

THE REBEL!

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

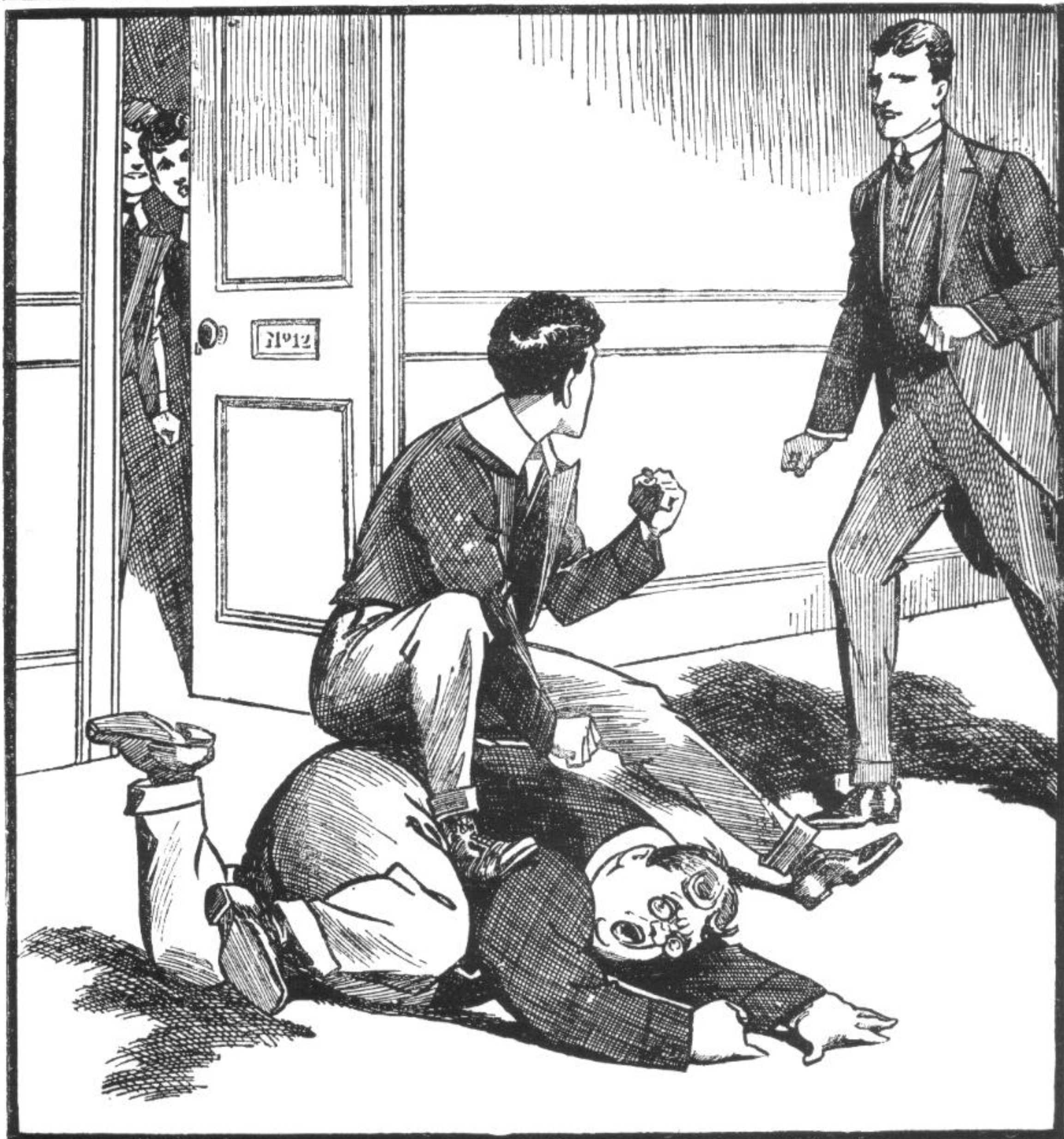


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SITTING ON BUNTER!

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THE REBEL!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Not in a Very Pleasant Temper!

ROT!" It was Bob Cherry, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, who made that emphatic remark, and it was addressed to his chum, Harry Wharton.

Wharton had only been a day or two out of the sanatorium, whither a nasty attack of influenza, complicated by the pulverising given him by Bolsover major, had taken him. He ought not to have fought Bolsover at all, for he was anything but fit at the time. But it was dangerous even now to tell him so.

"You may think it rot, Bob," he said, in a tone that showed he resented Bob's frank speech. "I don't. Delarey's a very decent chap, but he's inclined to kick over the traces."

"In some ways, I dare say," answered Bob. "But I must say I've never seen any sign of that sort of thing."

"You might have done if you had kept your eyes open, though. You can't deny that Skinner and that lot have been going the pace while I've been laid up and you have been acting as vice-captain."

"They may have been!" growled Bob. "Can't say I know much about it. Not exactly in my line to stay awake half the night to make sure those rotters don't go on the randan. But that's nothing to do with Delarey."

Bob was not quite pleased. As acting-skipper he had done his level best to keep the footer up to the mark, and to preserve order in general. But it was not in Bob's sunny, somewhat careless nature to give to the black sheep of the Form that attention Wharton gave them. He did not consider them worth it.

"I'm not so sure," said Harry, knitting his brows. "Don't get on your ear, Bob! I didn't mean anything offensive. But the thing's being talked of all over the Form."

"Let it!" growled Johnny Bull, who was entirely in sympathy with Bob. "The best thing that could happen would be that Skinner and his crew should be allowed enough rope to hang themselves with! The school would be a heap better without them."

The Famous Five were all present in Study No. 1. Ten was just over there.

Frank Nugent and Inky—otherwise Hurree Janset Ram Singh, Nabob of Bhanipur—were looking anxious. They saw the signs of a gathering storm. It could not be denied that since his return from sunny Harry Wharton had scarcely been his old self. His chums were inclined to think that it would have been better had he remained a few days longer in dry dock.

"I don't agree!" said Harry shortly. "You don't agree to anything nowadays, it seems to me!" retorted out spoken Johnny Bull.

Wharton turned his back on Johnny, and went on talking to Bob.

"Delarey's in Quelchy's black books—you know that. It's not for nothing he's called the Rebel."

"Oh, hang Quelchy!" said Bob. "I

know he's fair and all that, as he sees it; but I'm not going to admit that he's always right. I've noticed he and the Rebel don't hit it; but I guess there are faults on both sides, and you can't say that Delarey has ever behaved like a cad to Quelchy, or to anyone!"

"I don't. But I believe he's been roped into this gambling bizney, and I mean to put the kybosh on it. If Skinner & Co. aren't worth looking after, Delarey is!"

"True, O king!" said Bob more amiably. "But he's just about the last fellow at Greyfriars to stand interference, old scout."

"That's nothing to do with it!" replied Harry obstinately.

"You'll find it's got a jolly lot to do with it, if you get stirring up the Rebel!" said Johnny Bull. "Chuck it, old chap! You're hardly yourself yet. It doesn't seem very reasonable to fight Toddy's battles for him, and then come out of sunny, where you've been together, not on speaking terms with the chap!"

"I'm not talking to you, Bull!"

"Right-ho, Wharton! I'll go. I don't want to quarrel with you, and I'm jolly certain I shall if I stay here!"

And Johnny Bull made exit, slamming the door behind him.

There was a moment's silence among the four he had left behind.

Then Bob spoke.

"You're one of the best, Harry," he said. "But you really do worry too much about other fellows' bizney. I'm not saying anything against your looking after Hazel. He's a queer chap. But there's Marjorie—that makes it worth while. And Bunter—the silly, fat ass ain't fit to look after himself. But the Rebel's quite another kind of fellow. You won't get any change out of him, even if you've guessed right—and I don't think you have."

It was a long speech for Bob to make, and at the end of it he glanced rather appealingly at Nugent and Inky, as if he considered it was their turn now.

"I don't think Delarey need take offence at a friendly warning," said Frank rather weakly.

"Bow-wow!" answered Bob. "I know other chaps who take offence at things no bigger than that."

Nugent flushed. His own pride had made trouble more than once.

"May I respectfully ask my esteemed and ludicrous chum Harry what is the precise chargefulness made against the honourable and absurd Rebel?" said Inky tactfully.

"Well, if you come to that, there isn't any actual charge," said Wharton. "And it was just in the eliciting of this admission that the tact of Inky showed itself."

"Who told you about it, Harry?" asked Nugent.

"Hazel."

"Burr-r-r!" said Bob.

"It came out by accident, really," Wharton hastened to add.

"The accidentfulness was doubtless terrific!" said Inky. "But if the esteemed and disgusting Hazel were mindfully to attend to his own business and neglectfully leave the business of others, a stitch

in time might save the pitcher from being soonfully broken, as your English proverb has it."

"And the yarn was that Skinney was dunning the Rebel for half-a-sov.," said Bob thoughtfully.

"Yes."

"I can't see how that proves they have been gambling," Bob replied.

"The esteemed and honourable Wharton has jumpfully arrived at a conclusion not evidently justified by the factfulness of the situation."

"Which is a horribly terrific thing for him to do, and no giddy error!" grinned Bob. "But Inky is about right, old scout. It ain't evidence of gambling, at worst."

"How else could it happen?" snapped Harry. "Skinner isn't the chap to lend anybody money, and he and Delarey have never been chummy, either."

The other three grinned. Knowing Harold Skinner, the cad of the Remove, as they did, they were agreed that he was not a likely lender, for his close-fistedness was a proverb in the Form. Still, most rules have their exceptions.

"If they aren't chummy, that seems all the more reason for not believing the gambling theory," said Frank Nugent.

"Rats! Plenty of chaps will gamble with fellows they don't like."

"Did Hazel say they'd been gambling?" Bob asked.

"No. Only that he heard Skinner dunning the Rebel."

"My hat, Harry, I wouldn't meddle! You'll get no thanks, right or wrong!"

"I don't want thanks, Bob. I've my duty to the Form to consider."

"I'm not dead sure you will have that much longer if you're not careful," said Bob bluntly.

Harry's face flamed.

"What do you mean?" he rapped out.

"Nothing you need get waxy about. Only that it's—well, I won't call it your meddling, but your getting a bit over-anxious about their little ways, that's making the fellows ask each other whether—"

"Whether they hadn't better get rid of me and elect as skipper someone who won't care a hang how much they roll in the mud. Is that it, Bob?"

Wharton was furious now, though he tried hard to restrain his temper. If Bob had answered him in his own angry tone there would have been a split at once. But Bob had more sense.

"I give it up, Harry!" he said sadly.

"I won't say another word to stop you. And if you set everybody else in the Remove by the ears, you can depend on us and Marjorie, through thick and thin, right or wrong! For we know jolly well that you are the best skipper the Form can have, when all's said and done."

Nothing could have been more loyal than that speech. The faces of Frank and Inky showed that they were in full agreement with it, too.

But Harry Wharton was not satisfied. He wanted to justify his own attitude, and it was plain that nothing he could say would convince Bob, while the other two seemed scarcely more open to conviction.

"What do you say, Frank?" he rapped out.

"I must own I agree with Bob. I think you're barking up the wrong tree about Delarey. And I'm inclined to think, too, that it would be better to go easy for a bit."

Harry snorted disdainfully, and turned to Inky.

"I thinkfully consider that all my honoured chum does is right," said the nabob quietly. "For what he does is causefully dictated by his high and noble heart. But that which is right essencefully may be wrong timefully, and least said is good butter for parsnips."

Harry gave them one comprehensive glance of angry impatience, and the next moment the door slammed behind his retreating form.

"My only aunt Jemima Jane, he's got it badly this time!" said Bob, rubbing his wavy hair. "What's to be done, Franky?"

"We can't do a thing. I never saw him quite like this before. It's bad enough that he should have quarrelled with Toddy, for I'm jolly sure Toddy did all he could to put things straight. But this is worse. He's shaping to get himself kicked out of the captaincy—that's the size of it!"

Inky nodded. The three stood looking at one another in something very like dismay.

"I'm off to see what Marky says about it," said Bob. "He's got a better head-piece than any of us, and he's true blue, whatever happens. But outside us four—"

"Johnny's fed up already," said Nugent dismally.

"Rats! He'll come round. Us four and Marky—oh, and the Bounder, I think. But I'm hanged if I can be sure of anybody else! It's a bad job, Franky, and no mistake!"

And Bob went, looking very little like his usual cheery self.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Tackling the Rebel!

"HE sha'n't run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, anyway," muttered Harry Wharton to himself as he strode along the passage.

It was of Delarey he was thinking. If the Afrikander meant to make pals of the Skinner crew—well, let him! But he should not do that and keep in with the fellows to whom the ways of Skinner & Co. were anathema—of that the skipper of the *Remove* was determined.

There was nothing wrong with this resolve. What was wrong was that Wharton was taking for granted something which rested on a basis of mere flimsy suspicion. In a calmer moment he would have seen this.

The Common-room was pretty full, for pouring rain kept fellows indoors.

Delarey stood with three or four others at the farthest window as Wharton entered. He did not look round. Harry went towards him.

But Skinner was nearer. Without appearing to see the skipper of the *Form*, Harold Skinner walked up to Delarey, and said:

"I say, Delarey, have you got that half-quad now? Sorry to dun you, but I'm needing it, you know."

The Bounder, who was hard by, grinned. Skinner's anxiety whenever anyone chanced to owe him money—which he took care should not be often—always amused the Bounder.

"Oh, here you are!" replied the South African junior carelessly. "You should have had it before this if I'd known you

were going to worry about it so much. There's always old Mauly to go to if a chap's hard up, you know."

"Right-ho! I wasn't really worrying. But you owed me—"

"I've owed you it less than two days, and this is the third time you've got at me about it," said Delarey, as he handed over a ten-shilling currency note.

He did not speak at all ill-temperedly; and Wharton got the notion that there was a pretty good understanding between him and Skinner—which it is quite likely was exactly the notion Skinner wanted him to get.

Harold Skinner found immense satisfaction at any time in setting decent fellows at odds with one another. They were all his enemies, in a way, for no decent fellow could tolerate Skinner long.

"I say, Delarey!"

Wharton did not mean to speak in a tone so peremptory as to draw the attention of everyone within hearing. But that was the effect of his sharp call.

"Well, Wharton?"

The Afrikander's answer was cool and civil, but there was a hint of temper held in leash about it, too.

"I want to speak to you."

"There's nothing to hinder you, then."

It had to be done in public now, Wharton saw that.

But he was not ready to own, even to himself, that he had gone about his self-imposed task in the wrong way—not as yet!

"Do you mind if I ask you how you came to owe Skinner anything?"

Delarey simply stared. Skinner sniggered. Bolsover major guffawed.

"You may as well hear," said Bulstrode, grinning. "It was a bet, too. Do you want to know what we were betting about, Wharton?"

"It doesn't interest me in the least!" snapped Harry.

"But it's wrong to bet, isn't it, Wharton?" squeaked Snoop.

"You may as well hear," said Bulstrode. "Hazel bet you'd be up against someone before the day was over—and he's won, I fancy!"

"Snoopy," said Stott, "I owe you tuppence-ha'penny. Will you have the gracious goodness to explain to the captain of the *Form* why I owe you tuppence-ha'penny, or must I?"

"Oh, we needn't," answered Snoop, with a spiteful leer. "It wasn't a bet, you know. Wharton lets a fellow borrow, if that's all."

Wharton took no notice of them. It was just about as much notice as they were worth. But he looked at Bulstrode with reproach in his eyes. Bulstrode met his glance coolly, and pursed up his lips to whistle.

If there had ever been any doubt in Harry's mind about going through with his task there was none now. The thing had to be done at any cost!

But as he met Delarey's direct and defiant look he began to see that Bob had been right in saying that he would get no change out of the Rebel.

"Did you hear what I said, Delarey?"

"I did, Wharton. All I have to say is that I don't particularly mind your asking me, though I don't see any reason for it. But I shall suit myself about answering!"

Harry Wharton turned feriously upon the sneering Skinner. That worthy was quite enjoying himself—or had been till the skipper of the *Remove* turned upon him. Then he scented danger, and moved nearer to Bolsover.

"Do you deny that you've been at your old gambling games again, and roped this fellow in, Skinner?"

"Tell your nice, kind skipper all about it, Skinney!" jeered Stott.

"Tell him to jolly well mind his own business!" growled Bolsover.

"And what in the wide, wide world is it to do with you if I have, Mr. Meddling Muddling Maudling Wharton?" replied Skinner, feeling himself safe under Bolsover's protection.

"I'm not going to stand it!" snapped Harry.

"Sit it then!" growled Bolsover, cheaply witty.

"Do you deny it, Skinner?"

A grin overspread Harold Skinner's lean, cunning face—a face old enough for a man of twice his years.

"I sha'n't trouble to," he said. "I don't see what it is to do with you. Ask Delarey. He may have put his conscience in your keeping; I haven't handed over mine—not yet, thanks!"

Wharton turned again to Delarey. The flush of anger had died out of his face; he looked worn and ill.

Piet Delarey felt more than half sorry for him. He remembered how this fellow had stood up to Bolsover's pounding when illness had made him no match at all for the burly bully. He would not have defied Wharton for the sake of the cheap applause of Skinner & Co.

But his own pride was up in arms.

"Well, Delarey?"

"Well, Wharton?"

"Haven't you anything to say?"

"Nothing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bolsover.

"The skipper's struck a snag this time!" sneered Skinner.

"The Rebel actually doesn't seem pleased with the nice, kind gentleman's fatherly interest in him!" jeered Snoop.

"I shall bump you, if you're not careful, Snoop," said Delarey coolly.

One moment Harry Wharton lingered. He would have spoken again; but he saw that further speech was useless. Delarey had made up his mind. And it was not worth while to bandy words with Skinner and Stott and Snoop.

Harry turned his back and marched out. His ears tingled at the roaring burst of laughter that accompanied his going.

"I've made a monumental ass of myself!" he muttered. "And yet—I can't quite see where I was wrong, either. That fellow Delarey really is a bit too thick!"

Which was naturally very much what Piet Delarey thought about that fellow Wharton!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Getting Their Backs Up!

"BRAVO, Rebel! That's the way to talk to the swanking idiot!" said Harold Skinner, rubbing his hands together gloatingly.

"Hear, hear! There'll be a fight, of course," chimed in Sidney James Snoop. "But that's all right. You can lick him, Delarey."

