow, I somehow dislike him. You might keep your eye upon him, Ching."

"Dat's whatee me do," said Ching-Lung. "Allee lightee, sil. Thankee you. Good-morning!"

At dawn on the fourth day after the attack on the vessel, Horton came bounding into the saloon. He had been taking the reckoning from the log—the distance traversed—and had a paper in his hand.

"Twenty-six sixteen north by one twenty-five twelve east, you said, sir, didn't you?" he cried.

That was the latitude and longitude engraved upon the ring. Rupert sprang up.

"Yes. But surely we're miles south yet?"

"Not a bit of it, sir!" cried the diver. "We've made a splendid time. Unless the log is a liar, and our last reckoning at fault, we're not three knots away. I've got the searchlight on, and a double watch. Are you coming up, sir?"

Rupert flushed with excitement.

"Of course I'll come!" he answered.

He took the ring from the safe, slipped it on his finger, and followed Ned Horton to the conning-tower.

Ching-Lung, as he quite deserved to be, was quite a prominent person on board the Lord of the Deep. Though he loved practical jokes, and bubbled over with fun, he never shirked his duty, and he did his duty well. Prout was at the wheel, and the Chinese boy and Maddock on watch. The two brilliant searchlights shot two broad streams of white through the glassy water. Rupert glanced at the circular dial that registered the depth.

"By Jove," he said, "we're in ninety fathoms!"

He ran to the speaking-tube, and gave an order. The pumps clanked, and the vessel rose until the finger on the dial jerked back, showing sixty fathoms as the vessel rose. The engines were put at half-speed, and the searchlights slowly moved round, slanting downwards.

(Another splendid, long instalment next Tuesday.)



Next Tuesday's number of "THE MAGNET" Library will contain a Special School and Coronation story, in which Harry Wharton & Co. are able to render valuable service to one of King George's illustrious guests under exciting circumstances. You must not miss Next Tuesday's SPECIAL CORONATION ISSUE on any account. Usual price, One Penny.

