

THE FALL OF THE BOUNDER!

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



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

THE FALL OF THE BOUNDER!

By Frank Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Called Over the Coals!

HARRY WHARTON tapped at the door of Vernon-Smith's study, in the Remove passage at Greyfriars, and looked in.

Wharton was in flannels, and he had a cat under his arm.

"Coming out, Smithy?"

Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, stood at the open study window, from which he had a view of part of the quadrangle and the playing-fields.

His hands were driven deep into his pockets, and his brows very darkly knitted. He was staring out grimly into the quadrangle, that shimmered below in the afternoon sunshine.

He did not hear Wharton, and he did not turn his head. Wharton glanced across at him curiously.

"Smithy, old scout!"

The Bounder started, and looked round.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Anything up?" asked Harry.

"No."

"You looked just then as if you'd got a good half of the troubles of the world on your shoulders," said Wharton, with a smile.

"Oh, rot!" said the Bounder.

The captain of the Remove gave him a rather sharp look. From of old he knew that the Bounder's temper was sometimes a little uncertain.

"Well, are you coming out?" he asked.

"We're going down to cricket practice."

"I—I think I'd rather not just now," said Vernon-Smith hesitatingly.

"Redclyffe match to-morrow, you know," said Harry.

"Oh, I'm in form!"

"You're always in form," said Wharton, with a nod. "A jolly good thing for the Remove Eleven, too. We shall be depending on you a lot this season."

"Rather different from old times," said the Bounder, with a grim smile. "It's not so very long since you wouldn't have me in the Form Eleven at any price."

"Oh, that's ancient history! I don't think I was wrong, then," said Harry, colouring a little. "I thought that was all forgotten, Smithy. You don't mean to say you've been thinking over old troubles like that?"

The Bounder forced a laugh.

"No; it's all right. But I won't come out just now; I'm not feeling inclined for cricket."

"Right-ho!" said Harry. He was about to step out of the study when his glance fell on the table. On the table lay a cardboard box; and from the look of the box Harry did not need telling what it contained. He started.

Vernon-Smith followed his startled glance, and burst into a laugh.

"All serene!" he said. "The smokes are not mine. That box belongs to my

cheery study-mate, Skinner. He goes in for doggishness, you know."

"Silly ass, to leave them in sight like that!" said Wharton drily. "Anybody might come up to the study."

"I happened to turn them out, going through the table drawer for my fountain-pen," explained Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton nodded, and left the study. Bob Cherry's powerful voice was bawling to him from the stairs.

Vernon-Smith turned back to the window.

His brow was knitted and gloomy. His thoughts, whatever they were, did not seem to be pleasant. From the window he watched the Famous Five crossing to Little Side—Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Squiff and Tom Brown and Delarey were with them—a cheery crowd.

But the Bounder's thoughts were not with the cricketers. He was a really keen cricketer, and he had done good work for the Form Eleven. But other thoughts were in his mind now—thoughts of the old days when he had earned the nickname that still clung to him—when he was the reckless Bounder of Greyfriars, and lived up to it.

It was a meeting that afternoon with an old acquaintance that had put his mind upon this train of thought. The keering face of Jerry Hawke, the book-maker, had brought back old times to his mind—old times associated with reckless rascality, doubtless, but also with the excitement and sense of danger that was like the wine of life to the Bounder. His thoughts wandered to the snug little parlour at the Cross Keys—the glimmering cards, the little piles of money, the excitement and the peril of it all, that he had once enjoyed so keenly.

"Well bowled!"

It was a shout from Little Side, and the Bounder looked up. Hurree Singh had lowered Bob Cherry's wicket, and the juniors were cheering him. That shout woke an echo in the Bounder's breast.

His face cleared, and he drew a deep, deep breath.

"You fool!" he muttered, addressing himself. "You duffer! After getting clear of it all, to think— Oh, you duffer! Nothing of that sort for me again! I've started fresh, and I'll stick it. It may be a bit dull at times, but I'm going to stick it out!"

The Bounder had undergone real temptation. But he had made up his mind. He looked round the study for his bat, with the intention of scudding down to Little Side and joining the cricketers—where he would have been warmly welcomed.

There was a tap at the door, and it opened.

"Just coming!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, I didn't know it was you, sir!"

It was Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, who entered the study.

The Form-master's brow was stern, and Vernon-Smith wondered what had brought him there, and why his brow was so grimly bent.

And at the same moment there flashed into his mind the thought that the box of cigarettes was still on the table, exposed to view.