"Of course he can," growled Bolsover major. "Tell you what, I'll second you if you like, Delarey."

The Afrikander eyed Skinner and Snoop in so cool and contemptuous a manner that Skinner went red, and Snoop fidgeted nervously.

But he answered Bolsover. These two had fought, and each had some respect for the other.

"Thanks, Bolsover; but I'm really not aware that there's any reason why I should fight Wharton," said Delarey.

"Oh, if you're afraid of him!" sneered Skinner.

Then Skinner tried to get behind Bolsover, for he did not like the look in Delarey's eyes as he came forward.

But Bolsover was not having any.

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"Gerrout!" he growled, giving Skinner a lusty push in what Skinner considered the wrong direction.

The South African junior seized the cad of the Remove by the collar.

"I don't think I'm afraid of Wharton," he said quietly; "but I jolly well know I'm not afraid of you, Skinner! I'm going to bump you!"

"Lemme alone! You can't do that! Hands off, you rotter!"

Skinner struggled hard. But Delarey's muscles were like steel.

Bumping was not, as a rule, an operation to be started upon single-handed. But Delarey seemed to consider himself capable of carrying it through alone. No one was inclined to interfere.

It appeared that he could! In something under five seconds Harold Skinner sat down on the floor, forcibly and painfully.

"Yarooogh! Stoppit, you cad!" he howled.

"That's not pretty talk," said the Afrikaner. "Have another bump, my pippin!"

He yanked Skinner up a few inches, and then dropped him again.

"Groooh! Stoppit, I say! I'll be even with you for this!"

"Another for that!" said the Afrikaner, and yanked him up and dropped him once more.

This time Skinner had the sense to abstain from any abusive words. He merely howled.

Delarey released him, and walked out without another word to anyone.

"My hat!" said Bolsover. "I never in my life before saw a chap fairly and squarely bumped by another chap no bigger than himself. Is that the way you like it done, Skinney?"

"Hang the cad, I'll be even with him yet! And with Wharton, too—it was all his fault, the meddling rotter!" gasped Skinner.

"Better leave the Rebel alone," warned Bolsover. "He's above your giddy weight. But as for Wharton—well, I dunno what you fellows think, but my notion is that he's the absolute outside edge!"

"We ought to make the beast resign!" said Skinner viciously.

"So that you can rule the roost, Skinney?" grinned Wibley.

"Oh, you go and eat coke!"

"Wouldn't be half a bad idea to try Delarey as skipper," said Bulstrode.

Bulstrode had been captain of the Form at one time. He had no ambition to fill the post again. It was anything but a bed of roses. But Bulstrode was one of those who were feeling rather fed-up with Harry Wharton just now.

"Can't say I agree with that notion," said Wibley.

"Still, a change would be a jolly good thing!" added Peter Hazeldene.

"There's Toddy," said Kipps.

"Oh, Toddy be hanged!" growled Bolsover.

"Might suit you," said Kipps coolly. "Then you wouldn't have to fight him, and get those fresh laurels of yours spoiled. No such luck as finding a chap in the first stages of the flu every time!"

Bolsover scowled at the bold Kipps. After all, the combat between Peter Todd and Bolsover had merely been postponed by Harry Wharton's action in taking on Bolsover himself, not scratched. But Bolsover had insisted that Todd should be quite fit before they met, and Peter was evidently not quite fit yet.

"Todd be boiled!" shouted Skinner. "He's as bad as Wharton—worse, if anything! We don't want any of your good

little Georgies, who never do anything wrong!"

"Who's your man, Skinney?" asked Wibley, winking at Hazel and Bulstrode.

"Why not old Bolsy?" returned Skinner, nobly choking down his resentment against the bully for failing to protect him. "He's the strongest chap in the Form!"

"And the ugliest!" chipped in Bulstrode.

"Sure, an' the thickest-headed, entirely!" said Micky Desmond, who had just come in with Ogilvy and Rake.

"He's got the biggest feet, too," remarked Kipps. "Even Bob Cherry can't beat him there!"

"Shut up, you idiots, or I'll jolly well scalp you!" roared Bolsover.

"Beginning with me?" inquired Bulstrode hotly.

Bulstrode was spoiling for a chance of getting at Bolsover.

Dicky Rake struck in. He had quickly tumbled to the state of affairs, and he saw a chance of getting in a good stroke for Peter Todd, whose cause he had taken up whole-heartedly.

He knew now that Todd meant going on. That had been settled only ten minutes before. Peter was nettled by Wharton's attitude to him in the sanny. He had been full of gratitude; but Wharton had turned that sour.

"Look here," said Rake, "there's no need to be nasty with Wharton! I don't agree with that. He's an uncommonly decent sort. But he has certainly got a bit too big for his old size in hats lately!"

"Yes; and it's jolly well time we had a change!" growled Bolsover. "I don't want to brag, but—never mind that now. Are you thinking of putting up for it yourself, Rake?"

"My hat, no! I shouldn't have any more chance than you would, old chap!"

"Who says Bolsy's got no chance?" asked Skinner.

"Oh, he can have a shot, of course! The more the merrier! But Wharton will have to be get out of it before anyone else can be got in. Even Bolsover's intelligence will be equal to perceiving that!"

"What's the matter with my intelligence?" growled Bolsover.

"I'm not going to pay you any more compliments," said Rake.

"Compliments you cheeky idiot?"

"Yes. I gave you credit for having some intelligence. That's quite as far as I'm prepared to go just now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover's scowls were useless. Dick Rake did not mind them a bit.

"The only thing to do is to ask Wharton to resign," went on Rake coolly.

"Rats! He'll take a fat lot of notice of that, won't he?" sneered Skinner.

"There's a lot of difference between Wharton and you, Skinney," said Rake.

"He's got self-respect. He will clear out all right if he finds there is a majority against him."

"And who's going to take his place?" squeaked Snoop.

Sidney James Snoop did not at all think that Rake would take trouble to replace Wharton by anyone likely to appeal to him, Sidney James.

"I don't mind betting you a bob that I can tell you who won't, Snoopey," said Bulstrode.

"Who?"

"You, fathead!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Snoop can put up if he likes," said Rake—"anyone can. The place will be open to any fellow who can get enough support."

"But that ain't Snoopey," said Kipps. "There's something in Rake's notion,

though the chap is a silly ass," said Bolsover.

"And there's nothing in Bolsover's head; but perhaps that's because the chap is a silly ass!" retorted Rake.

"My hat! Can't you stop your slanging match and get down to bizney?" said Bulstrode. "How do you mean to work it, Rake?"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER Signing the Petition!

IT was plain that a pretty considerable section of the Remove had got its back up against Wharton. They were not all rotters, either, by any manner of means.

Wharton had suffered distinct loss of fame in his licking at Bolsover's hands. It was not forgotten that there were ten other fellows who had offered to take on the combat for Peter Todd. Bolsover had to some extent forced it on Wharton by slapping his face; but before that, as many pointed out, the captain of the Remove had thrust himself forward more than was at all needful.

It was said, too, and that plainly, that he had gone out of his way to renew his own quarrel with Todd, when all that Peter wanted was to make it up. Peter did not talk about it; but everybody knew that he felt hurt and aggrieved—not that some of them minded much.

So there was real keenness now to hear what Rake had to say.

"Send him a round-robin, signed by most of the fellows in the Form, asking him to clear out," said Rake.

"Round-robin be hanged! Who's afraid of Wharton? I'll sign first, like a shot!" howled Bolsover.

"Right-ho! I don't mind. I only thought that a round-robin wouldn't be quite so personal, that's all!"

"I don't mind being personal!" Bolsover growled.

"Nobody supposes you do," said Bulstrode, between whom and Bolsover there really was not a great deal to choose on that score.

"You make out your thingummyjig, Rake, and we'll see whether it's the sort of thing we care about signing," said Skinner.

"Faith, an' I'm not sure that Wharton will mind a hape whether you want him for skipper or not, Skinney!" said Micky Desmond. "If 'twas meself, I'd just be after lookin' for your name, an' if 'twas there, I'd say to meself, 'Micky, alanna, this is where ye kape fast hould! For if Skinner wants ye to go, darliet, there's something fishy about it entirely!'"

But no one paid much heed to Micky. They crowded around Rake in a manner which might have made another fellow feel nervous.

Dick Rake took up a pen, dipped it into an inkpot, found it too full, flicked the surplus on to Stott's collar, and scratched his left ear meditatively.

"You silly ass, look what you've done!" howled Stott.

"Did I? Never mind. Stott, old scout. It takes off a bit of the contrast between your collar and your neck. You really ought to wash on the mornings you have a clean collar, if you skip it other times!"

"Start it, 'Dear Wharton,'" suggested Bulstrode. "After all, we don't want to be uncivil to the chap!"

"Rats! I do, anyway!" said Skinner. "Begin it, 'Meddling ass!'"

"Won't do, Skinney. This is to Wharton, not to your address!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Had you there, Skinney!"

"If you're not a bit more careful, Rake, you'll have that job taken out of your hands!" snapped Skinner.

"Right-ho! Come along and take it!"

But anything so drastic as that was scarcely in Harold Skinner's line. He shut up, and Rake was suffered to get on for a minute or two without interruption.

He looked up from his work, to find Skinner's eyes fixed upon him with a most unfriendly glare in them.

"If you think so jolly much of Wharton, I don't see what you're in this for, Rake," said Skinner.

"My good ass, you wouldn't see," replied Rake loftily. "Your mind ain't capable of understanding a fellow's acting purely on public and patriotic grounds!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Billy Bunter, who had just come in, in the company of Fisher T. Fish. "We all know Skinney ain't a patriotic chap. He's too mean, and, of course, he's got no pluck. What's all this about, Dicky, old man?"

"Bumping a porpoise," answered Rake. "At least, that's what the next scene will be if I have any more of your 'Dicky, old man,' you fat, spying heathen!"

"Oh, really, Rake! Now that we're both on the same side I did think you would be a bit more friendly. But I don't care. I can do a jolly sight more than you can to get Toddy in——"

"Ring off, you fat idiot!"

Rake was wily. He saw that it would pay best to keep Peter Todd's candidature in the background for the present. But Billy Bunter was sure to blurt out anything that ought to be kept dark.

"This is a beastly put-up job, if you ask me, Bolsy!" said Harold Skinner, with virtuous indignation.

But Bolsover was not inclined to support him.

"I don't care a hang!" he growled. "Let's get Wharton out. That will be good enough to go on with. It doesn't follow that everybody's going on their hands and knees to Todd to take his place, does it?"

"Now, I rather guess an' calculate that what you galoots want is my help," said Fisher T. Fish. "This yer riffle wants to be tackled as a business proposition right from the word 'Go!' I'm your man, I surmise. When it comes down to sheer bedrock business, I'm right thar', every time and all the time. What's doing?"

"We're going to ask Wharton to resign the captaincy of the Form," said Rake.

"Waal, now, I do admire! That's some notion. I'm right on to it—yep! I'll draw up the doc-u-ment, and I'll make a right slick job of it, you bet your bottom dollar!"

"Nothing doing," grinned Rake. "Not your line, old pard. There ain't any profit in it—not a red cent."

"Oh, shut your yawp-trap, you jay! D'ye reckon a business man takes on a job like this for nix? Nope! Look at your English solicitors. Why, they'll skin a client alive if they can't make him pay up any other way! They couldn't be crier that way if they were real live Amurrican citizens."

"This isn't a solicitor's job. This is a friendly letter."

"Not much, it isn't," said Skinner, grinning viciously.

And certainly there would not be any large amount of friendliness wasted as far as Skinner & Co. were concerned.

"You're talking guff, Rake; that ain't any sort of way to go about it. Jerusalem crickets, lemme get at it! I'll fix it up—some! And—lemme see—a tanner each from everybody who signs, for my trouble. That's a fair deal, I calculate. In Noo York——"

"Oh, bump the beastly neutral!" howled Rake.

"Gerroff it! Stoppit, you mugwump! Ow! Yow! Yarough!"

A dozen pairs of hands seized Fishy, and he was well and truly bumped.

"Jolly likely we should pay a tanner each to be allowed to sign. I don't think!" said Hazeldene. "Now, if every chap who signed were to be paid a tanner——"

"But that would be bribery and corruption," objected Rake.

"Yes, I suppose so," Hazel admitted.

"Not that I'd mind, personally, in a good cause," Rake went on; "but I ain't a millionaire yet. And I don't see many giddy plutocrats in this crowd."

"Fishy would shell out," said Wibley. "He doesn't like Wharton. Horribly in the way of business, a chap with Wharton's ideas."

"Are you on, Fish?" asked Bulstrode.

"Nope!" snapped the Yankee junior, contemplating his trousers, which had not been improved by their recent contact with the floor. "Nothin' doing. You jays don't seem to catch on to what a business proposition is. I've got no sort of use for the little end of the horn, lemme tell you."

"Oh, bump the rotten neutral again!" hooted Bolsover.

Fisher Tarleton Fish made for the door. Fishy liked getting things cheaply, but even perfectly free bumpings had no attraction for him.

Rake went back to his writing.

"What do you want to 'Esq.' him for?" asked Stott, looking over his shoulder.

"Oh, you wouldn't understand, Stott! That's politeness."

"Tomfoolery, I call it!"

"Yes, I rather fancied that was your view towards anything polite. Get away, please. I don't like your face so close to mine. It ain't nice, and it might be catching!"

"Stott's right. There's no need to butter him up that way!" growled Bolsover.

"My hat, you needn't worry! I'll give you my word of honour I won't address you as 'Esq.' when you're skipper, Bolsy."

Rake wrote on. In a few minutes he had finished. Then he read aloud what he had written.

"To H. Wharton, Esq., captain of the Remove.

"We, the undersigned members of your Form, are of opinion that you have held office long enough. We consider that it would be for the general good if you now resigned, and gave another fellow a turn."

"How's that, umpire?" asked Rake.

"Beastly tame!" said Bolsover.

"Putrid!" agreed Skinner.

"Silly tripe!" added Stott.

"Piffle!" squeaked Snoop.

"I'm satisfied," said Rake, beaming on the crowd. "If those chaps bar it, the chances are it's all right!"

Anyway, nobody else seemed to bar it. The general opinion was that it would do very well indeed. Bulstrode, Hazeldene, Desmond, Ogilvy, and other fellows of their type had no desire to be rough on Wharton.

As Bulstrode said, "calling the fellow pet names would only get his back up"; and Wharton with his back up was known to be very difficult to handle.

Hazel drew Bulstrode aside for a moment. Hazel was one of the sons of Reuben—unstable as water. He never knew his own mind long together.

"Look here, old chap!" he said. "I'm not dead sure we aren't making trouble for ourselves. Is it worth while to squeeze Wharton out if there's any chance of that bullying beast of a Bolsover grabbing the job?"

"Rats! There no fear of that," said George Bulstrode, who was a far more

decided character, for good or for evil, than his chum.

"I'm not so sure. Why won't you put up for it yourself?"

"Had some, thanks!" replied Bulstrode. "It's safe enough, Hazel. We'll put old Toddy in, and let the heathens rage as furiously as they like."

"Who's going to sign?" called Rake.

"Give me hold of the pen!" growled Bolsover. "It's a tame thing leastly tame—utter bosh—no good at all; but you clever chaps seem to think it's going to work the oracle, so here goes!"

And, to make sure that no one should sign above him, Percy Bol-over scrawled his name so close up to the last line of Rake's writing that the "I" and the capital "B" ran into it.

Bolsover had every intention of keeping the lead, if possible.

But Rake did not mean that he should keep it long. It was too late now to disguise the fact that Peter Todd would be in the field against Bolsover. So as soon as he had signed his own name, and Skinner had seized the pen to add his, Rake said:

"Run off and fetch Toddy, porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Rake, I'm not your fag, am I? Run your errands for yourself!"

"Right-ho! We'll see what Toddy says about that."

The Owl concluded that he might as well go. He was, for the time being, quite definitely on Peter Todd's side, and against both Wharton and Bolsover. Not once had the cricket-stump been applied since Toddy had come out of the sanatorium, and Bunter felt that at last his study leader was beginning to recognise the proper position of William George Bunter in the Remove. It would be something to have No. 7 top study, too; and, anyway, Wharton hadn't been any too friendly in sanny.

The other fellows pressed round Rake, eager to sign. Stott and Snoop followed Skinner. Trevor, Treluce, and Elliott added their valuable autographs.

Dicky Rake began to feel that he scarcely liked the look of the company his name was getting into.

But he liked it better when Bulstrode, Hazeldene, Wibley, Kipps, Desmond, and Ogilvy had all signed. These were not associates to be ashamed of.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Three Colonials!

PIET DELAREY had left the Common-room feeling very sore in mind. He went to No. 12 Study, which he shared with Lord Mauleverer and Sir Jimmy Vivian, the baronet from the slums. Neither was there.

Delarey threw himself into the comfortable armchair, stuck his hands into his trousers-pockets, stretched out his legs, and frowned gloomily.

He had not wanted to quarrel with Wharton. He liked Harry Wharton. But the skipper of the Remove had gone too far.

"It's above a bit off, jumping to conclusions in that silly-ass way!" muttered the Afrikander. "What right had he to suppose I'd been gambling with Skinner? And even if I had, what bizney was it of his?"

"Hallo, old son! What's bitten you?" asked Squiff, coming in with Tom Brown.

These two were very frequent visitors to Study No. 12 nowadays, but they had not succeeded in rousing Mauly out of his slackness. It took time to do that. "About two hundred and fifty years might see some slight change for the better!" Tom Brown said.

"We hear you've been rowing with Wharton," said the New Zealand junior. "And he looks like it—just a few!" said Sampson Quincy Ifley Field, from New South Wales.

"What's the odds?" returned the Afrikaner, somewhat morosely.

"Rather a pity, Piet," said Squiff, without a trace of his usual joking manner.

"Oh, I grant you that; but I really can't see that it was my fault!"

"It needn't be much trouble to set straight, then," said Tom Brown. "Wharton's not an unreasonable chap, you know."

"I suppose I am, then, for I'm hanged if I want it set straight!" replied Delarey.

His face took on the stormy, mutinous look that his chums had seen before. He was not easy to handle in that mood, and they knew it.

"What was it all about, old scout?" asked the New Zealander.