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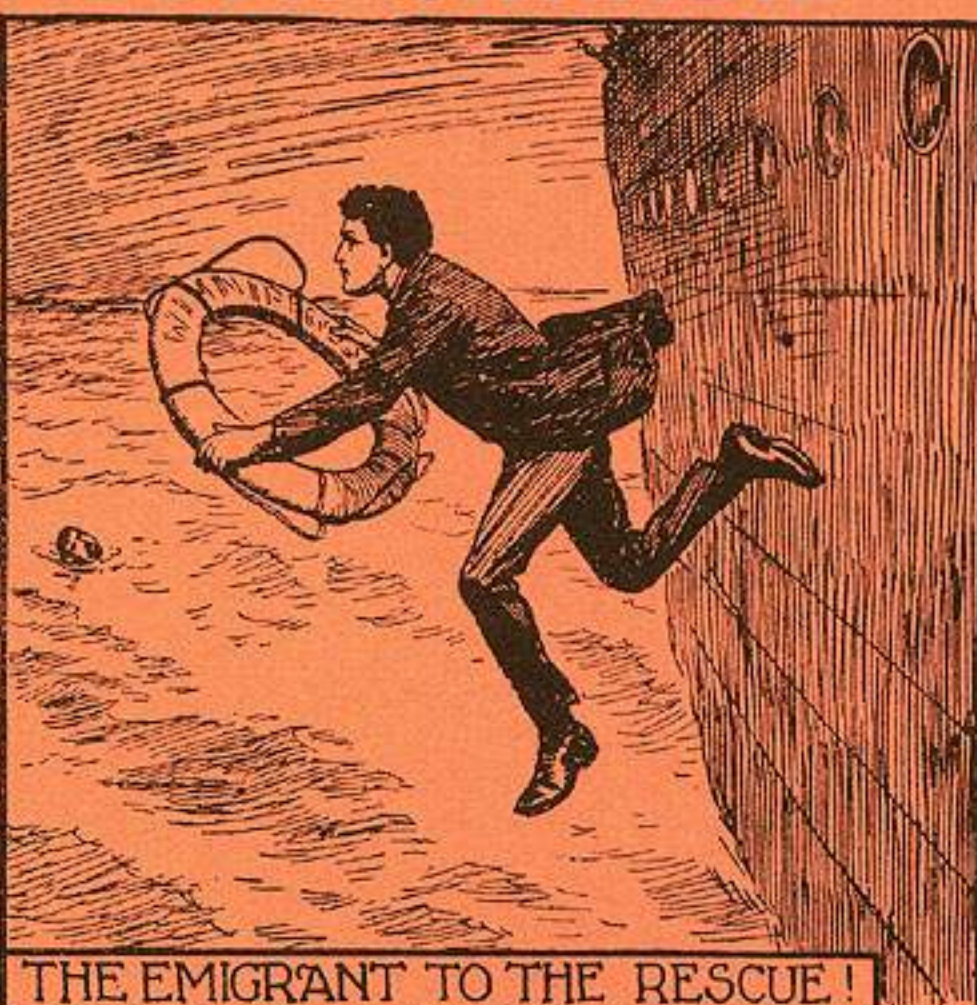
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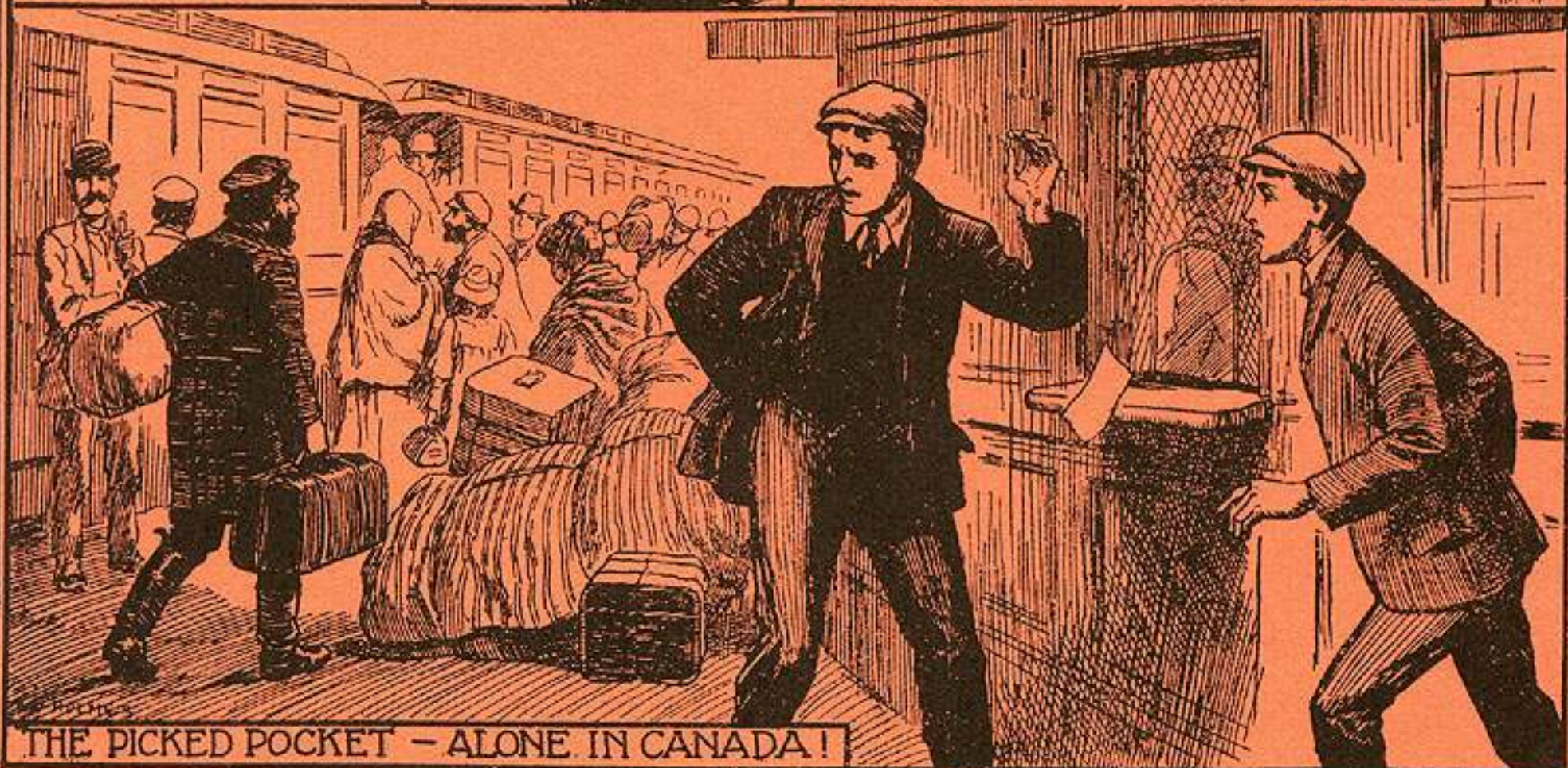
"THE RIGHT SORT FOR CANADA."