The reform of the Bounder had not robbed him of his old cunning and resource. He moved a little, and stood with his back to the table, so that the tell-tale box was screened by his person from the Form-master's sight. He devoutly hoped that Mr. Quelch would not stay long. He could not even guess what had brought the Form-master there.

"Vernon-Smith"—Mr. Quelch's voice was stern, but not unkindly—"I have a very serious matter to speak to you about!"

"Yes, sir," said the Bounder.

"This afternoon, Vernon-Smith, you were seen in conversation with a disreputable character—"

The Bounder started violently.

Mr. Quelch did not miss the start, or the change that came over the Bounder's face. His own face became harder.

"This man, Hawke, has a most enviable reputation," said Mr. Quelch. "There was a time, Vernon-Smith, when your conduct was so reckless that it came under the stern reprobation of the Head. You confessed your faults, and were pardoned. You had at that time acquaintance with certain disreputable persons, of whom this man Hawke was one. I firmly believed that you had kept your promise of amendment."

"I have kept it, sir," said the Bounder calmly.

"I trust so—I believe so. Then what does your meeting this afternoon with Hawke imply?"

"Who says I met him?" asked the Bounder sullenly.

"I saw you myself, from a distance, while returning across the fields from the vicarage," said Mr. Quelch sternly.

The Bounder bit his lip.

"Were you about to deny it, Vernon-Smith?"

"No, sir."

"I hope not. But your action requires explanation."

"There's nothing to explain," said Vernon-Smith quietly. "I was coming home from a walk when Hawke spoke to me. He has been away from this neighbourhood for a long time. He had the cheek to speak to me—quite against my wish."

"In that case, you should have left him instantly."

"He told me he was hard up, and asked me if I would help him with a pound or so," said Vernon-Smith. "I refused, and he left me. That's all, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked at him searchingly.

"I don't see why I should be catechised

"Like this, sir!" said Vernon-Smith, with bitterness in his tone. "If it were Wharton or Cherry or Field—"

"Wharton or Cherry or Field never transgressed as you have done, Vernon-Smith," said the Remove-master coldly. "However, I accept your explanation, and will only say that you have acted incautiously."

The Remove-master had moved a step or two towards the window. Vernon-Smith moved also, to keep between the Form-master and the tell-tale box on the table.

Mr. Quelch turned towards the door again.

The Bounder moved along the table once more, keeping between the Form-master and the box with as careless an air as he could assume. Mr. Quelch stopped.

The Bounder's heart sank as he read the quick, sharp suspicion in his eyes.

Mr. Quelch was as sharp as a needle. He stepped towards the table.

"Kindly stand aside, Vernon-Smith!"

"Mr. Quelch—"

"Unless I am mistaken, you are concealing something from me," said the Form-master sternly. "Stand aside!"

There was no help for it. The Bounder, with compressed lips, stepped aside, and Mr. Quelch uttered a sharp exclamation as his eyes fell upon the box of cigarettes.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

At the Cross-roads!

VERNON-SMITH stood silent, his heart throbbing a trifle faster than usual. The discovery could not have come at a more unlucky moment. The rules against smoking were very strict at Greyfriars, and any foolish and thoughtless fellow found with cigarettes in his possession was certain to be hauled over the coals. But in the Bounder's case it was not merely thoughtlessness that would be suspected. What was discovered would be taken as a sign of a great deal more that was undiscovered. His old reputation, and his recent meeting with Jerry Hawke, the bookmaker, made the matter into a more serious one.

"Cigarettes!" said Mr. Quelch, taking up the box. "You have been smoking, Vernon-Smith?"

"No, sir."

"You had these cigarettes here for that purpose, I suppose? Vernon-Smith, this places the matter in a new light. You have told me that you met Hawke by accident, and did not wish to speak to him. Immediately afterwards I find in your study a box of cigarettes, which you were endeavouring to conceal from me. What do you expect me to conclude?"

"The cigarettes are not mine, sir."

"Indeed! Skinner is your study-mate. Do you state that this box belongs to Skinner?"

No answer.

Whatever the Bounder's faults—and he had plenty—he was not a sneak. No punishment in prospect would have induced him to utter a word that would have given up even a worthless fellow like Skinner to punishment.

"You have not answered me, Vernon-Smith?"

"I have nothing to say, sir."

"What you have said implies an accusation against your study-mate. I shall question Skinner."

"I've said nothing against Skinner, sir."

"The cigarettes were not, I presume, placed in the study by a person who does not use the room?" said Mr. Quelch sharply.