"The merest nothing! It sounds too silly to be true; but I reckon somebody's been pulling Wharton's leg for his own ends. A day or two ago I happened to want change for a pound Treasury-note. Everybody seemed pretty nearly broke to the wide; but Skinner said I could have ten bob he'd got until the note was changed, and I took it. I don't like the chap; but it was a small thing, and I'd do as much for him any day."

"Then you'd be a mug!" said Squiff promptly. "Don't let Skinner get hold of any of your oof. He can't be trusted."

"He was playing his own game in this, I could see. It wasn't an hour afterwards when he came up and invited me to take a hand at banker in his study. No; he wanted to come here—said the Bounder was in the way in No. 6. Old Mauly was too precious slack to mind, of course."

"And was the vigorous Mauly too slack?" asked Squiff, grinning.

"Didn't ask him. I declined without thanks. I'm not keen on cards, anyway. Might get too keen if I went in for it; though. I know myself well enough for that."

"Well, what then?"

"Just a sneer or two, that's all. Skinner's sneers—who minds them? But as the trap had failed, I reckon he began to want the bait back in a hurry. For he started dunning for the ten bob. I should say somebody who heard him must have told Wharton. I don't care a hang about that! But Wharton's not my keeper, and I'm not going to be jumped on by him. I wouldn't stand it even if the thing had been true, instead of being the utter rot it was!"

"What did Wharton do, then, Piet?" asked Tom Brown.

"Tackled me in the Common-room before a dozen fellows, inquiring if I'd been gambling with Skinner."

"My hat!" said Squiff. "That's a trifle too thick! I don't wonder you kicked, old scout!"

"Oh, there wasn't a row. I refused to answer, and he'd the sense to leave it there."

"Then he doesn't know yet whether it's true or not?" said Tom Brown.

"No. What's it to do with him? I tell you chaps straight that if you go explaining things to him I shall kick—hard!"

"I won't say you're wrong, old son," said Squiff. "Though I, for one, shouldn't think any the worse of you if you put your pride in your pocket and explained."

"I'm jolly well hanged if I will!"

"I ain't sure I should," said Tom Brown. "It's easy to advise other chaps."

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Squiff, but I don't believe you would. There are limits, you know, and Wharton's gone right past them."

"He'd apologise if he knew," said Squiff.

"I don't want his apology! Let him leave me alone—that's all I ask of Wharton. Oh, I know very well he's a good sort—well-meaning ass, I should call him. But he's not the keeper of my conscience."

"Still, it's a pity. Two first-rate chaps like you and Harry Wharton ought to be able to pull together."

"If you're taking his side, Browney —"

"I'm not, you silly, hot-headed donkey!"

"He's an older friend than I am, I know—"

"Rats! That's no odds at all. We three just naturally hang together, old scout!"

"Hear, hear!" chimed Squiff. "Great Britain ain't any small potatoes, but we speak for the Greater Britain that's bound to be."

Piet Delarey looked much happier. At the bottom of his heart had been a dread that these two good chums of his might take Wharton's side—the side of a friend of far longer standing than himself. He would have let them go. He would never have given in.

But he would have missed them no end.

"Don't let's worry," said Tom Brown.

"Next time Piet and Harry meet they'll grin at each other like two amiable chimpanzees, and it will all blow over."

"Don't you believe it!" snapped Delarey.

Mauly lounged in, yawning, and threw himself on the couch.

"Anything doing, Mauly?" asked Squiff.

"Oh, begad, I don't know! How should I? When I see anythin' doin' I walk away. It's hard work watchin' chaps bein' so strenuous."

"Will you have another cushion, Mauly?" said Tom Brown sweetly.

"Oh, thanks, Brown! Very kind of you, I'm sure! Yooop! What are you at, you ruffian?"

Tom Brown had hurled a cushion with unerring aim, and it had caught his lordship under the chin. But the New Zealander did not appear satisfied.

"Your cushions are all so beastly soft, Mauly!" he grumbled. "You couldn't feel that."

"Oh, couldn't I, begad! It hurt horribly! An' cushions are meant to be soft."

"Chaps aren't, though!" growled Squiff.

"Think not, begad? Well, p'raps you're right. It's too much doosid trouble to worry one's head about it. Oh, now I come to think about it, there really is something goin' on in the Common-room. I looked in, an' the fellows there seemed no end excited."

"What was it?"

"Oh, begad, I didn't stop to ask. A row like that makes me feel tired, don'tcherknow?"

"Kim on, you cripples!" said Squiff.

"Going to stop here, Mauly?"

"Yaas."

"You're a slacker!"

"Yaas—I mean, no."

"Which do you mean, you old ass?"

"Oh, begad, I don't know! Don't worry a chap, Field!"

They hurried off.

On the stairs they met Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry.

Bob nodded, and smiled genially. Harry, who looked worried, took no notice of any one of the three.

The backs of Tom Brown and Sampson Quincy Ifley Field were up at once.

Squiff stopped, and stood gazing after the two.

"Come on!" said Delarey.

"Of all the absurd idiots!" growled Squiff.

"Cutting us because we happened to be with a chap he has tried to quarrel with!" said Tom Brown. "It's enough to make a fellow jolly well get on his ear!"

Delarey did not say: "Told you so!" He said nothing. He did not even smile.

A grin might have turned the wrath of his comrades upon him. As it was, Wharton got it all. Tom Brown and Squiff went on their way in a decidedly huffy state of mind.

Just as the three Colonial chums reached the door of the Common-room, up came Peter Todd, with a serious look on his long, thin face, and the long tuft of hair flapping over his thoughtful brow.

Behind him were Billy Bunter, smirking, Tom Dutton, rather puzzled, and Alonzo, like a fish out of water. The Common-room had few charms for Alonzo Todd.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected Support!

"WHAT'S up, Toddy?" asked Squiff.

Peter Todd did not say "Wait and see." Peter said

"Come and see."

The seven made quite a small crowd as they entered the Common-room.

They were greeted noisily.

"Come along, Toddy!"

"What-ho, Squiff!"

"Down with tyranny!"

"Now's your chance!"

"Sign Magna Charta—"

"And win a cigar!"

"Come and sign, Browney!"

"Here's a pen, Rebel!"

Squiff shouted till he made himself heard above the din.

"What do you want us to sign, you duffers?"

"Request to Wharton to resign the captaincy and give someone else a chance," chirped Rake.

Half an hour later Squiff's reply to that invitation would have been, "Oh, go and eat coke!"

He did not say that now. He said, "What's your sentiments, Browney?"

"Well, I dunno," said Tom Brown.

"Toddy's signing. My hat! It looks like a majority! I don't care a scrap about that; but, confound it all, that chap's cutting us dead on the stairs was the giddy outside edge!"

"Piet's signing now," said Tom Brown. "Can't say I'm exactly keen, Squiff, and yet that fellow does need a lesson! He's been a good skipper, but he ain't the only possible. And it seems to me we're bound to stand by Piet."

"There's Toddy, too. If it's the truth we hear, Wharton hasn't treated him quite nicely."

And yet the two hardly liked it. But for that cut on the staircase they would not have done it.

But that rankled. It was as though Harry Wharton fancied he had a right to choose their friends for them. The proud Colonial spirit was up at once against any such claim.

Tom Brown stepped forward to sign.

"It will be a case of *Et tu, Brute!* when Wharton sees my fist and yours, Squiff," he said, with a last pang of reluctance.

"Oh, really, Browney!" said Bunter peevishly. "You needn't push like that!"

"Haven't you appended your illustrious signature, tubby?"

"Yes. Can't you see it, you ass?"

"My hat, yes! I see now! I thought it was a spider that had been getting boozy on ink and had meandered about. Take care of this priceless document, Rake! It bears the signature of a Bunter de Bunter, and if you only make that clear by writing the name in the margin it ought to be worth golden quids some day!"

And, jesting, but with no very light heart, Tom Brown signed.

Squiff followed him. Then Tom Dutton took the pen.

Peter had explained to Tom the enterprise upon which he had embarked, and the deaf junior was with him to the death, if need be. But it did look rather as if Dutton scarcely understood all the details of this particular transaction, for he remarked as he signed:

"Well, the Head can't strafe us much for asking for a holiday, though, all the same, I don't believe we shall get it."

"Ha, ha, ha! Better put him wise, Toddy, hadn't you?" said Squiff.

"That will keep," answered Peter, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Now then, Lonzy!"

"My dear Peter, I must request time for consideration. I consider Wharton an earnest and right-minded youth. I really do not think—"

"You ain't asked to! Leave the thinking to me. All you've got to do is sign—and don't make a blot like Bunter, or I'll see that you lick it up!"

Alonzo sighed, and signed.

"If a majority decides it, we're all right," said Skinner, gloating over the signatures. "We have over half the Form now, I fancy."

"We haven't got all possible yet," said Bolsover. "What about Newland?"

"No go," said Bulstrode.

"Hang the Sheeny! But we can do without him."

"Russell?" suggested Stott.

"Says he's sticking to Wharton," replied Ogilvy, Dick Russell's study-mate.

"Can't you bring him round?" said Wibley.

"Haven't tried. Sha'n't try, either. A chap's got a right to his own opinion, and I'm not going to quarrel with Russell because his isn't like mine," said the sturdy Scot. "For the matter of that, I should vote for Wharton every time, before Bolsover."

"Where's that rotten little Chink?" asked Skinner.

No one had seen that Wun Lung was present, for he had tucked himself away in a corner. But now he came forward.

"Will you sign this?" hooted Bolsover.

"No savvy," answered Wun Lung, looking as if not the slightest notion of what was going on had penetrated his mind.

"We're asking that rotter Wharton to resign," explained Snoop.

"Hally Whalton no lottel. But if you go makee handsome Bob Chelly captain, Wun Lung signee."

"Oh, rats to Bob Cherry! We might as well have Wharton himself as another of the gang."

"No lats about Bob Chelly. Velly good captain!"

"Well, he ain't going to get the chance. Are you signing, or aren't you, you yellow-skinned little ape?"

"No savvy."

Bolsover caught Wun Lung by the arm. He would have twisted it cruelly in another moment. But Squiff interposed.

"You drop that, Bolsover, or you'll get something for your complaint!" snapped the Australian junior.

"What is my complaint?" demanded Bolsover, releasing Wun Lung and turning on Squiff.

The little Chinese glided quietly out of the room.

"Same as you accuse Wharton of—silly swank!" replied Squiff coolly.

Bolsover growled something, but dropped the argument.

"Where's the Bounder?" he asked.

"I'm here," said the voice of Vernon-Smith at the door. "But you will have to do without the Bounder's moral support, Bolsover. And I'm a bit surprised that you've roped in two or three fellows I see here."

"Go to Bath!" snapped Squiff. "Bolsover never roped us in!"

"Todd, then, I suppose? Well, that's not quite so bad as if it were Bolsover."

"Wrong again, Smithy," said Tom Brown. "It wasn't Todd."

"I didn't know there was a third

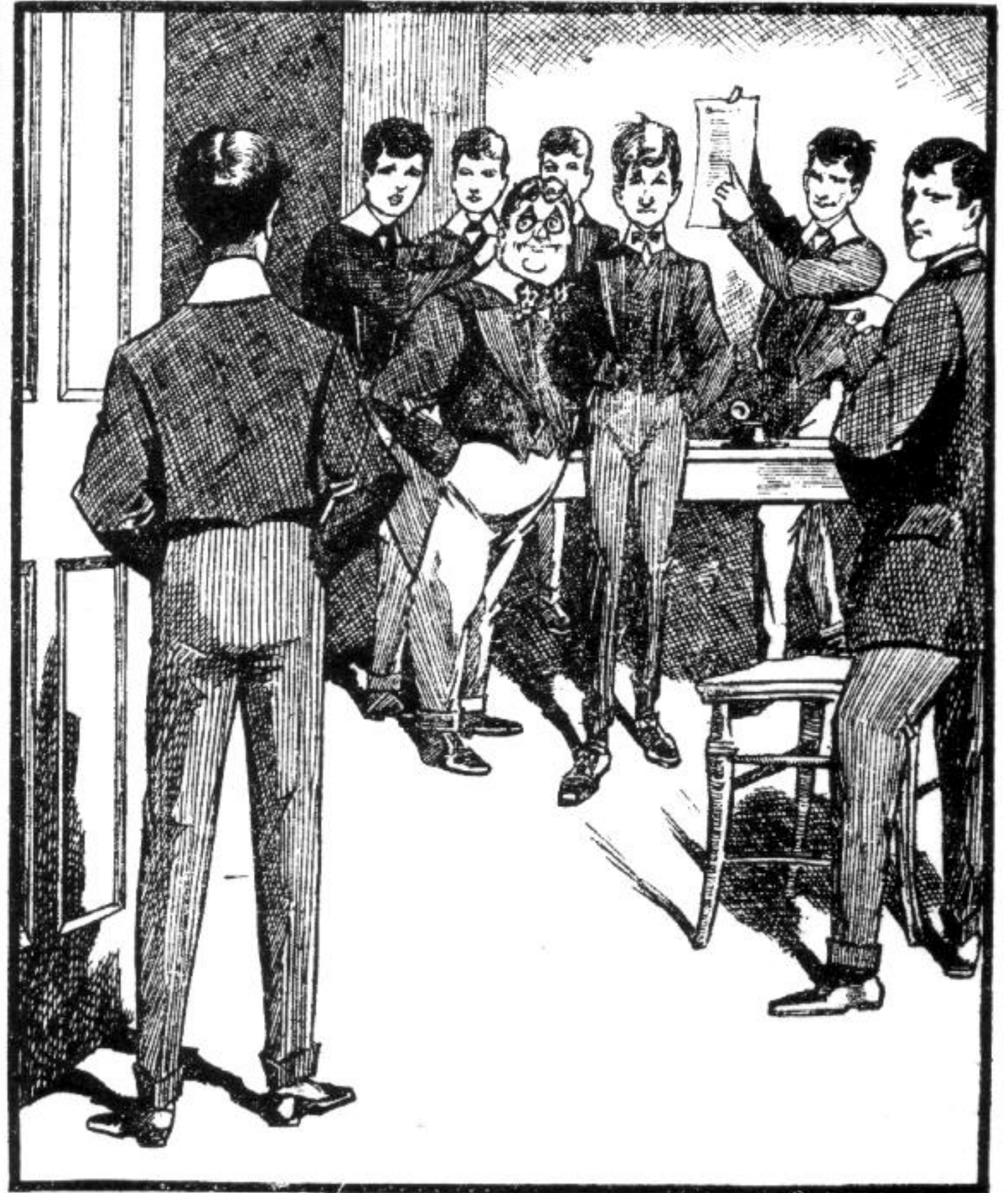
"Oh, leave Smithy alone!" said Peter Todd.

"Thanks, Todd; but when I want your backing I'll ask for it. And it won't be while you are in your present frame of mind!" retorted the Bounder snappishly.

Harry Wharton might elect to take the request for his resignation quietly. But it was plain that some of his friends would take it fighting. By this time they must all know something of what was going on in the Common-room. But the Bounder alone had turned up there.

They could guess why he had come. This sort of thing was in the Bounder's line. He was still a good deal of the stormy petrel. Settled calm was not his element.

But Johnny Bull, as ready as he to fight, Frank Nugent, Inky, Bob Cherry,



The Boun'er Speaks Out.
(See Chapter 6.)

aspirant," said the Bounder, who seemed to know pretty well everything but that.

"There is not. Wharton himself showed us the way here," answered the New Zealand junior—meaningly, as the Bounder saw, though he was puzzled as to what the meaning was.

"I sha'n't go to Bath or anywhere else in the company of—I won't say renegades, for that would be tude," said the Bounder, with a hostile gleam in his keen eyes.

"Oh, cut out that sarcastic rot, and let's get on with the washing!" blustered Bolsover. "Better bunk, Smithy, or you may find yourself bunked!"

"I'll go when I choose, and anyone who tries to put me out may find he's bitten off more than he can chew!"

Mark Linley—all of these had kept away. And Newland and Russell and Penfold, less closely associated with the skipper though they were, seemed to be declaring themselves by their absence as staunch on the side of the present captain. Mauleverer hardly counted; it was a desperate exertion for him to drag himself as far as the Common-room. Morgan, who had been missing, turned up at this moment and signed willingly enough, though with the remark that he had not anything in particular against Wharton.

It was discovered that Fish had gone before the signing began, and Bunter and Snoop were despatched to fetch him. The Yankee junior sent back word that

his terms for signing were one dollar, cash down. But he signed within ten minutes without getting the dollar. Bolsover saw to that!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Asked to Resign!

"**W**HOS going to take this along?" asked Skinner.

"Quite a nice little job for you, Skinney!" said Bolsover sarcastically.

"Rats! I'm not having any."

Skinner looked round him after making that statement.

He was looking for a volunteer.

But apparently nobody else was having any. At least, nobody else was in any sort of hurry to come forward.

"Now then, porpoise!" said Peter Todd.

"Oh, really, Toddy, I—I—really, I couldn't!" protested Billy Bunter.

"Why not? It's just the sort of job for a popular, tactful chap like you!"

"I—I—oh, look here, I'll take it if you like!"

This sudden change of front on the part of William George was not without its reason.

In fact, it had two reasons.

One was that Bunter always liked to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds if possible. And it seemed possible in this case.

But that was the lesser reason.

The greater one was that it was close on tea-time, and tea in No. 7 was likely to be a frugal meal. Whereas it seldom happened that one or another of the Famous Five was not sufficiently in funds to provide something like a spread in No. 1.

And if, by fair means or foul, a tea could be wangled, Billy Bunter was the fellow to wangle it.

Bunter was too stupid and too forgetful to realise that no one who had signed the document he carried was at all likely to be received as an honoured guest by the Famous Five.

"My hat! Bunter ain't exactly the chap I should choose for a herald, Toddy," said Rake. "But never mind! I dare say he'll do. Catch hold, fatty, and buzz off!"

"Half a tick!" said Peter, with growing suspicion. "What's your dodge, porpoise?"

"Oh, really, Toddy, I haven't any dodge! A chap of my well-known high character—"

"High enough," said Skinner. "So high that it's fairly gamey!"

"Stop him!" howled Peter Todd.

But Bunter, paying no heed to the humorous Skinner, had got to the door. No one seemed inclined to run after him, and Peter himself was hampered by the crowd.

Hampering is a mild description. The crowd simply would not let Peter stop Bunter. The crowd thought there was something funny in the notion of having that manifesto presented to Wharton by William George Bunter. Peter, who did not look upon the manifesto as at all a joke, seemed the only one who failed to appreciate the humour of it.