OFF TO CANADA!



THE EMIGRANT TO THE RESCUE!



THE PICKED POCKET - ALONE IN CANADA!

"THE RIGHT SORT FOR CANADA"

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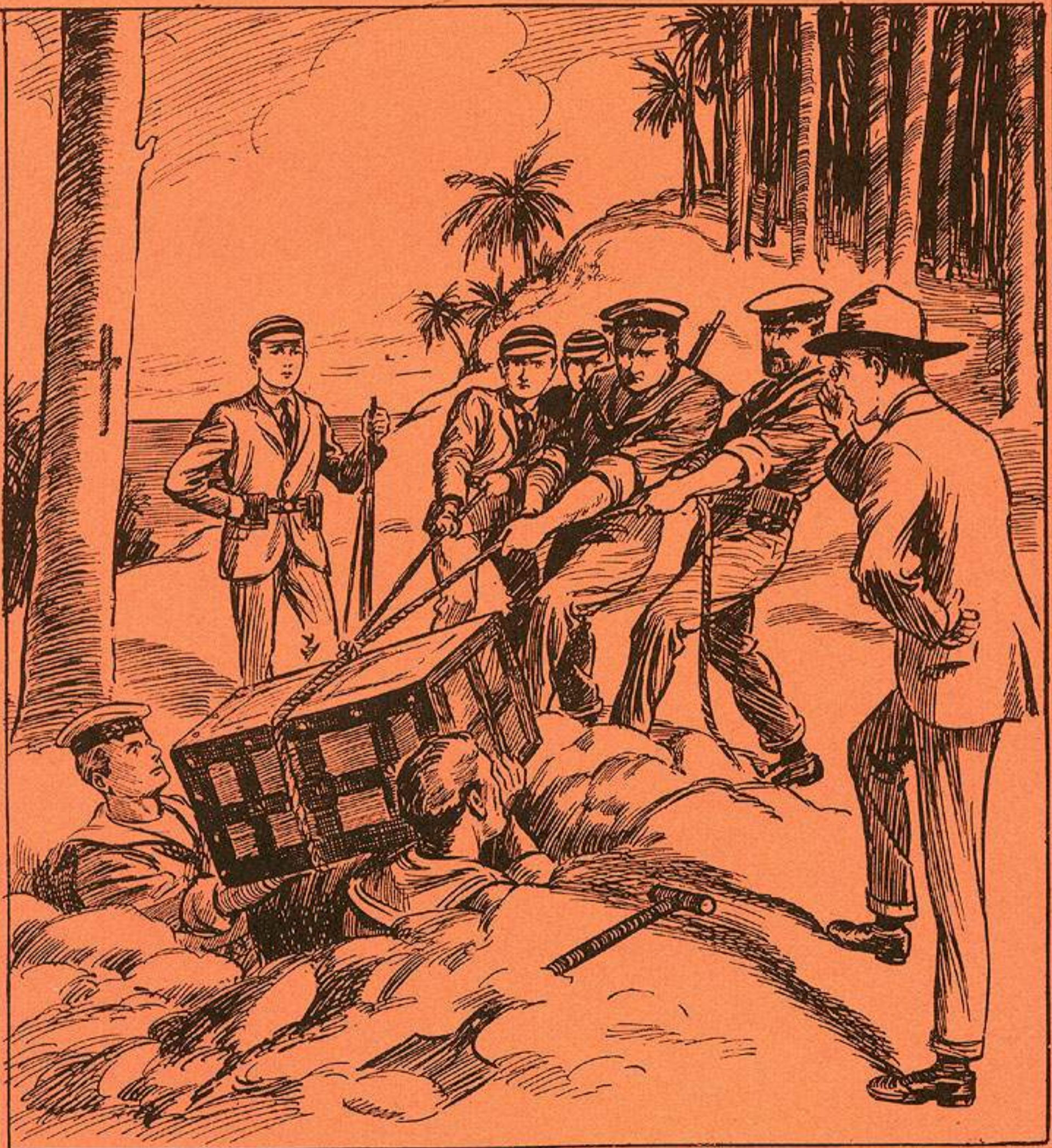
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