The Bounder did not reply.

"Follow me to my study, Vernon-Smith!"

Mr. Quelch rustled out of Study No. 4, and the Bounder followed him in grim silence, with darkly-set brows and gleaming eyes. His breast was full of bitterness and resentment. This was his reward, then, for resisting temptation, and holding to the right path in spite of secret urgings to return to the old bad ways! Had he been cooler, the Bounder would doubtless have seen that Mr. Quelch was taking the only course open to him. But he was not cool—he was hot with resentment.

Mr. Quelch stopped to speak to a junior in the hall, and told him to find Skinner and send him in. The junior, who happened to be Ogilvy of the Remove, looked curiously at the Bounder's face, and went in search of Skinner. Mr. Quelch entered his study, and stood silent, his hand resting on the table, while he waited for Skinner to come. The Bounder stood like a statue.

of it. Skinner's conscience was an elastic one; but a direct lie troubled it a little, and he was not feeling comfortable.

The Remove-master turned again to Vernon-Smith, who had listened with a sarcastic curl to his lips. He had not expected Skinner to admit the truth—indeed, Skinner had not been told that Vernon-Smith was suspected, and he probably did not realise, in his alarm, that he was throwing his own fault on the shoulders of his study-mate.

"You have heard what Skinner said, Vernon-Smith. Do you still deny that the cigarettes are yours?"

"Yes, sir."

"Vernon-Smith, you have placed yourself under very grave suspicion, as you must see. Your past misdeeds have been forgiven, but you cannot expect them to be forgotten. It is your duty, and should be your care, to keep yourself above all possible suspicion. Yet this afternoon I have seen you in conversation with a disreputable betting-man,



"There's your way out, Wharton!" (See Chapter 6.)

Skinner of the Remove looked in at the open door, his narrow face uneasy in its expression.

"You sent for me, sir?" murmured Skinner, his eyes falling on the cigarette-box in Mr. Quelch's hand.

"Yes, Skinner. I have found a box of cigarettes in the study you share with Vernon-Smith."

Skinner was quite on his guard now.

"Cigarettes, sir!" he exclaimed, opening his eyes wide. "Surely not, sir!"

"Yes, Skinner. Were they your property?"

"My property! How could they be, sir, when we are not allowed to smoke?" said Skinner, in seeming astonishment.

"I am asking you a direct question, Skinner, and I require a direct answer. Do these cigarettes belong to you?"

"No, sir," said Skinner, driven to the lie direct at last.

"You did not take them into the study?"

"Certainly not!"

"Very well. You may go, Skinner."

Skinner left the study, glad to get out

and in your study you were attempting to conceal this box of cigarettes from my sight, which is presumptive proof that they were your property. Without absolute proof, Vernon-Smith, I shall not punish you. But I warn you, plainly, that your conduct will be kept under observation, and, in the circumstances, I consider it advisable for you to remain within school bounds until further orders."

The Bounder's lips set tightly.

"Until you receive permission from me, therefore, you will remain within gates," said Mr. Quelch quietly. "If you are guilty of nothing but carelessness, this is not a heavy punishment. If you are guilty of worse, it is very light. You may go!"

"So I am to be gated?" said the Bounder.

"I have said so."

"Very well, sir."

Vernon-Smith spoke very quietly, and he quitted the study without another word. The Form-master looked after

him with knitted brows and a doubtful expression was on his face. Had the wayward junior, whose nature was so curious a mixture of good and evil, kept his promise of reform—the promise he had made when he was allowed to remain at Greyfriars after the discovery of his transgressions? Or had he been playing a cunning part, and deceiving the master whose suspicions he had lulled to sleep?

But Vernon-Smith was not thinking of the doubt in the Form-master's mind, or the difficulty of his position. He was only thinking that this was the reward of playing the game—suspicion, distrust, that seemed to have no end. He could not have prevented Jerry Hawke from speaking to him. He certainly had had no hand in Skinner's smuggling cigarettes into the study. But he was gated, and under observation!

His eyes blazed at the thought. "By gad," he muttered, as he strode savagely out into the quadrangle—"by gad! If I am going to be suspected, they shall have something to suspect me of! If I'm to be gated in the daytime, I'll make up for it after lights-out! By gad!"