Bunter turned and looked back. He saw that the crowd was attending to Peter. He put his fat thumb to his fat little nose and spread his fingers out.

It was very rude and improper of Bunter. But he was not likely to fail of being told by Peter Todd that it was so; and as Peter's lessons in manners would be punctuated with a cricket-stump; it was tolerably certain that Bunter would be made to feel that he had done wrong.

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The Owl rolled upstairs and along the passages to No. 1 Study chuckling. He did not even think of the cricket-stump. Bunter was the insect of an hour, with no thought for the next. He could not look farther ahead than the next meal.

He tapped at the door of No. 1.

"Come in!" howled Johnny Bull.

Bunter entered, smirking all over his fat face as he saw the preparations for tea.

It was not really a very cold day; but the pouring rain out of doors made it cheerless, and the Famous Five had gone in for a good fire.

Inky was toasting himself and a large slice of bread. Bob Cherry was cooking sausages. Johnny Bull had the teacaddy in one hand.

Frank Nugent and Harry Wharton stood together by the window. There was a dark cloud on Harry's face, and Frank looked none too cheery. The dripping Close was not, indeed, a very cheery scene to gaze upon. But they could have turned to the bright fire.

Billy Bunter cast but one look at them. Then his greedy eyes blinked behind his big spectacles as he contemplated the array of good things upon the table. It might not have seemed anything out of the way in ante-war days; but Greyfriars had cut down luxuries of late, and the old-time spreads would have been voted rather bad form now.

"Gerrout, tubby!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I must say I like that, when—"

"Just as well you like it," said Bob genially. "For you've got to go whether you like it or not."

"If I'd known you were at the door, you fat worm, I should have said 'Bunk!' not 'Come in!'" growled Johnny Bull.

"What do you want, Bunter?" asked Harry crossly.

"I—I—I say, Harry, old man—"

"Oh, cut out all that!"

"I—I—I've got something to tell you. Ain't you going to ask me to tea?"

"And I've got something to tell you, tubby," said Bob solemnly. "We are not!"

"Tell it and bunk!" said Wharton. "Or bunk without telling it, if that suits you better. We don't want to hear it."

"Promenade, porpoise!" said Bob.

"Absquatulate, ass!" said Johnny Bull.

"Trot, tubby!" grinned Frank.

"The obligefulness will be great if the honourable and disgusting Bunter will departfully get hence with the despatchful promptfulness," purred Inky.

Still Bunter did not go. He looked from one to the other pathetically. He could not bear to go and leave behind him a tea like that!

"On your feet or your neck, Bunter?" snapped Harry. "Wait one minute longer and you won't have the choice!"

"Oh, but you must listen—really, you must, Wharton! It's no end important."

"Bunk, or be bunked!"

"The—the fellows are in a conspiracy against you!" blurted out Bunter.

"The poor silly ass has gone potty!" said Bob.

But Bob did not feel at all sure that there was nothing behind the Owl's disclosure. Nor did any of Bob's chums. They were alive to the drift of feeling in the Remove, and it was not for nothing that no one in the Five had shown his face in the Common-room that afternoon.

"I'm no more potty than you are, Cherry—not so much!" howled Bunter, always virtuously indignant when his word was doubted—like most liars.

"He'd try to palm off any rotten lie

on us to get a feed," growled Johnny Bull.

"The liefulness of the ludicrous Bunter's story is—"

"Terrific!" chimed in Bob.

Wharton was frowning in indecision. He could not trust Bunter, and he hated pumping him. But he felt anxious. There was a storm blowing up, he knew.

"Ring off, you fellows!" he said. "Now then, Bunter, what is it? None of your beastly whoppers, you know!"

"Oh, really, Harry, old man, I'm a very truthful chap! I've often suffered for being so truthful."

"You'll be suffering again directly," said Johnny Bull, in his deepest growl; "but it won't be for that."

"If it is, then the chap who said the age of miracles had passed is clean off the rails," remarked Bob.

"The fellows are all against you, Harry, old man," said Bunter affectionately. "I dare say these chaps will rat as soon as they hear about it. But I'll stand by you as long as—"

"The cupboard ain't Hubbard, and there's still a shot or two in the locker," chipped in Frank Nugent.

"Rot, Nugent! I'm Wharton's best friend, really; he knows that, even if he don't tell you fellows so. But we'd better have tea first, and talk about this bizney afterwards."

And Bunter made an attempt to take his place at the table. The attempt was not exactly a success because Bob Cherry snatched the chair away, and it was on the floor that Billy Bunter took a seat.

"Ow-yow! You've busted my backbone, Cherry, you beast!"

"Get up, and say what you've got to say, you fat ass!" rapped out Harry Wharton.

Frank Nugent picked up a folded paper which had fallen from the Owl's pocket.

"Give that to me! Gimme it directly, Nugent, you rotter!" howled Bunter. "It's mine! It ain't yours!"

"Do you mean that it's private?" asked Frank.

"Yes—no—yes—er—that is, 'tain't exactly private; but I think we'd much better talk about it after tea, don't you, Harry, old man?"

Frank hesitated. Johnny Bull had fewer scruples. He snatched the paper.

"If it ain't private, it's public!" he growled. "If it's public, we may look at it. So here goes!"

"Q.E.D.!" grinned Bob. "Go up one, Johnny, old son!"

"Gimme it!" howled Bunter, seeing all his chances of tea vanishing like a beautiful dream.

"My hat!" gasped Johnny Bull. "This is too giddy thick for anything. It's a rotten what-d'ye-call-it, signed by ever so many of the chaps, asking you to resign, Wharton!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Council of War!

"**B**UZZ off, Bunter! You've done what you came for, I suppose, and we don't want you here."

"Oh, I say, Harry, old man—really, you know—I'm not going just because Bull tells me to. 'Tain't his study, anyway. And you haven't said you don't want me, have you?"

Johnny Bull, breathing hard, advanced upon the Owl.

"So you ain't going to take any notice of me, you fat worm?"

"I—I didn't really mean that, Bull. I—I—I meant to say that I always have respected you very highly. Bub-bub-but I think I ought to be let stay. I can explain things while we're having tea, you know."

"You get no tea here, you fat toad!" said Bob Cherry hotly.

"Oh, really, Cherry, you must treat me decently, you know! I'm like one of those old what-d'ye-call-'ums, you know—"

"Whales?" suggested the humorous Bob.

"Polecats, Bob!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"Nun-no! Heralds! That's the word. You couldn't do anything to a herald, you know. You had to be civil, and—and hospitable, and all that."

"Then you can't be a herald, tubby, because we ain't going to be either civil or hospitable to you, and we are going to do something!"

"Oh, leave the fat rotter alone, Bob!" said Wharton wearily. "I don't see why they sent an utter idiot like him along with this. But it's meant seriously."

"Of course it is!" said the Owl, wagging his head solemnly. "Didn't I say so all the time? I thought you might be glad to have my advice and—and sympathy, and all that sort of thing."

Harry glared at him, Frank looked daggers, Bob grinned, Johnny grunted, Inky, unusually silent, wore an inscrutable look.

"Go and boil that little lot!" said Bob.

"Who sent you with this thing?" snapped Harry.

"The—the fellows. I came on purpose to—to make it easier for you, you know. It can't be quite such a blow when it's brought along by a pal, Harry, old man. Let's sit down to tea and talk it over. Everything's spoiling, and I'm sure you'll feel better for a little snack of something. I shall, I know!"

"Not here, you won't!" said Bob grimly.

"Hang tea!" snapped Harry.

"Better hang Bunter!" growled Johnny Bull.

"So you came along because you were a pal of mine, did you, Bunter?" asked Harry, who now had Rake's manifesto in his hands.

"Ye-ye-yes. That's it, Harry, old chap."

"And is that why you signed this thing?"

The question came like a shot from a gun, and it hit Bunter hard.

"I—I— Oh, really! Did I sign it?" he bumbled.

"That's your signature!"

"Ye-ye-yes. Bub-bub-but I don't think I wrote it. I don't think I cu-cu-could have—"

"You fat Ananias! You spoofing porpoise!" hooted Bob Cherry. "Nobody else in the giddy Form could write as badly as this if he tried!"

"I—I—yes, I remember now. Yarooop! Lemme alone, Bull! Droppit, Cherry! Yarooogh! Make them stoppit, Harry! I—I— Toddy made me sign! It wasn't my fault, I tell you, you cads!"

"Bump him!" said Frank Nugent.

"Half a jiff!" interposed Wharton.

"Now, Bunter, if you can tell the truth, for once, why did you bring this along?"

"I—I— What's the use? No one believes a word I say! I can't understand it, because all the school knows what a truthful chap I am! Telling lies is painful to me. It is, really!"

"The painfulness of the revered and disgusting Bunter must be—"

"Terrific, also chronic!" chipped in Bob. "Where's his little axe?"

"He ought to have a big axe—at his neck!" growled Bull. "Tell the truth, you fat worm, if it kills you! I dare say it will—hope so, I'm sure!"

"Were you asked to bring this to me,

or did you get hold of it by some of your low, sneaking ways?"

"I—I— Oh, really, Wharton, I'm faint with hunger! I—I'll tell you all about it while I have tea with you."

"You get no tea here, you slimy toad!"

"Not a giddy mouthful, you gorging, fibbing oyster!"

Bunter gave up the attempt at sponging in despair. He backed towards the door.

"Yah!" he hooted as he opened it. "Beasts! Cads! I wouldn't lower myself to eat with you! I brought that thing along because I was the only chap who had the pluck to. I'm as brave as a lion—it runs in our family—and I'm not afraid of Wharton, or any of you! He's going to get jelly well kicked out, and I'm going to help to do it! Yah! I defy you! Ow-yow! Groooh! Stoppit! Yarooogh! Oh, mercy! You'll kill me, Cherry! Bull, you beast! Nugent, you cad! I—I'll slay you when I get you alone, Inky, you nigger!"

Wharton did not move; but the other four had seized Bunter. His audacity had almost taken away their breath for the moment—but only for the moment.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Rescue! Toddy! Rake! Bolsover! Rescue! Fire! Murder! Thie— Yarooogh!"

But it was in vain that Bunter cried for rescue. None came. Only little Wun Lung put out his head from the door of No. 13, shook it solemnly, and disappeared.

Then the door of No. 1 shut, and Billy Bunter, sitting on the cold and unsympathetic linoleum, lifted up his voice and wept—like Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted—wept for that lost tea, and for the pangs

WHY BE TOO FAT?

A WONDERFUL FAT-REDUCING REMEDY.

It is distressing to hear men and women who are getting stouter and stouter every day, and who have, perhaps, weakened themselves by trying to starve down the over-fatness, exclaiming: "Oh, it can't be helped, I suppose; obesity is a family complaint; father was awfully stout—" and so on. This is ridiculous; it can be helped; and thousands have proved this by taking a short course of Antipon when all sorts of dieting and drugging treatments have utterly failed to eradicate the obstinate obese tendency. Antipon is the one remedy



that permanently reduces weight to normal; the one remedy that kills the cause of obesity; the one remedy that helps to reinvigorate and re-nourish the whole system; that assists digestion and promotes appetite. Antipon is as great a tonic as it is marvellous as a lasting fat-reducer. Rapidly freeing the muscular tissue of all needless and form-spoiling fat, and ridding the body of that dangerous excess of internal fatty matter that clogs the vital organs and vitiates the blood. Antipon soon restores the healthy conditions essential to beauty of outward form and physical strength, and the recovery of graceful symmetry and hardy vigour is permanent. With every pound of unwholesome and disfiguring fat lost there is a more than compensating regain of firm, muscular fibre, and sound nerve tissue. The transformation is simply splendid. A decrease of from 8 oz. to 3 lb., according to degree of stoutness, is the result of the first twenty-four hours' treatment. You now see, stout reader, how unwise it is to resign yourself to the "can't-be-helped" mood. Antipon is an agreeable liquid—is purely vegetable in composition, is quite harmless, and has always proved itself to be a grand tonic. It has enjoyed the testimony of Doctors, Physicians, Nurses, and thousands of private individuals all over the world. Try a bottle of Antipon ere another day closes.

Antipon is sold in bottles, price 3s. and 5s., and is recommended by Boots' Cash Chemists (580 branches), Taylor's Drug Stores, Timothy White & Co., and all high-class chemists and stores all over the world, or, in the event of difficulty, may be had on remitting amount (abroad postage extra), privately packed, direct from the Antipon Company (Dept. 52), 27, Store Street, London W.C.

Antipon

GET TRADE MARK

1st Lady Munition Worker: I am tired out and feel as if I shall break down. I suppose it is because I am so stout.

2nd Lady Munition Worker: You should take Antipon, my dear. A year ago I was stouter than you, but Antipon reduced my weight 42 lbs., and now I am fit for anything.

of the bumping. But no one tried to comfort Bunter.

Inside the study there was silence for a moment.

It could not be said that the Famous Five were taken by surprise. They had scented this from afar. Not one of the other four but had seen that Wharton, during the last few days, had tried the temper of the Form pretty hard.

He meant well, they were sure. But he was scarcely himself. The depression which so often comes in the train of influenza was upon him, making him morose. They were loyal; they could allow for this.

But it was not to be expected that other fellows would make the same allowances.

"Let's have tea," said Harry.

They sat down to the table. But the tea was partly spoiled, and their appetites were quite spoiled.

"Where's that wretched paper, Harry?" asked Bob, pushing from him in disgust a plate of overcooked sausages.

Wharton threw it across to him. Even in that slight action there was shown a nervous irritability unlike Harry Wharton in his normal state.

Inky sat with his dark, glowing eyes on Wharton's face. Frank sipped at half-cold tea. Johnny Bull looked over Bob's shoulder.

"Bow-wow!" said Bob. "Bolsover—what's he worth? Rake—well, I grant you, Dicky Rake's no duffer; but he's bucked before, and come out of it wrong end up."

"Skinner, Snoop, Trevor, Treluce," read Johnny Bull, with hearty contempt. "Why, Harry, what do that gang matter? Not a scrap!"

"There's more yet, Johnny," said Wharton.

And Johnny Bull felt like groaning aloud as he read on:

"Bulstrode, Hazeldene, Kipps, Wibley, Desmond, Ogilvy." He could not pretend that these fellows did not matter.

But there was worse to come.

"Peter Todd, Delarey— Oh, I say, Harry, this is too thick for anything! Tom Brown and Squiff!"

"Yes, I know," said Harry quietly. "I didn't think they'd turn against me."

"The rotters!" yelled Bob, in wrath.

Harry's lips quivered. This had hit him hard. For a moment his face was buried in his hands.

Then he looked up, trying to smile.

"I suppose it's my own fault," he said. "But hanged if I could have done it to Squiff, or to Browney!"

"You made a mistake, jumping on Delarey," said outspoken Johnny. "But they needn't have taken it like this."

"Never mind, Harry!" said Frank Nugent, with a brotherly hand on his chin's shoulder. "There are some who will stand by you to the end. We four, and Marky, at worst!"

"And the Bounder," added Bob. "He's still a queer chap in some ways; but there isn't much he'd shy at doing for Harry. There's Wan Lung, too, and everybody counts."

"Russell's name isn't here," said Johnny Bull. "Or Newland's—oh, or Penfold's, either. Buck up, old son! We haven't lost the day yet!"

"It's no use," said Harry. "I don't say that because I haven't any light left in me; but, as I see it, a fellow simply can't go on sticking to a job like this when most of the others want him out of it—and his own friends among them!"

The last words were spoken with more bitterness than Harry Wharton was in the way of showing—or feeling.

That Squiff and Tom Brown should have joined the enemy hit him hard.

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Delarey did not matter quite so much to him; but the South African counted, too, just as Peter Todd counted, although ambition was at the bottom of Peter's falling away from grace.

"May I come in?" asked a voice at the door.

And the Bounder appeared.

"Just the chap we wanted!" said Bob. "You're a cool card, Smithy, and we should like to know what you think about this."

"Tell him what it is first," growled Johnny Bull. "The chap ain't a blessed wizard, for all he's so wide."

"No need to tell me," said Vernon-Smith. "I know. I was there before the signing had finished."

"Advice isn't much good," Harry said wearily. "I've made up my mind. To go on in the face of this is hopeless. I've done my best for the Form. If it isn't good enough, let them try someone else, that's all!"

"If I was in your place, Wharton, I'd hang on like grim death! They shouldn't have any cheap victory, anyway!"

And there was no possible doubt that the Bounder meant every word he said. He looked the fighting-man all over. And, for the moment, Wharton did not.

"The worst thing about it is that some chaps have gone over that we should have reckoned on as safe to back up Wharton," said Frank.

The Bounder nodded.

"I know," he said. "It wasn't any laughing matter when it was only Todd. The chap counts. But his hand has been strengthened now; there is no getting away from that. The three Colonials—they are the crux of the matter."

"Hang them!" growled Johnny Bull. "I've always liked Squiff no end. We've got along first-rate. But I won't speak to the rotter after this!"

"I shall resign," said Harry obstinately. "There's a big majority of the Form against me, even without those chaps. And they've a right to do as they like—I'm not denying that."

"On second thoughts," said the Bounder coolly, "I rather think you had better resign."

Bob and Johnny, Frank and Inky stared at him in amazement.

Could the fellow really think that Harry's present attitude was due to faint-heartedness—that he had not the pluck for a fight to a finish? They knew better than that, anyway!

"Don't you understand?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"No! Unless it means you're of the same mind as those three sweeps!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"I'm not. You ought to know that. But Wharton's resignation will make some of the fellows feel a trifle sick at once. I could pick out half a dozen from that list who won't feel exactly proud of themselves when they see that they've forced out of office the chap whom they know is the best skipper the Form ever had—or could have!"

"Rot, Smithy!" said Harry, with a wan smile. "I don't care about keeping on, anyway!"

"But we care that you should," said the Bounder quietly.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder's Advice!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH was hard in many ways. They all knew that. The Bounder of the bad old days had not changed entirely his nature. His mask of cynicism was not wholly a mask, perhaps. But it hid more affection for just a few fellows—and fast among that few for

Harry Wharton, his former enemy—than he would willingly have admitted.

The mask dropped now. In this crisis he was one of them—so they all felt. And not one but realised that he had brains better fitted to cope with a very difficult situation than they had.

"Thank you, Smithy," said Harry gratefully, almost humbly. "But you'd make a better skipper than I am."

"Rot! I know better than that. And, my dear man, I don't want the job. I give you my word that I wouldn't stand against Skinner—and I can't say anything stronger than that!"

"There's Toddy. We could stand Toddy all right. He's as straight and fair as a chap can be!"

"Granted! I've nothing against Todd, except that he's in the enemy camp. But that is quite enough for me."

"But we don't catch on, Smithy," said Bob Cherry, looking very puzzled. "If Harry resigns, someone else must have the job."

"I don't see that," replied the Bounder.

"Rats!" growled Johnny Bull. "The thing stands to sense. And as for the old chap turning it up just to make a few rotters sick—well, all I've got to say is that the game isn't worth the candle!"

But Frank Nugent and Inky seemed to have got at least the gleam of a notion as to the Bounder's meaning. For the dark face of Hurree Janset Ram Singh was smiling, and Frank had clutched Harry by the sleeve in excitement.

"You mean that if he resigns there's nothing to hinder his standing again when the election comes off?" said Frank breathlessly.

"Oh, my aunt!" groaned Johnny Bull. "Fancy chucking up a thing on the off-chance of having it bunged back at you by fellows who have said plainly that you aren't the man they want to have it!"

"It's rot!" said Bob emphatically. "Toddy's sure to have a big majority. This blessed paper proves that."

"Does the paper mention Todd?" asked the Bounder patiently.

"No; but we know!"

"You don't know it all, Cherry! Are you aware that there is another Richmond in the field?"

"Another?"

"Candidate for the office!"

"Who is it?" snapped Johnny Bull.

"Bolsover—no less!"

"That bullying lout! What chance has he?"

"None at all, I should say. But he'll get a dozen votes or so, I suppose. And where will those votes come from? Not from our side."

"Don't you see?" chipped in Nugent. "If Harry stands again there will be three candidates. Toddy could whack Bolsover out of sight. We should vote for him. Bolsover would be beyond the limit. But all the rotters will vote for Bolsover. That cuts down Toddy's poll. And with Harry standing again there would be a solid block of votes that would go against Toddy instead of for him, as they would have to go if it were a tussle between him and that bullying, bragging ass!"

"That's it," said Vernon-Smith.

"You've got my notion exactly, Nugent. Mind, I'm not saying it's a dead cert for our man. It isn't that, by long odds. But it's a good chance, especially if some of the deserters come over between now and the election, as I fancy they will."

"My hat! You're as wide as they are made Smithy!" cried Bob, slapping the Bounder on the back. "I should never have thought of that."

"Me either," confessed Johnny Bull. "But I ain't sure I'm keen on it now."

I say—when you've got a thing stick to it; don't chuck it away on the chance that someone will bring it back to you!"

"But I don't want it," said Harry crossly. "I won't have it, as things are. I'm going to resign, anyway. Whether I put up again or not I sha'n't decide yet. But I'm ever so much obliged to you, Smithy, and I can see that you've given me a tip worth thinking over."

"Worth taking, old fellow," said the Bounder seriously. "Look at it any way you will, you would have a right to the captaincy if you came out first in a three-cornered fight—if only by a single vote over the next man. There isn't a chap in the Form who could command enough votes to have an absolute majority over the total of two others. If you refuse my tip there's only one thing to be done. We must put up another man—Cherry, Bull, Nugent, or Linley—any of our own lot. We'll fight Todd, anyway!"

"Not for me, thanks, Smithy!" said Bob. "Too much fag."

"Nor for me, while Wharton's alive and kicking," growled Bull.

"I'm not the right chap for it," said Nugent. "I don't say Linley isn't—or Inky."

But Inky's expressive shrug of the shoulders told how he felt about it.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Stubborn as a Mule!

"I SUPPOSE the box-room window really is the best way to get out at night, if it's necessary?" said Piet Delarey to Tom Brown and Squiff, when they dropped into No. 12 after prep.

"Yaas, dear boy; but it really isn't necessary, begad!" said Mauly, who was reclining on the couch, quite washed out after a terrific struggle with Virgil, Euclid, and quadratic equations. It is doubtful whether Mr. Quelch would have regarded the struggle as terrific. But a very little of that sort of thing went a long way with Herbert, Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, dry up!" said the South African junior. "I wasn't speaking to you, old ass!"

"Tha-a-anks!" drawled Mauly. "You're very polite, Piet!"

But Delarey only grinned. Mauly did not mind, and he knew that. The slacker of the Remove and the keen, self-willed Colonial boy were on the best of terms, utterly unlike though they were.

Squiff looked rather morose. "I agree with Mauly," said the New Zealander.

"Don't be an idiot, Piet!" said Squiff.

Delarey looked from one to the other with the slow, cynical smile that was very far from improving his good-looking face.

"That's not what I'm asking for," he said. "I don't know that I'm really particularly interested in the opinion of you chaps as to whether I ought to go or not, though I haven't any idea of going on the sly as far as you are concerned. All I asked you for was the straight tip as to the best way out."

"I won't tell you!" snapped Squiff, badly nettled.

"Right-oh, my son! I'll go to someone else."

Delarey got up and moved towards the door.

"Hold on, chump!" said Tom Brown. "Whom are you going to ask?"

"Skinner struck me as the likeliest person. He knows, anyway."

"Fathead! He's sure to have his knife into you after that bumping bizney the chaps are talking about. And you want to put yourself in his hands! Hang Skinner!"

"Oh, hang Skinner if you like—it's really no odds to me! But perhaps you won't mind waiting till I've asked him my question first. Even people who are going to be hanged may as well be made use of when possible!"

Delarey went out—to consult Skinner, as it seemed.

"The chap's as stubborn as a mule!" groaned Squiff.

"Mauly, why don't you teach the kid more sense?" asked Tom Brown.

"Yes, why don't you?" echoed Squiff.

"It's fairly up to you, Mauly!"

His lordship looked at them in utter astonishment.

"Me? Oh, begad, dear boys, that's a trifle too steep for anything—it is, 'pon honour! I can't do a thing with Piet."

"Then I'll wait, too," said Tom Brown, sitting on the table and swinging his legs.

"Do you mind much if I have a doze?" asked Mauly pathetically.

Without waiting for an answer, he nestled down among the cushions and closed his eyes.

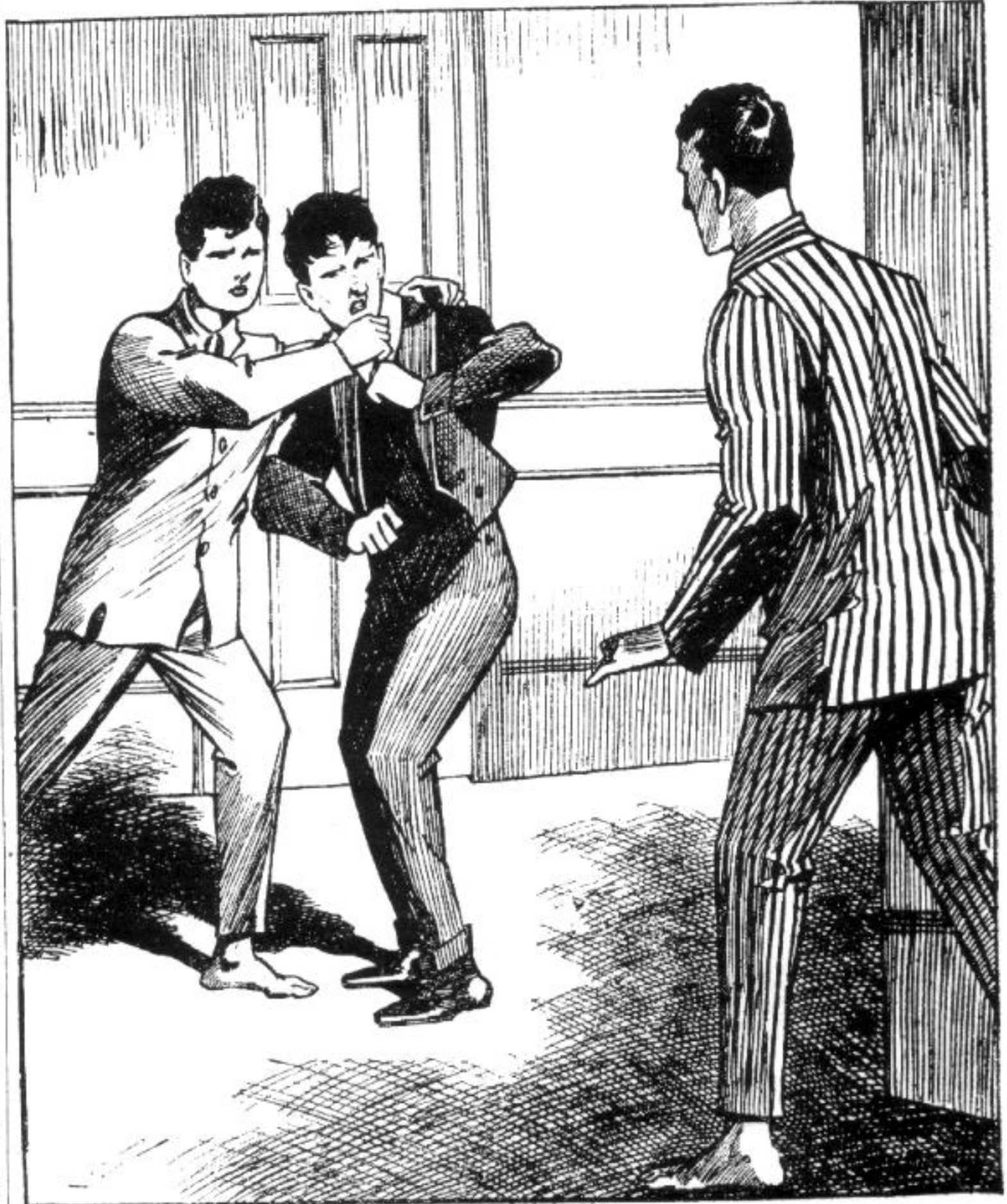
"It's no good worrying, old scout," said Tom Brown.

"Oh, I dare say not! And who says I'm worrying, any road?"

"Delarey is a pretty good hand at taking care of himself."

"It's just these chaps who can take care of themselves so jolly well who come the most horrible muckers in the long run, I reckon," replied Squiff gloomily.

Mauleverer opened his eyes.



Catching out Skinner!
(See Chapter 14.)

The chap fairly twists me round his little finger. He's so strenuous, begad, and I haven't the energy to stand out against him. Why, he's making me buck up like a Trojan—all through that!"

"Don't see much sign of it!" growled Squiff.

"Dunno, Squiff. After all, did you ever hear this old slacker make a speech of that length before? And not go to sleep in the middle of it, either!"

"You two ain't in a very pretty temper to-night, begad!"

"We're not!" replied Squiff candidly.

"Oh, begad! Would you mind doing a bunk, then? Take him out, please, Brownie; you don't seem quite so far gone as he does!"

"I'm going to wait till that silly ass comes back!" growled Squiff.

"Piet won't," he said, and closed them again.

"Playing 'possum!" said Squiff. "Hi, Mauly, you frabjous old ass, are you asleep?"

"Yaas," answered his lordship.

"Do you know what game our silly idiot's up to?"

The only answer was a very unconvincing snore.

"Mauly!"

Another snore.

"Mauly, you absurd ass!"

Not even a snore this time.

"I believe he knows something," said Tom Brown.

"Not a giddy thing, begad!" Mauly said, without taking the trouble to open his eyes.

Squiff picked up a cushion and hurled it at his head.

Then Mauly sat up suddenly.

"Oh, begad, Field, why can't you leave a chap alone?" he asked plaintively.

"Why don't you have harder cushions?" growled Squiff.

"Because I'm not such an ass as you fellows take me for, begad!" answered the slacker. "Soft cushions are more comfortable, an' when a silly idiot chucks them at you they don't hurt as much as hard ones—see, Squiff?"

And Mauly dropped back into a recumbent position once more.

"No go, Squiff! Nothing on earth will ever properly wake that chap up!"

"Never supposed it would, Browney."

Delarey reappeared.

"About bed-time, you fellows," he said coolly. "I see Mauly's taking an instalment in advance. Catch hold of his noble legs, Browney, and help me to carry him upstairs!"

At that the slacker of the Remove woke up.

"Oh, chuck it, Piet, begad!" he said weakly.

But Tom Brown had not responded to the call. There was something more serious in the wind than japing Mauly.

"Have you seen that rotter Skinner?" growled Squiff.

"Lots of times," replied Delarey cheerfully.

"I mean just now, ass!"

"Oh, yes! I saw him about two minutes fifteen and one-half seconds ago, to be precise, Squiff."

"You burbling idiot! Did you—?"

"Don't you think that, with an effort, you might manage to mind your own bizney, old chap?"

"Rats! You can't quarrel with us, and we jolly well mean to look after you, so you can like it or lump it! But I begin to believe Wharton wasn't so entirely wrong, after all!"

"Rather a pity you joined in asking him to resign, then," drawled Delarey.

He still spoke in a joking tone, but his face had changed.

"If you go out to-night, we go, too," said Squiff.

"Shall you ask Wharton to come along? Or perhaps you might hand the job over to him?" returned the Afrikaner.

Squiff looked a good deal riled. Mauly, now unusually wide awake, looked a good deal worried.

"You're getting off the rails a bit, you know, Piet," said Tom Brown.

"Perhaps—perhaps not! There is just a chance that I may know better what I'm doing than you chaps, who know nothing about it!"

"Not much chance!" snapped Squiff.

Delarey gazed at his chum in a way that made Squiff feel like bristling all over. Then he smiled in his most cynical fashion, and went out again.

"Time for bed, kids, and past time!"

sounded the voice of Wingate, the Greyfriars skipper, in the passage.

Then the three in No. 12 heard him say sharply:

"What are you doing, Delarey? Is that Bunter you are sitting on?"

"It's either Bunter or an elephant calf that has strayed down the passage," answered Delarey.

"I rather think it must be Bunter, because elephants don't wear bootlaces, and I'm pretty sure this thing was tying its bootlaces near our door!"

"Spying again, you fat young rascal!"

"Oh, really, Wingate! I think you ought to know that I should scorn so base an action! I—I—if I heard anything about Delarey going out with Skinner to-night—I mean, I didn't hear anything of the sort, of course; and if I did, I hope I am incapable of sneaking. I certainly don't approve of such conduct, though, and as captain of the school—"

"Ring off, you creeping object! What's this mean, Delarey?"

"Do you take any notice of what Bunter says, Wingate?"

The prefect looked very hard at the speaker. The Sixth were disposed to think the South African junior a little too cool a hand.

"I certainly don't as a rule," said the captain slowly.

"But you accused him of spying, and he does sometimes let out the truth by accident!"

"Oh, really, Wingate, you're taking away my character, and it ought to be stopped!"

"It's the sort of character that might be the better for taking away!" rapped out Wingate.

"Well, Delarey?"

"Well?" drawled Delarey.

"You heard Bunter?"

"I heard. That's hardly the question is it?"

Wingate bit his lower lip. The usually good-tempered skipper was beginning to get quite wrathful.

"What is the question, then?" he snapped.

"There are two. The first is, do you believe Bunter?"

"Blessed if I see what there is for Wingate to believe! I didn't tell him anything. I'm not to be called a sneak now, I should hope!"

"Dry up, you fat young idiot! Yes, Delarey, I do believe there's something in what the prying fat sweep said!"

"Then the other question is, what are you going to do about it?"

Wingate fairly gasped. This was not quite insubordination; so much depended upon how it was meant. And yet it was difficult to see it otherwise than as impudence.

The skipper kept his temper in leash.

"I warn you—"

"Thanks!" broke in Delarey.

"Awfully good of you, I'm sure! But, as far as that goes, you needn't trouble; there seem to be plenty of other people looking after me to see that I don't step out of the narrow path!"

This was too much for Wingate to bear patiently.

"Delarey," he said hotly, "if you break bounds after that warning, you do it at your peril!"

"Wouldn't it be all the same, as far as that goes, if I'd had no warning, Wingate?"

"Take two hundred lines for impertinence!"

"All right, Wingate. When do you want them shown up?"

"To-morrow!" snapped the captain of Greyfriars.

"I'll deliver the goods—unless I'm sacked first. It would be wasting my time in that event, wouldn't it?"

Snorting with half-suppressed wrath, the captain strode away.

Squiff popped out of No. 12, and caught his chum by the arm. The three in the study had heard every word; they could not help hearing.

"What an utter ass you are, Piet! I never saw such a stubborn old mule! You've simply gone miles out of your road to get into Wingate's black books—"

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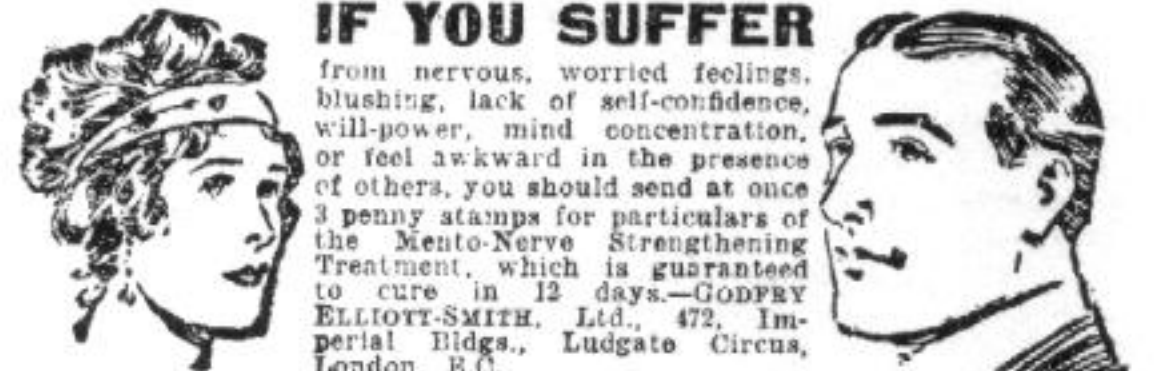
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as if it wasn't enough to be in Quech's!"

"I don't see that it was my fault, Squiff."

"Whose was it, then, you frabjous ass?"

"You chaps, for gassing; this worm's, for spying; Wingate's, for interfering!"

"Anybody's but yours, Piet!" said Tom Brown.