He did not join the cricketers now. With dark brows, he paced to and fro under the elms, thinking. His face grew darker and darker as he thought. Never had the old life, which he had abandoned, seemed so attractive to him. The path of reform was an uphill one for a fellow like Vernon-Smith. He knew how gladly his old associates would welcome him back—Jerry Hawke, Mr. Joliffe of the Cross Keys, Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe, and the rest. They would greet him with open arms. He was suspected, he was detained within school gates, he was to be watched! Why not have the game as well as the name?

A sudden slap on the shoulder interrupted the Bounder's black reflections, and he spun round with an angry exclamation. Bob Cherry grinned at him cheerily. The Co. had come away from cricket practice.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob. "Working out a mathematical problem in your napper, without the aid of a net—what?"

The Bounder forced a smile. "We're going over to Cliff House, Smithy," said Harry Wharton. "You're coming, you know."

Vernon-Smith started. "I can't come." "Oh, rot!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "We're going to help Marjorie and Clara with their merry potato-patch, and you've got to come, Smithy. Don't be a slacker!"

"I can't come," repeated the Bounder. "I'm gated." "Gated! What the dickens for?" asked Nugent.

"Nothing."

"Ahem!" said Wharton. "Nothing much, I suppose, you mean?"

"Nothing at all," said Vernon-Smith. "Quelchy is pleased to be down on me. I'm gated—till further orders."

"That's hard cheese," said Wharton, puzzled. "I don't quite see—"

He paused. Harry Wharton knew very well that Mr. Quelch would not be unjust, and he did not know what to make of the matter.

"The hardness of the cheese is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But what is the causefulness?"

"Quelchy found cigarettes in my study, and I tried to keep him from seeing them, so as not to get Skinner into a row. That's all."

"Oh!" said Harry.

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"And Jerry Hawke spoke to me in the fields to-day, and asked me for money. I told him to go and eat coke. Quelchy saw us—but didn't hear us. I dare say he thinks I was making bets with the fellow," said Vernon-Smith, with a sour smile.

"Dash it all, it must have looked suspicious, taken all together!" said Johnny Bull with a quick look at the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith caught the look, and smiled sarcastically.

"To you, as well as Quelchy?" he sneered. "Thanks!"

"Oh, no," said Johnny Bull, after a moment or two of deliberate thought. "I don't think that of you, Smithy. If I did, I'd say so quick enough."

"Well, I can't come to Cliff House," said Vernon-Smith. "Don't let me delay you. Ta-ta!"

He walked away before any of the juniors could reply, leaving the Famous Five somewhat nonplussed. He almost ran into Hazeldene of the Remove as he crossed the quad, and Hazel stopped him, with a laugh.

"Aren't you coming along, Smithy?"

"No; I'm gated."

"Rotten luck! Marjorie says you're the best of the bunch on the potato-patch," said Hazel. They'll be disappointed if you don't come."

The Bounder gave him a curious look. There had been a time when Hazel's sister, Marjorie, had regarded him with aversion and distrust, and feared his influence over her weak-natured brother. His reform had won him Marjorie's frank friendship, and he had prized it. And now, Marjorie would be disappointed if he did not go! But he could not go!

"Sorry!" he said. "Tell them it's not my fault."

"Right-ho!" said Hazel, laughing. "It never is our fault, is it, if we're gated? Innocent and long-suffering youths—what? Ha, ha!"

And he ran off to join Harry Wharton & Co.

Vernon-Smith went indoors, and up to his study. He found Skinner there, and the latter looked at him rather uneasily.

"I—I say, Smithy—" Skinner spoke hesitatingly. "Did Quelchy jump on you over those fags?"

"Yes."

"You didn't give me away?"

"No."

"Good for you, Smithy! You always were a good sort. Did you get licked?"

"Gated."

"Well, that's not so bad. I was looking for a licking when I saw the box in Quelchy's paw."

"You don't feel inclined to own up to Quelchy?" said the Bounder, looking at him.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Skinner. The Bounder laughed.

"Got a smoke about you?" he asked.

"Yes; I've got a few left."

"Give a fellow one, then."

Skinner started.

"You don't smoke now—you chucked it long ago! What's your little game, Smithy?"

"Oh, give me a fag, and don't jaw!" Skinner, in amazement and wonder, passed a cigarette to his study-mate. Vernon-Smith lighted it, and blew out a cloud of smoke. Skinner's surprised face broke into a grin.

"So you've been spoofing all this time, Smithy? Well, I can say, for one, that you never really took me in."

"You're a sharp chap, Skinner!" said Vernon-Smith, with bitter sarcasm.

"Well, I've got my eye-teeth cut," Skinner said complacently. "You

never quite pulled the wool over my eyes, old scout! Give us a match!"