"That's the ticket, Browney! I'm not going to admit myself wrong!"

"Fathead!"

"Bunter wants bumping, though," said Tom Brown.

But Bunter had scuttled.

"And we'd better cut, too, I fancy," said Delarey, cool as ever. "Wingate doesn't quite love me just now, and he won't allow any extra time for undressing!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Trouble in the Dormitory!

"WHAT can we do to stop him, Squiff?" asked Tom Brown, letting their headstrong chum go on ahead.

"Hanged if I know! And I can't even feel as mad with the chap as I ought to. Somehow, I feel sure there's something serious behind his blessed mulishness. It isn't to play the giddy goat in any ordinary way he means to go out!"

"That's my notion, too," said the New Zealander thoughtfully. "I could swear it's no Cross Keys rot!"

"Why don't the ass trust us?" growled Squiff.

"I think he does," said Tom Brown. "What he's trying to keep off is letting us share any danger he's running into."

"That's just as fat-headed as the other thing!" replied Squiff.

Now, Tom Brown and Sampson Quincy Ifley Field, though they loved a jape, were as level-headed as any two fellows in the Remove. Taking big risks unnecessarily did not strike them as either funny or heroic.

But Piet Delarey was their chum. If he meant to run a heavy risk, they were game to share it. They would want to know first why he was running it at all, however. And just there came the trouble. For he did not seem at all minded to tell them.

"Yow-ow! Yarooooogh! Droppit, you beast! Help! Bolsover, Cherry, Toddy, Wharton! Help! Yooop!"

Such were the sounds that struck upon the ears of Tom Brown and Squiff as they entered the Remove dormitory.

"That's Piet walking into Bunter!" grinned Squiff.

"Serve the fat cad right! All the same, it's a silly trick," replied Tom Brown.

Bob Cherry simply turned his back. Bolsover laughed. Peter Todd showed no sign of intending to interfere.

But Wharton stepped forward.

He was still skipper of the Remove. He had his duty to do, and part of his duty was to keep order in the dormitory.

"You'd better stop that, Delarey," he said quietly.

With a slipper held high in his right hand, Piet Delarey paused.

Only for a moment, though. Then he brought the slipper down with a resounding thwack on the appropriate portion of Billy Bunter's fat anatomy.

"The fat sweep deserves it, Wharton," he said coolly.

Harry Wharton did not doubt that. Never a day passed but in some way or another Bunter transgressed against the schoolboy code of honour, and deserved bringing to a stern account.

But that was not the only thing to be considered. The dormitory was the wrong place for bringing him to book.

And if Wharton did not intervene there would be plenty to say that it was because he funk'd the South African junior.

Whether the knowledge of that fact or the claims of duty had most to do with Harry's attitude he himself could not have told, probably. What is very certain is that neither sympathy for Bunter nor dislike of Delarey played any part. Harry would far rather have had to do with another fellow—even Bolsover or Peter Todd, his rivals.

"Stop him, Harry, old man! Help a pal! It's a beastly crammer to say I deserve it! I—I—I didn't sneak! I told Wingate that I hadn't heard anything at all—not a syllable! I don't know anything about Delarey's breaking bounds to-night, and I told Wingate I didn't. I don't see what more I could have said, because it's true. Squiff and Browney and Mauly know it's true! Ask them, if you don't believe me!"

"The fat idiot!" breathed Tom Brown. "He'll jolly well drag us all into it before he's done! And I, for one, don't want a row with old Wharton."

"So you've been prying and sneaking again, have you, porpoise?" said Peter Todd, suddenly facing round with a frowning brow.

"There you are! Toddy's dragged in now!"

"He's dragged himself in, if you ask me!" growled Squiff.

"Leave this to me, Todd, please!" said Harry, with more heat than he had shown in speaking to Delarey.

"I don't see why I should, Wharton. Bunter belongs to my study, and I'm not going to have him disgracing it!"

"That's not the question. This is no bizney of yours."

"Maybe not. I consider it is. And, anyway, I can't quite see myself taking orders from you, Wharton."

"I'm skipper of the Form, Todd."

"For the present. But we ain't all your slaves, you know."

Piet Delarey gave Bunter one last resounding thwack. Then he turned to Wharton.

"I've finished," he said. "Todd need not worry; I think I've given this rotter a lesson. What precisely is it you object to, Wharton?"

"Captain Harry Wharton doesn't allow anybody but his own pals to bully poor old Bunter; and you're no longer a pal of his, Rebel!" sneered Harold Skinner.

"That's quite true, Skinney; they're always knocking me about! I'm blessed if they aren't the worst bullies in the Form—worse than Bolsover!" bleated the Owl.

This may have been meant as an unsolicited testimonial to Percy Bolsover, but that important personage scarcely seemed to take it in that light.

"If you're asking for more trouble, fatty—" he began.

"Chuck it!" whispered Skinner eagerly. "Don't you butt in, Bolsy! Let the bounders row among themselves. It's all to the good for us."

Bolsover dried up. Peter Todd drew back. He did not really want a row with Wharton.

So Harry and the cool, self-willed, self-possessed South African junior were again left face to face.

"What do you object to?" asked Delarey again.

"If this yarn of Bunter's is true—"

"Since when have you taken to believing Bunter's lies?"

"Don't try to evade the issue, Delarey!"

Skinner held up his hands as if in awe-struck admiration.

"My hat! Ain't he eloquent, you chaps?" he sneered. "Evade the issue! You'd never have thought of a fine

phrase like that in a blue moon, Bolsy! Todd's the only other chap here who is up to such House of Commons jaw as that."

"That's where he ought to be," chimed in Stott. "Let's return him and Todd as members for Greyfriars—and get rid of them!"

Harry did not even look towards Skinner and Stott. His eyes were still fixed on Delarey's obstinate face.

And, obstinate as the Afrikander was, something like reluctant admiration stole over him. There was real manhood in Wharton, anyway. He was no quitter.

"See here, Wharton, let's drop it," he said quietly. "There's no need for us to row, even though I don't admit your right to dry-nurse me. As for Bunter, you know the worm deserved it!"

"I'm willing to drop it, Delarey, but I can't consent to your breaking bounds to-night, you know."

"I wasn't thinking of asking for your consent, Wharton."

"Now, then, why aren't you kids in bed?" demanded Wingate, coming in. "I'll give you two minutes more, and anybody who isn't between the sheets then will find the chopper coming down heavily."

When he returned two minutes later everyone was in bed. Bob Cherry gave a very unconvincing imitation of a Bunter snore. The captain put out the light, and went, with a "Good-night!" that was distinctly more curt than usual.

For a moment there was silence. Then the mocking voice of Harold Skinner was lifted:

"Aren't you going to settle the important question as to whether you can have Wharton's consent, Delarey, or are you still—ahem!—evading the issue?"

"Ring off, or I'll come and attend to you, Skinner!" snapped Piet.

"Oh, really," said Bunter virtuously. "I don't think the beastly Rebel ought to be allowed to go out and break bounds. The whole Form ought to stop him, if Wharton refuses to do his duty."

"You don't think, because you can't think, porpoise," said Peter Todd. "The apparatus was left out."

"Lead on, MacBunter!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Don't be so silly, Cherry! My name ain't MacBunter!"

"My mistake, tubby. I was under the impression that an ancestor of yours with that name came over with the washing."

"Oh, really, Cherry, what rot! As if my family ever had anything to do with—"

"Now we know it isn't Bunter's fault," put in Vernon-Smith. "If he fails to wash his neck—"

"If!" growled Johnny Bull, putting infinite meaning into the one word.

"I should say, on the frequent occasions when he fails to wash his neck," went on the Bounder. "It is not his fault. It's the influence of what the scientific chaps call heredity, meaning that as his ancestors never ran up big soap bills—well, there you are, you know! Poor old Bunter! He may have been born in the waistcoat we found on him once when we were washing him!"

"What a blessed whopper, Smithy! I wasn't—I mean, I—"

"Now that you've jogged his fat memory, Smithy, he can distinctly remember losing that waistcoat!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

Bunter shut up. But Skinner had not finished.

"Are you going, Delarey?" he asked.

"I'm coming to punch your head unless you have the sense to drop this foolery!"

"Are you going to let him, Wharton?"

"What, punch your head, Skinner?—I

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certainly should not interfere with anyone who thought it his duty to do that!"

"I calculate Delarey's got too much boss-sense to go fooling round like that now every galoot here has heard about his little game," remarked Fisher T. Fish. "Yep, Skinner; I calculate so."

But Delarey refused to be drawn by Fish.

"Bet you he goes, Bolsover!"

"Bet you he don't, Skinney!"

"How much, old scout?"

"A level half-dollar."

"Betting in the dorm!" squeaked Snoop. "And Wharton keeps mum! A pretty pass the Remove is coming to!"

"Are we going to stay awake to see who wins?" inquired Skinner.

"No need," said Treluce. "You can ask Wharton in the morning. He is sure to know."

Within a few minutes most of the Remove were asleep. Billy Bunter's snores left no doubt in his case.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

And Heavier Trouble Yet!

BUT not everybody was in the arms of Morpheus—god of slumber.

Wharton was sitting up in bed, his jacket over his shoulders.

Piet Delarey lay awake. He could not see Wharton—it was too dark for that; but he guessed that the captain of the Remove was keeping watch.

Delarey did not want trouble with Wharton. But, whatever might be the upshot, the Afrikaner meant to break bounds that night.

He held himself fully justified. He had a very strong motive for going, and he had promised to go.

Tom Brown and Squiff were also wakeful.

And—which was really astonishing—Maully had not gone to sleep, though he had not spoken a word since getting into bed.

Ten strokes boomed from the great school clock. Nobody stirred.

The quarter-past ten sounded. Tom Brown came out of a doze, and drew himself up in bed noiselessly.

Now the moon had risen, and, though the blinds were drawn, there was light enough for the New Zealand junior to see Wharton on watch.

The minutes seemed ten times their proper length to Tom Brown. He began to fancy that the clock must have stopped altogether.

Then the half-hour chimed, and someone got out of bed.

On the instant four others were alert. But none of them spoke or moved at first.

It was Delarey who had got out. He dressed quickly and quietly.

Still no one spoke. No one quite fancied being the first to interfere, it seemed.

Words were on the lips of Squiff when Wharton's voice broke the silence.

"It won't do, Delarey! It isn't that I want to be awkward with you; but it really won't do!"

"I understand all serene, Wharton!" answered Piet Delarey. "You feel you ought to protest, and I've nothing against that. But the risk is mine, and I'm simply bound to go!"

Harry Wharton got out of bed. Squiff and Brown did likewise. So, quite unsuspected by the rest, did Mauleverer.

"Who's there?" asked Wharton sharply. "Is it you, Skinner?"

He could see the figures of the other juniors; but the light was not strong enough to see their faces.

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"Browney and me—Squiff," said the Australian junior.

No one had yet twigged Maully.

"I suppose you're backing up Delarey?" snapped Harry.

"Then your supposer's out of gear, for we're not!" gruffly replied Squiff.

"We'd prefer to stop him!" said Tom Brown.

"Three of us should be enough for that," said Wharton. "I shouldn't have asked you fellows; but it's for his own good!"

"Perhaps even three of you may find me a bit of a handful!" spoke the voice of the Rebel.

"We're not on, Wharton!" Tom Brown said. "It's rot to talk of force, isn't it, Squiff?"

"I don't know that it's rot!" growled Squiff. "But I'm not in it, anyway! If you hadn't been so beastly suspicious of the chap, without a scrap of reason, this wouldn't have happened, Wharton!"

"You're clean off it, Squiff!" said Delarey promptly. "That bizney had nothing in the world to do with this! I won't say I liked it; I didn't, that's a fact! But I want to be fair to Wharton. I'm going! You can all take your change out of that!"

Noiseless, in his rubber-soled shoes, he moved towards the door.

Wharton planted himself right in the way. His blood was up and his teeth were set.

There was no enmity to Delarey in him. The fellow had shown up well; he would have admitted that to anyone.

But Piet Delarey was not going—not if Harry Wharton could stop him!

Now someone else interposed. A slim, white hand fell upon Delarey's shoulder.

"Oh, begad, Piet, don't be an ass!" said Maully.

The Afrikaner shook off the hand good-humouredly.

"Can't help myself, old chap!" he said. "This is just one of those things that must be did, whatever comes of them!"

"Yaas; I understand, dear boy. It's a promise, no doubt. But—"

"Haven't time for any chin-music, especially at your pace, Maully! Will you oblige me by standing aside, Wharton?"

"I won't!"

Delarey breathed hard. It would come to a tussle, then, and time that was valuable to him would be wasted.

"Oh, begad, what a beastly lot of rot this is, Piet! Wharton's right, you know!"

"If it's any consolation to Wharton, and the rest of you, to admit that he's right and I'm wrong—it doesn't concern anyone but us two, as I see it—then I'll admit it! But I'm going, all the same!"

Mauleverer turned. Slowly, heavily, he went back to bed. He knew that the limit was reached. Only force was left. And against neither Delarey nor Wharton was Maully willing to use force.

Tom Brown and Squiff waited. They half expected Wharton to appeal to them, but were not at all sure whether they wanted him to.

Wharton's pride stood in the way. Come what might, he would handle this matter alone.

Delarey moved forward till he was within arm's length of the Remove skipper.

"For the last time, are you going to stand out of the way, Wharton?" he asked, with more heat now.

"No!"

"Then put up your fists!"

Neither Squiff nor Tom Brown knew who struck the first blow. But next

moment the two were at it hammer and tongs.

Wharton reeled, and Delarey pressed on. But Harry recovered himself quickly, and the Afrikaner got a blow on the jaw that staggered him.

"May as well let 'em see what they're doing!" said Squiff.

A blind clicked up, and the moonlight streamed in.

Twice Delarey got home on Wharton's chest. Again Harry's fist smote his opponent's jaw—a regular piledriver!

Again Delarey beat down Harry's guard and put in some lusty body blows.

Then it dawned upon Harry Wharton that it was no accident that his face had not yet been touched.

It made him angrier than ever. There was chivalry in it, but to him it seemed cheeky as well as chivalrous. But, thenceforth, it was for the body he went also.

Now the dormitory began to wake up.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" cried Bob Cherry. "Have the Zepps come again, or is it only an earthquake?"

"What is the beastly row?" murmured Frank Nugent sleepily.

Johnny Bull, saying nothing, was first out of bed.

Others quickly followed. A hubbub arose.

"Great Scott! There will be the biggest size in rows if this goes on!" growled Squiff.

Then the door opened, and Wingate appeared.

"What's this about?" he demanded, looking around him angrily.

No one answered.

"Wharton, do you think this is quite the correct thing for a fellow who is supposed to have some sort of authority in the Form?"

But Wharton could not justify himself without accusing another. So he kept silence.

Delarey spoke out recklessly.

"Don't shove the blame on Wharton!" he said. "He's all right, from your point of view. Put it where it belongs—on my shoulders! I guess they can carry it!"

"You're a young ass, Delarey!" said Wingate. "But you're a decent young ass!"

The Rebel turned to the washstand, shrugging his shoulders. His nose was bleeding freely.

"You'll undress at once, Delarey!" snapped the captain.

"Mayn't I wait till my nose has stopped bleeding?"

Amid a buzz of eager whispering the rest of the juniors were tumbling back into bed.

Wingate waited, looking annoyed. Delarey did not hurry himself in the least.

"The bleeding has stopped now," said Wingate. "As you were able to dress in the dark, you can undress in it. And there's moonlight, anyway. I'll talk to you about this in the morning!"

The light which the skipper had switched on when he entered was switched off again, and Wingate went.

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

In Spite of Everything!

THE Rebel must be one of our noble skipper's particular little pets!" sneered Skinner.

"By gum, yes! If it had been me, I'd have got it in the neck! I jolly well know that!" said Bolsover.

"True, O king!" said Bob Cherry. "You'd have got it there before Wingate came! Wharton would have given you it!"

"Rats!"

Delarey did not answer the taunt. They supposed he must be still busy at the washstand.

A minute or two passed, and still he did not return to bed.

Tom Brown sat up.

"Squiff!" he said.

"Well, Browney?"

"I do believe that ass Piet has done a bunk, after all!"

"I didn't hear the door shut! But he ain't at the washstand!" replied Squiff.

"He's gone, I tell you!"

"Piet!" called the Australian junior.

"Piet!" mocked Skinner. "Answer your uncle, Piet! I say, Bolsy, that half-dollar is mine!"

"Delarey, you idiot!" snapped Tom Brown.

No answer! Skinner & Co. chuckled in malicious glee.

"He's booked for the sack!" said Snoop.

"Serve him jolly well right!" replied Stott.

"Oh, shut up, you crawling worms!" said Dick Rake.

Tom Brown and Squiff were out of bed now.

There could be no longer any doubt that Delarey had gone.

He had seen his chance, and he had seized it.

His resolution had never wavered. But it had no more occurred to any of the fellows in the Remove dormitory than it had to Wingate that he would have the hardihood to go directly Wingate's back was turned.

And it was the utter unexpectedness of this move that gave him a chance. It was not in the least likely that the skipper would be on the watch against anything so audacious.

Squiff and Tom Brown began to dress in haste.

"You fellows don't mean to say you are going, too?" asked Wharton.

"We don't mean to say anything about it!" answered Tom Brown, in quite friendly tones, but firmly. "You turn over and snooze, Wharton!"

Harry did not get out of bed. But someone else did.

It was Mauleverer.

"Oh, begad!" yawned the slacker. "It's no end of a beastly noosance! But I'm bound to toddle along with you! Please don't hurry so! It don't suit me to hurry!"

"Crumbs, Mauly! I didn't know you were such an ass!" said Bob.

"Didn't know myself, Cherry! But you never do know your luck! Begad, Squiff! My dear man, don't be in such a brutal hurry!"

"Wharton's abdicated!" sneered Skinner.

"Oh, cheese that!" snapped Peter Todd. "You leave Wharton alone! He's done enough for one night! Be satisfied that you've won your dirty bet!"

Harry got out of bed.

He could have let Skinner's sneer pass, but not Peter Todd's championship. He knew it was unreasonable—knew that Peter meant well; but it stirred all the obstinacy in him.

"I can't allow this, you fellows!" he said.

"You ain't asked to!" growled Squiff.

"You're not going!"

"Your mistake, Wharton, we are! We're going, even if we have to lay you down and walk over you!"

"Mauly—"

"Oh, begad, Wharton, don't start it all over again—please don't! It's so beastly tiring, y'know."

"Brown—"

"It's no go, Wharton! We've made up our minds."

"Come along, Mauly, you frabjous old ass!" said Squiff.

Wharton stood irresolute, his heart like a live coal within him as he waited for the help that did not come.

Not one of them! Not even Frank or Bob. Not loyal Inky or staunch Mark Linley. Not the Bounder! Peter Todd had spoken up for him when they lay silent; and now not one of them came to his aid!

"Chuck it, Harry!" said Johnny Bull.

That was the last straw. Johnny was the least likely of them all to help him, for he had an independent way of looking at things. But he had not expected Johnny to turn against him!

Without a word more he got back into bed—miserably, heavily.

And, without a word, the three passed out.

"Finis regni Whartonii!" sounded the sneering voice of Skinner.

The end of Wharton's reign! It seemed like it, indeed.

What was there to do after this but resign?

Against such as Bolsover and Skinner and their satellites he could hold his own.

But it was hard when fellows like Peter Todd and Dick Rake and Bulstrode, Squiff and Tom Brown and Mauleverer turned against him.

And now it seemed to him that Johnny Bull had gone over, too, though in truth nothing was farther from Johnny's mind. And the rest—Bob and Frank and Inky and Mark and the Bounder—what had become of their backing? What was it worth?

He lay awake in dull misery, feeling himself utterly deserted.

Around him the rest seemed all to have gone to sleep. It did not matter to them. The three Colonials and Mauly might run their risk; he might lie there wakeful and broken in spirit; but they could sleep!

Bunter's snores irritated him almost beyond endurance. The Owl was at the bottom of all this trouble; but he could go on snoring as if nothing were wrong!

Half an hour or more had passed, and Harry was feeling less like sleep than ever. The slightest sound reached his ears. He was waiting—watching for the return of the four adventurers—eager about them, in spite of everything that had passed.

It would be an untold relief to him to see them safely back.

Delarey, with all his self-willed obstinacy, was the right sort. Squiff and Tom Brown and Mauly—they could all stand by a friend in his need.

Yes, better than his own friends did! Not one of them had lifted hand or voice to help him!

But wasn't there another side to it?

Wasn't some of the blame his?

He knew his chums better than to think for a moment that they had funk'd declaring themselves. It was not that, anyway.

Then they must think him in the wrong!

Was he in the wrong?

Searching his own heart, he could not

deny that at best he had not been entirely in the right.

He had not been justified in his attitude to Delarey that afternoon. Nothing could be much more certain than that the Afrikaner was not in alliance with Skinner. He had acted without evidence, and had blundered badly in doing so.

He had shown foolish annoyance with Squiff and Tom Brown because they had not at once thrown Delarey overboard. But what right had he to expect them to?

To-night he had been right and wrong. Right to protest against the breaking of bounds, wrong to attempt to stop it by force. He might have reported it at once. That would have been correct morally; but he knew that he could never have done it—never have faced the scorn of the Remove for what would have been called sneaking.

And when he had got out to oppose those three, what had been his real motive?

Pique against Peter Todd—resentment that a fellow who, after all, would make a good captain for the Form—he had never denied that—should have dared to challenge his right to the office!

Never had his self-confidence been at a lower ebb. It was all up with him as a leader of the Remove, he thought. A fellow who did the wrong thing when the call for action came—who could not put away petty jealousy—a weak, nerveless specimen, only better than such rotters as Skinner and Snoop because his natural tendencies were unlike theirs!

So, in his self-abasement, he thought of himself; and it may be that to the end of his life Harry Wharton will never forget that dark hour!

It ended suddenly. Somebody was stirring in the dormitory; and Harry sat up in bed, master of his own soul again, ready to act as decidedly as ever, for all his misgivings, and to chance whether he acted rightly, as one must chance it at times!

The moonlight showed him the face of Harold Skinner. Skinner's face, too old for its years in its look of mature cunning, wore a mocking, spiteful grin.

Not for nothing had the cad of the Remove slipped out of bed thus secretly. He meant harm to someone!

In an instant there flashed into Wharton's mind the memory of that night when Bob Cherry had gone out to see his wastrel cousin, Paul Tyrrell, and on his return had found the box-room window fastened against his re-entry.

Not much doubt but that Skinner had done that mean trick! Little room for doubt that he meant something of the same sort again. He might have it in mind to let Wingate know—but that seemed less likely, for the sturdy skipper was down on sneaks.

Harry was in the shadow. Skinner did not see him—did not guess that anyone had witnessed his stealthy exit.

Harry slipped out of bed. He did not even wait to put on any day-clothes over his pyjamas. He thrust his feet into his slippers, and followed silently in Skinner's tracks!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

In Which Everything Does Not Come Right!

HE had guessed aright.

It was towards the box-room that Skinner was making his way.

Not for the cad of the Remove any such bold stroke as reporting the four to Wingate! That would have meant trouble for himself. This could be done in stealthy secret, after the manner he loved.

Noiselessly Wharton followed him.

What an utter rotter the fellow was! Not one of the four had ever done him wrong. They had treated him with pretty consistent contempt, no doubt; but that was his own fault.

Skinner chuckled gloatingly as he pulled to the catch of the box-room window. He stood for a moment looking out into the gloom beyond, for the moonlight did not shine on this side of the house.

Still as a statue stood Harry Wharton. He had meant to clutch Skinner in the moment of his villainy. But something made him stay his hand.

So he waited in bitter cold, scarcely breathing. Why did not Skinner go straight back to bed? He would not have the boldness to stay here till the four returned, surely? No, that was not Skinner's way!

But he had not done yet. This was not the whole of his scheme.

"They can't be long now," Harry heard him mutter.

Then he turned, and Harry followed him, unsuspected still.

Not back to the dormitory—no, he was making his way to Wingate's study!

The Sixth had beds in their studies. If Wingate was aroused by what could be made to seem an accident, it was likely enough that he would pay a visit to the Remove dormitory. And he might run into the returning adventurers on the way; or, if not, he would surely note that their beds were empty, and settle down to watch for their return.

That was Skinner's scheme, Harry fancied. But he could not be quite sure, and until he was sure it seemed folly to attack him.

Skinner was just the fellow to scream out in fright and rouse the whole place.

So he was allowed to steal through the dark passages. And at his heels stole Harry Wharton.

No doubt left! Skinner was at Wingate's door. His hand was upon the knob, and his stealthiness was proof enough that his game was to arouse the skipper and steal away undetected, not stay to give information. It would suit him better to leave something to chance than to face the angry scorn of George Wingate and the certainty of being labelled "sneak"!

Harry sprang forward, and threw his arms around Skinner's neck.

He hoped to stifle any noise the cad

made. But he was only partially successful. The sudden cry of alarm, half-stifled though it was, reached Wingate's ears. The captain of Greyfriars had been lying awake. Like Harry Wharton, he had problems to think out.

The door opened. Wingate stood there in his pyjamas, revealed in the light he had switched on.

"What's this? Who are you?" he asked angrily.

"Ow!" was the only reply Skinner could make.

Harry did not hurry to release him. The case was pretty desperate now; but every second gained gave those four a better chance of escape.

"Wharton! Skinner!" snapped Wingate. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"Ow! Where am I?" gasped Skinner, gazing around him wildly.

"None of that! I'm not to be taken in so easily!" snapped the skipper. "What does this mean, Wharton? You, at least, will tell the truth."

Not all of it! There was a part of the truth which wild horses would not have dragged from Harry Wharton.

"I happened to be awake, Wingate," Harry said slowly, "and I saw Skinner leave the dormitory. It seemed to me that I had better follow him."

"Not a bad idea either, seeing that it was Skinner," said Wingate grimly. "What were you after, Skinner? I suppose you didn't by any chance see Wharton go out and follow him?"

Bunter might have tried so thin a yarn as that, but not Harold Skinner.

The cad of the Remove passed one arm across his eyes, as if he were just awaking. Then he looked down at his trousers, and started in well-feigned astonishment.

"Why, I'm dressed!" he said. "Well, if this isn't a knock-out!"

"Now, what's the game?"

"I must have been walking in my sleep, Wingate! That's the only way I can account for it. And dressed, too! It's a licker—a regular corker! I say, Wharton, I'm no end obliged to you for following me! Nobody knows what danger I might have blundered into."

Did Wingate believe? There was nothing quite impossible in the story, though it might sound unlikely, and Wharton knew it was not true.

"I didn't know you were a somnambulist, Skinner," said the captain, in

rather doubtful tones. "Well, the only thing to be done is for both of you to get back to bed. Wharton, you'll have another spell of the 'flu if you're not careful. Here, put my ulster on, and I'll come up with you to bring it back."

Harry submitted to be muffled up in the stalwart skipper's roomy ulster. It all helped in wasting time.

"I'll bring it back in the morning, Wingate," he said. "No need for you to come."

"I'm coming," said Wingate drily. Harry knew that he suspected something, and that argument would be useless.

But he contrived to waste a little more time. Twice he fell over the ulster on the way up. And he stopped outside the door of the dormitory to take it off, for his quick ears had caught sounds inside which he hoped earnestly had not reached Wingate's.

"Hurry up!" said the skipper impatiently.

Next moment the light showed the Remove dormitory and two empty beds—only two—Harry Wharton's and Harold Skinner's!

It had been touch-and-go with the four. Half a minute earlier, and Wingate would have caught them!

But that they did not know till some time afterwards.

To all but Skinner and Wharton the appearance of Wingate in the dormitory remained for the present an unsolved mystery. Skinner, naturally, did not explain, and Harry would not.

Not a word did he speak to the four. Where they had been—why Delarey had gone out—these things were dark to him. And the reason of Delarey's going was still dark to Delarey's chums—though they and others were to know in due course, as will be told later.

Meanwhile, the events of the night had done nothing to put Harry in better odour with the Form. If he had told them all it might have been otherwise.

But pride stood in the way—a wrongful pride, maybe, but not wholly an unworthy one!

THE END.

(DON'T MISS "COLONIAL CHUMS!"—next Monday's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"COLONIAL CHUMS!"

By Frank Richards.

The mystery of Delarey's breaking bounds after lights-out is made clear in this story. Serious trouble for the Rebel, as the Remove call the South African junior, arises in the Form-room, and still more serious trouble comes about through his cutting detention a little later. Squiff and Tom Brown do all that loyal chums could do to help him; but their efforts fail through no fault of theirs, and things have gone so far that Delarey looks to be booked for the sack. Meanwhile, he and Bob Cherry have quarrelled, and are due to fight in the gym. The story of how Delarey kept that appointment under great difficulties, and of how Sir Jimmy, the schoolboy baronet from a London alma, stood staunchly by him and helped him to keep it, will be told next week.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 478.

THE PAPER SHORTAGE AGAIN.

You Really Must Read Th's!

It is plain now that, so long as the war lasts, there will be difficulty, likely to grow more acute as time goes on, in getting from overseas supplies of even the most necessary articles. Now paper, though very necessary, is less so than food and some other things, and the Government have again placed severe restrictions upon the amount of paper-pulp allowed to be imported.

No one has any right to grumble about that, of course. We can but do our best to obey loyally the orders of the Government, while at the same time trying to avoid losing readers.

In times of peace the system of "returns" entailed making wastepaper of quite a number of copies each week. These were copies which newsagents bid in for chance sales, and failed to sell. Whatever they failed to sell was our loss, not theirs, for they returned the unsold copies, which thus became wastepaper.

It is clear that, if they are not allowed to make returns, they will not get copies for casual sales, for any unsold copies would then be their loss.

Now, in future, in order to economise

on paper, we are going to cut out the system of returns—until such time as paper is again plentiful, at least. Possibly we may never go back to it in quite the old way; in any case, while we are so tied down, we cannot print extra copies on the chance that they will be sold, knowing that, if they are not, the paper is wasted.

I am particularly anxious that no regular reader of the MAGNET shall drop out of the ranks through being unable to get his copy. We want to keep our readers, and we want them to help us and the newsagents by doing what will enable us to print, and the agents to order, the exact number of copies required.

There is only one way of doing th's, and that is for everyone to order in advance. I believe most of you are doing so. I ask you all to do so. Will you tack me up? An order form is printed on the opposite page. If you have not already a standing order, will you fill this up, cut it out, and hand it to your newsagent at once?

YOUR EDITOR.

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 14.—TOM BROWN.

TOM BROWN is every bit as good a fellow as Squiff, but different from him in a good many ways. They are both Colonials, which makes a comparison natural; they are both gifted with a keen sense of humour, which makes it worth while.

But, as no doubt careful readers of the stories have noted, Tom Brown is rather a relisher of japes than an originator of them. He lacks something of Squiff's ability in thinking out a new wheeze, though he is always ready to play his part in anything of the sort, and can certainly keep up his end every bit as well as the next man, whoever that may be.

Squiff hails from New South Wales, which Billy Bunter vainly imagined to be in Victoria. But Bunter's geography was not absolutely inaccurate, though it was a long way behind the times, for New South Wales and Victoria were one Colony until somewhere about sixty or seventy years ago. Bunter went very far wrong, however, when he supposed that New South Wales and New Zealand were practically the same. New Zealand is a long, long way—as we count distances in this little country—from any part of Australia.

It is a fine land, New Zealand—a southern Britain, with a more genial climate than we have. Mr. Rudyard Kipling calls it

“The land of the waiting springtime,”

and the description is a good one. And its people are proud of it—make no mistake about that!

Taranaki, from which Tom Brown hails, is one of the smaller provinces—though the old provinces are now little more than names—in the North Island, which is the warmer of the two big islands. It is a country of big dairy-farms, which exports lots of butter. Not that Tom Brown has much to do with that; he is not a butter-merchant!

He dropped right into the thick of things when he landed at Greyfriars. Billy Bunter, on sponging bent, went to meet him, but missed him—through the manoeuvres of Bulstrode & Co., who sent Snoop, in Christy Minstrel disguise, to represent the new boy at the station. Bunter is no end of a swallower, and it was easy to persuade him that New Zealanders were all either born black, or soon became black, owing to the (quite fictitious) heat of the climate. And Bunter, for once, had money, and Bulstrode & Co. were hard up.

So Bunter was standing treat to Snoop in Uncle Clegg's shop before Tom Brown ran against a Greyfriars fellow. Harry Wharton & Co. had gone to meet the Colonial boy, and on the way had come into collision with their rivals of the Upper Fourth, whose football they had seized and rushed before them to Friarsdale, Temple, Dabney, Fry, and the rest pursuing. The very scratch game was carried on to the platform, where Tom Brown at once took a part in it. He scored his first goal when he kicked the ball through Uncle Clegg's door, greatly disturbing the peace of his personator and Bunter. His second was scored when he kicked the leather straight into the open door of the School House, and hit Mr. Quelch full in the face. His third came later. He had been demonstrating the advantages of the Rucker game to the famous Four—this was before the advent of Johnny Bull—and a neat drop-

kick smote Wingate, entering, full in his rugged countenance.

But little accidents like this are easily excused to a good fellow, and as such Tom Brown was classed from the first. He had always been on friendly terms with the Famous Five, and with Mark Linley, Peter Todd, Squiff, and the best of the Form generally. At the outset he shared No. 13 Study with Bob Cherry, Mark Linley, and Wun Long. But a game of Rucker in that apartment resulted in its being closed for repairs—oh, the mere trifle of a wall being brought down, that was all!—and Tom Brown, taking up quarters with Bulstrode and Hazeldene, has stayed with them ever since. His study-mates suit him now a great deal better than they did then, for at that time Hazeldene was a waster, and Bulstrode more than a bit of a brute.

Tom Brown's most notable fight was with Bulstrode, by the way. The New Zealander resented Bulstrode's over-



Tom Brown

bearing tactics from the first, and the trouble would have come earlier if Harry Wharton and his chums had not done something to keep the bully in order.

When the fight did come, Bunter had something to do with it. The Owl got on the track of a secret—really a perfectly harmless one—of the Colonial's, suspected all sorts of dark and deadly things, and set out to play detective. He told Bulstrode about it. The bully, infuriated with Bunter for some failure chased him, and came upon him with only Tom Brown to see. A little of what he saw was enough for the New Zealander. He put a stop to the game, fought Bulstrode, and thrashed him. The grateful W. G. B. was so far from ceasing his prying that he actually accused his rescuer to Mr. Quelch. But the explanation offered cleared Brown completely.

The good-hearted Colonial fellow was

one of Mark Linley's staunch supporters, and old readers may remember how he got Bulstrode down on the bank of the river, and threatened to roll him in unless he took back the insinuations made against Mark. Bulstrode took them back. In the same story Tom Brown scored over Stott, who had raided a boat belonging to a picnic-party, and was keeping it tantalisingly just out of reach on the river. Tom Brown climbed a tree which overhung, wriggled his way along a branch, and dropped upon the astonished Stott.

The sturdy Colonial does not take it for granted that all Wharton does is right. He is quite capable of taking up an attitude of opposition when it seems to him needed. Thus he backed up the Bounder's claim to a place in the Remove Eleven, on the score of his abilities as a player, when Wharton would have kept him out, on the ground that he was a scheming ratter; and not to be depended upon. Wharton was right, as after events proved, and Tom Brown is not the fellow to mind admitting he is wrong when shown his mistake. But he was solid for Wharton when Bulstrode set up against him for the captaincy. Lately, as will be seen in this week's story and next, he has been in opposition to Wharton again, but regretfully, and not with entire conviction. Such a temporary split is not likely to spoil their friendship.

But Tom Brown's closest chums are his fellow-Colonials, Squiff and Piet Delarey. It is a very natural alliance, and the three pull well together. They have not yet managed to wake up Maulverer, who is a kind of honorary member of the firm; but even that may come some day.

T. B. once figured as a lecturer. Miss Primrose asked him to lecture at Cliff House on his native land. And he began “Dear kids!” But that was a mistake. He was reading from the wrong paper, one wangled in upon him by the enemy, and he was very flustered at the outset. But he pulled himself together, and made good without the aid of notes.

He has done more than good service in the cricket and footer fields. Several times he has stuck in and batted well when the game was at a critical stage, and he is a good fast bowler and a fine field. A sturdy back, too, never afraid of hard knocks, and able to kick with the best.

Moreover, as all readers of the “Greyfriars Herald” can testify, he has literary ability. He is at his best in a story which needs humorous treatment. It is possible to take a quite funny yarn, and to make it a dull thing by writing it with all the humour left out. But Tom Brown does not do that, as “Catching the Caterpillar,” in this week's “Gem,” will serve to show.

On the whole, a representative of whom his island home may well feel proud!

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(Signed)

IN A LAND OF PERIL!

By BEVERLEY KENT,

Author of "Officer and Trooper," "Cornstalk Bob," "A Son of the Sea," etc., etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

Bob Masters arrives in Cape Town to meet his cousin, Jasper Orme. Jasper sends him up country with a scoundrel named Faik, and it is made apparent that Faik and Jasper are in league to put Bob out of the way. Disgusted with Faik's bad treatment, Bob escapes, in company with Ted O'Brien, an Irish boy, and they take with them the map which shows the spot where a treasure is located, and which it was Faik's aim to seize. The two lads push on into the wilds, and are captured by savages. They are imprisoned in a kraal, and food is brought to them by a slave of their captors.

The slave had come to the door. He was staring at both seated inside. His hands had begun to tremble.

"My dream!" he muttered. "My dream by night and by day! Then at last it has come true!"

He stood, the bowl in one hand and the mealies in the other, his lips moving. Ted was about to speak, but Bob grasped his wrist to stay him, and bent forward.

"You are not an enemy of the white men?" he asked.

"No."

"And you are a slave here?"

"Thou hast spoken."

"Then can you help us to escape?"

The other shot a nervous glance at the

"You will return here?" he asked.

"As the snake creeps through the brushwood, so will I come!"

He put down the mealies and the water, and passed the guards, his head bent as if in fear.

Ted drew a deep breath.

"It looks as if things are bucking up!" he said. "That chap knows what he's about. It's funny that he should have been so pleased to see us!"

"There's a story behind all that," Bob replied. "And if we escape, we'll hear it. Evidently a white man—"

"Him of the bare legs!" Ted chuckled.

"Do be serious for once," Bob pleaded.

"I can't, and that's a fact—not when



"The treasure is there!" MacGregor s.i.l.
(See next week's instalment.)

A Friend in Need.

"Ha! A last meal! So shall it be!" was the answer of one of the guards. "Bid them eat well that they may fight hard! Thus shall we find rest in the combat!"

"That's a regular thoughtful gent!" Ted muttered. "Such gluttons for cheering one up I never came across in all my born days! If threats were black-thorns, and bold words could serve for hard knocks— But what are you staring at, my bold pal? And, hi, there! Don't go spilling the water over me!"

guards, who were leaning over their axes with their backs to the kraal. He put his finger to his lips.

"I, Mendi, of the tribe of the Inrobi, will go with thee," he whispered. "For this I have waited—ay, through many moons! Thus will my people once again be united, and the paleface with the bare legs will be avenged. A new white chief shall take his place, and you shall be that chief. O youth of the calm brow and the unflinching eye! To-night we leave this place of the jackals. Be ready!"

Bob nodded.

I feel I'm going to see the last of that old executioner, Kaas-hoki-joki!" Ted rejoined, shaking all over to stifle a loud guffaw. "I'm that happy that I could whoop for sheer joy. And the way he spoke to you. He thinks no end of you, Bob. He's going to make a chief of you. Oh, golly! Will you have to strut about for the rest of your life in bare legs, too? Thank goodness this is a warm climate, anyhow!"

He stuffed his handkerchief into his

(Continued on page 19.)

mouth to save himself from peals of laughter. Bob smiled.

"You're a cheery customer, and it's hard to feel down when you're about," he said. "But do stop that row! You're shaking the whole kraal! And we really must make our plans!"

"I am your servant, O great white chief!" Ted spluttered. "Fire away, and, lo, I will hearken! My ribs are sore, and therefore do I cease from mirth. What's your game?"

He sat up, looking serious and intent.

"Faik's going to be wiped out to-night," Bob said gravely.

"Well, we can't help that," Ted replied.

"Yes, we can!"

"What!"

"I reckon that at least we have a good chance. The indaba yonder is breaking up, and those cold-blooded scoundrels are taking to sharpening their axes. That shows, I reckon, that the vote has gone against Faik. And then there are those decent Kafir boys. They won't get any mercy, either!"

"Not likely!" Ted agreed. "Old Hoki-joki thinks of nothing but putting notches on his beastly axe. Go on! How are two forlorn captives to bowl over all those eagles and vultures? That's what I'm keen to know. They say that we Irish are always spoiling for a row, but—"

"The rifles!" Bob said. "If only this fellow Mendi gets us out of this in time—"

A bright light flashed into Ted's eyes; his whole expression changed. He was as earnest as his chum now.

"Bob, you're a wonder!" he said, with a deep note of admiration. "While I keep on playing the giddy goat, you do the hard thinking. I see what you're driving at. They evidently don't know anything about firearms. Sure, we ought to be able to scare them!"

"That's my idea. They'll go out in force to attack the caravan, and it's then Mendi will come along. If we can overtake them, we'll make a bid, anyhow, to save Faik and the others. As to our tactics, they must depend on what happens. There's no use trying to work them out now."

"Just so. But don't forget the ammunition. We'll want all we can get, for I guess our grub has been devoured by this time, and from this on we'll have to live on the country, as the fighting-men say," Ted replied. "Mealies ain't much catch, but perhaps we'll often be glad of 'em. Now, I vote we have a snooze, for there won't be much rest for us when we get on the trot with Mendi. All these chaps say they are fleet as the wind. He'll be a good 'un to run, anyhow, if Hoki-joki starts after him to get another notch on his axe, and I bet I won't be a bad second, either!"

He stretched himself out at full length, and Bob followed his example. In five minutes they were both sound asleep.

Bob was awakened by a noise like the gnawing of a rat. He sat up and listened intently. Night had come, and the zareba was flooded by moonlight. Dusky figures were flitting from all the kraals towards the centre, and the warriors were forming up for the attack. The gnawing continued.

In puzzlement the lad looked around. He could not locate the sound. Then, to his amazement, he saw a hand moving at the back of the kraal. He put out his arm, and gripped it. The fingers closed tightly on his in friendly pressure. At once he aroused Ted.

"Mendi is burrowing his way in here," he whispered. "The time has come!"

The two guards, their tall figures plain to see in the moonlight, stood rigid as statues. The least rustle would direct

their attention now, in the great stillness that had come with nightfall. Every second Bob feared that they might hear Mendi.

As he waited, his heart thumping hard, between anxiety and hope, the warriors in a body glided out of the zareba, as noiselessly as if they were evil spirits.

Mendi toiled on, and the two lads could only wait in suspense. The hole Mendi was cutting grew larger and larger. At last his head and shoulders appeared through it, and the white teeth in his dusky face shone in a smile of triumph. He beckoned.

They took their rifles, and crawled silently to the orifice. They wriggled through without disturbing the guards, and followed Mendi, who, stomach to ground, glided off rapidly.

Sometimes he stopped, and looked back to encourage them. They tried to wriggle along as he was doing, but knew that their movements were clumsy in comparison. But they all got safely to an orifice in the zareba, which he had also made ready. Then—the open country. They were free!

Mendi was for moving off at once, but Bob stopped him. Tapping his rifle, he explained about the ammunition. To his joy, Mendi did not seem in the least reluctant to re-enter the zareba and secure it. Bidding them wait, he disappeared through the orifice again.

After an anxious time for them, he returned with the boxes, and Bob told what was in his mind. Mendi protested.

"White chief, you do not know these night hawks," he urged. "They never cease to pursue. For many days and nights they will follow us. How can we escape if we do not leave many miles between them and us before daybreak?"

But Bob was firm, and Ted backed him up with all his force.

"We white men risk all for those of our colour," he said.

"And not an inch are we going to budge till we do the trick," Ted added. "Make up your mind quickly, Mendi, old sport! Cut off without us, and your tribe will weep, for my pal will never go with bare legs if you do!"

"I go but to return, and slay them all in my own time," Mendi urged. "Is not that satisfaction enough?"

"Not for him of the calm brow and the unflinching eye, nor for me of the tawny hair and blunt proboscis," Ted retorted. "Mendi, my son, we're going to follow the crowd, and shoot 'em from afar! Go thy ways if thou wilt; then truly I blush

for thee. Follow us; or, rather, go before to guide us. Thus shall we three hold together!"

Mendi raised both arms.

"Thou hast spoken!" he groaned; and he turned towards the river.

"I'm getting rather fed-up with that phrase," Ted grunted. "I wish these fellows would invent something fresh. Are you sure your rifle is loaded, Bob? And is there any use we can make of this chap?"

"We'll see in a moment. I've looked to my rifle," Bob replied. "Ha! He doesn't funk taking us. Do you see the outfit yonder?"

"I do, and the scoundrels are creeping towards it!" Ted said excitedly.

"Then we must press on!"

They walked very rapidly. Before long they broke into a run, and they were still half a mile from the caravan when they heard a piercing shriek of terror that sent the blood ebbing from their hearts. The savages had begun the attack!

Now, reckless of their own danger, they rushed on faster still. They could see the Kafirs dashing out of the kraal and fleeing across the veldt in all directions. They heard the yelling of the savages, and they thought they distinguished the voice of Kaasohiki urging them on. They wondered much what already had happened to Faik.

"Ted, we must both keep between the outfit and the river," Bob said. "Those who get clear out on to the veldt have a chance of escape. Those who rush for the river are certain to be caught. Get away to the left, lie down, and fire when you get the signal."

"And what's the signal to be?" asked Ted.

Bob turned to Mendi.

"Can you give the hoot of the owl?" he asked.

Mendi smiled.

"Who better?" he asked.

"Good! Then Mendi will come with me," Bob said. "I'm off to the right. When you hear the hoot, do you fire, but not before. Now, Mendi, come!"

He raced away. He lay down, his rifle to his shoulder. He heard another yell, and saw Faik being dragged out of the zareba in the grip of half a dozen savages and Kaasohiki brandishing his axe in his face.

"The hoot of the owl, Mendi!" Bob cried. "There's just a chance that we may save him yet."

(Continued on page 20.)

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IN A LAND OF PERIL.

(Continued from page 19.)

Fight and Flight!

The hoot of an owl rang through the air. It was the call of Mendi, warning Ted to fire. It was still ringing when the sharp bark of Bob's rifle startled the savages, with whom Faik fought desperately. Kaasohiki, swinging his axe round his head to strike the fatal blow, uttered an ear-piercing yell, flung up the axe, swayed, and fell.

Crack! Crack!

At this moment Ted's rifle away to the left sent a couple of bullets amongst the other savages. One of them yelled, and danced about on one foot. The others saw, to their amazement, that the calf of his left leg had been wounded, and as they looked around in bewilderment a bullet lodged in the arm of a man still holding Faik.

"Bewitched! Bewitched!"

With cries they scattered and fled. Faik saw his chance of escape. He turned and dashed in amongst the waggons. Bob and Ted continued firing, and the savages ran wildly to and fro in utter bewilderment. The lads went on firing, to give Faik time to get away. At length Bob jumped up.

"Mendi, show us the way out of this!" he said. "It is time that we thought of ourselves."

"That is true," Mendi said, and together they ran to the spot whence Ted, lying on the ground, fired rapidly.

"Come on!" Bob cried. "We're going to clear out!"

They hurried to the boxes of ammunition, and picked them up.

"Now, Mendi, take the lead!" Bob said. "We depend on you."

The dark boy broke into a long, swinging trot, and the two white lads kept close at his heels. Bob, looking back once, saw that the savages had gathered together, and were consulting. Before long they would get on the scent.

"You saw Kaasohiki fall?" Bob said, as he and Ted trotted side by side.

"Yes, and he's not dead," Ted replied. "He kept moving when on the ground, and he'll live to pay us out, I guess."

Mendi held on by the river. For three miles they ran, and they never ceased to hear the shouts of the savages. It was clear that they were being steadily pursued. With the boxes they were carrying they could not hope to outpace the pursuers. They were nearly exhausted; only their dogged courage enabled them to keep on.

Sometimes Mendi looked back. It seemed as if he was making some mental calculation, but they were too worn out to ask questions. On and on they went, and the shouts behind grew louder. How was it that the savages had been able to get on their trail so soon?

The explanation came at a moment when they had almost despaired of escape. Already their pursuers had seen them, and were pressing on faster, with loud shouts of triumph, when Mendi stopped at a big bush by the riverside and pulled out a canoe. He had been making for this, and the savages had divined the intention.

Bob and Ted dropped the boxes into the canoe, and stepped into it. Mendi jumped in last, pushed off from the bank, and seized a paddle. The canoe was only a few yards out when an axe splashed into the water a foot away. A score of savages yelled from the bank. But a few strokes of the paddles sent them well out into the river, safe from pursuit.

For some minutes no word was spoken. Bob and Ted sat with their hands to their heads, their chests heaving; Mendi swiftly paddled. At last Bob looked up.

"Are there any other canoes these fellows can get?" he asked.

Mendi nodded.

"There are many," he said; "but they must go back a long way to fetch them."

"I wonder what's happened to Faik?" Ted said.

"I expect he's got away," Bob replied. "If he could have got to his horse he's safe. But, of course, they'll loot the waggons and take his bullocks. He's out of the hunt now; he must work his way back to Cape Town as best he can. He will have to give up all hope of finding the treasure."

"Seems like it; and I haven't the least pity for him," Ted remarked. "He has got more than he deserved if he has escaped with his life, and he owes that to us. He brought us here to be useful to him till the treasure was found, and I'm quite sure he never meant either of us to get back."

"I think so, too," Bob affirmed. "I understand now what at first puzzled me. My cousin, Jasper Orme, is a villain! He had all this fixed up the day I landed at Cape Town; almost as soon as he met me he told me that I was to go into the veldt next day."

Ted chuckled.

"They've slipped up badly," he replied. "We may yet get hold of that treasure ourselves. We've got the map, and—"

Bob drew a deep breath.

"We'll keep on looking for the treasure, but just now we're rather up in the air, aren't we?" he asked. "Don't build your hopes too high, Ted. We're bound, in the first place, to stand by Mendi until we get him back to his people."

"Of course we are," Ted agreed; "and we don't even know where his tribe lives. The map points out that the lake is to the north-east, and if he takes us in the opposite direction—"

"Well, we can find out that at once," Bob cut in. "Hi, Mendi! Where does this great tribe of the Inrobi live?"

"Far away, great white chief, yet near enough for us to return and slay all these jackals," Mendi replied.

"That's not very clear," Ted commented. "And we've other work on hand besides helping you in your schemes of revenge. Can you tell us how long it will take before we come up with your crowd?"

"The moon will change into a ball, and then vanish, and then grow to the size of a ball again e'er we reach the land where are my people," Mendi replied.

"That means about six weeks' travelling," Bob remarked.

"And we'll have to find grub as best we can," Ted said. "The prospect ain't very cheerful, but it might be worse. And I say, Mendi," he continued, "shall we be on the river all the time?"

The black boy shook his head.

"The river goes into the earth, and then we must walk," he said. "For many days we walk, and, lo! we then see the lake. This we pass, and—"

"The lake!" both Britishers cried together.

"I have spoken."

"Oh, drop that silly talk!" Ted cried, exasperated. "You have spoken, true enough, but you've got to speak a good bit more. Where is this lake, and what sort of a lake is it?"

"It is as all lakes, in which one may catch the yellow fish and beware of the crocodiles," Mendi explained. "And by the banks there are water-ducks and guinea-fowl and bustard. 'Twas from there the whiteface of the bare legs

found his way to our kraal. And he was limping because of what the lion did to him."

Bob leant forward with shining eyes.

"Tell us more about this lake," he said.

"There are things of which it is not well to speak," the black boy replied. "For evil spirits hear where they are not seen; yet at thy bidding I will tell what I know. The lake is called Bana, and at night, when the wind blows, it rises mountains high."

"Then it is very large?"

"How large it may be I do not know, for my tribe only cross it where one can see from shore to shore. But strange tribes live upon its banks, and some we have found dead, drowned by the cruel waters. And there are tales—"

He broke off, as if afraid to continue.

"Go on!" Bob insisted. "We would hear all."

"Some of my people have dared to cross when the storm raged, and they have been swept away," Mendi continued; "yet have we seen them again ten months later."

"And they were dead?"

"That is so; and they have come back close to our kraal. They always come back to the one spot, and it was there we saw the whiteface. The bodies of those whose spirits are taken by the wind and the waves always return."

"An under-current!" Bob remarked to Ted. "And tell me, Mendi," he continued, "have you ever heard of a strange people who lived on this lake?"

The black boy nearly dropped the paddle in his surprise.

"None can live on it, but there are those who have tried," he replied. "Foolish ones who seek more than is good. What need of more than herds of oxen? Yet greed is everywhere. Thus often hath my father said."

"And why did anyone try to live on the lake?" Bob pursued.

"For that which they thought below it, by the old tales."

"Tell us something about those tales."

"They are folly, all of them. Can there be a great city under the water?"

The two Britishers looked questioningly at one another. Every moment their interest had increased, and Mendi's last question fairly amazed them.

"A city under the water!" Ted murmured. "That fairly takes my breath away. Surely this can't be true."

"Sounds a bit of a stretch," Bob agreed. "The question seems to be if the lake was always there. Perhaps there was once a city, and an earthquake happened along, and brought the water down on top of it."

"It's possible, I suppose, but it sounds a bit far-fetched, doesn't it?" Ted asked, with a grin. "Anyhow, is this the lake that is marked on Faik's map? Hi, Mendi! Whither do we go to reach this lake?"

The black boy pointed to some stars.

"North-east!" Bob gasped. "It looks like the lake we seek. To-morrow we will ask him more. Let us pull up here. We're all dead fagged, I guess."

(Another splendid instalment next week.)

FOOTBALL MATCHES WANTED.

HILDEN JUNIORS (12-17)—12-mile r.—T. Hawthorne, 76, Bridge St., Hilden, Lisburn.

TENTERFIELD ROVERS A.F.C. (15)—7-mile r.—W. Wightman, 50, Parkfield Terr., Norden, Rochdale.

LAWRENCE JUNIORS (15)—3-mile r.; also need good players.—E. Jones, 6, Scholar St., Wavertree, Liverpool.

HOLY TRINITY (15)—2-mile r., away matches only.—C. McDougall, 44, Castlewood Rd., Anfield, Liverpool.