And Skinner lighted a cigarette, too.

The Bounder threw himself into a chair, his eyes glinting through the little spirals of smoke. He might have been at Cliff House with the chums of the Remove, helping the girls with their gardening. And here he was, smoking in his study instead, in the old black-guardly way. Whose fault was it? He was gated! No one could have realised more clearly than Vernon-Smith how much Marjorie Hazeldene, with her sweet and candid friendship, had helped him to keep to the straight path. Her influence had been unconscious, but none the less real. But that influence was gone now—Cliff House was out of bounds for him. Mr. Quelch knew nothing of that. The Bounder would not be meeting the glance of those clear, calm eyes, difficult to meet with shady secrets on one's mind. He smiled bitterly at the thought.

Skinner was watching him curiously.

Although Skinner declared that he had never quite believed in the Bounder's reform, he was puzzled. He wondered how far this new development was destined to go, and he put the matter to the test.

"I say, Smithy, there's a little party on at the Cross Keys to-night."

"Well?"

"I'm going after lights-out."

"Good luck!"

"Will you come?"

There was no reply for a moment or two. The Bounder smoked on in silence.

"It will be rather jolly," said Skinner.

"Several fellows you know there—old Ponsonby, for one, and Gaddy and Monson—you'd better come, Smithy. They'll be jolly glad to see you."

"I'm your man!" said the Bounder quietly.

"Good egg!" said Skinner, with much satisfaction. "It will be like old times, Smithy—the merry old times—what?"

The die was cast!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Price of Folly!

HARRY WHARTON glanced sharply at the Bounder the next morning when the Remove turned out of bed at the clang of the rising-bell.

Vernon-Smith did not look his usual self.

Wharton remembered Smithy in his old reckless days—how he had sometimes looked in the morning after a night out.

The Bounder had a constitution that seemed to be of iron, but the loss of sleep and feverish excitement in a close and foul atmosphere told even upon him.

He looked now as Wharton had seen him look a term or two before—but more so.

His face was pale, his eyes heavy and dull, and he moved with slackness in every motion.

"Feeling seedy, Smithy?" called out Bob Cherry cheerily.

"No!" snapped the Bounder.

"By Jove! You look it, then!"

"Oh, rot!"

"Thanks!" said Bob drily. "Got any more civil remarks to make?"

The Bounder grunted, and turned to his washstand. It was not difficult to see that Smithy was in a bad temper that morning.

Skinner looked more seedy than the Bounder. He groaned dismally as he rubbed his face, and answered with

average snappishness to several humorous remarks the juniors made to him. "I say, you fellows, Skinner's been out on the tiles!" chuckled Billy Bunter. "He, he, he!"

"Had a good time, Skinner?" grinned Snoop.

"Ripping, to judge by his looks!" snorted Tom Brown.

"The ripfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Do you feel very merryful this morning, my esteemed Skinner?"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Skinner. "You blessed toad!" said Squiff. "If I'd woke up and caught you breaking bounds I'd have swiped you with a pillow!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"Have you been out, Skinner?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Find out!"

"I fancy Quelch will find out, when he sees your chivvy!" said the captain of the Remove drily.

Skinner growled, and rubbed harder at his face, trying to bring some colour into it.

The Bounder dressed, and went down by himself, leaving the dormitory in a buzz. Smyth's looks had not escaped notice, and as it was pretty clear that Harold Skinner had been out of bounds overnight, the Removites naturally wondered whether the Bounder had been with him.

They had been companions in shady adventures at one time; but that was supposed to be a thing of the past for the Bounder.

Skinner joined Vernon-Smith in the quadrangle. The latter was already looking better, but Skinner was pale and seedy and slack. Smyth glanced at him with the old sarcastic smile.

"You'd better buck up a bit before Quelch sees you!" he remarked. "You look like a washed rag!"

"I feel like one!" mumbled Skinner. "You were a silly ass to keep it up so late, Smyth! I wanted to come away at twelve."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. "Might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb!" he said.

"Don't you feel seedy?" asked Skinner.

"Yes. Rotten!"

"You're playing cricket to-day."

"Oh, I shall be all right by the afternoon!" said Vernon-Smith carelessly. "You won't, Skinner!"

"I feel as if I sha'n't be all right for a week!" said the unhappy blade dolorously.

"Better go sick," said Vernon-Smith. "Take the bull by the horns, you know! Tell Quelch you feel queer, and couldn't sleep last night—you think it must be the tinned fish you ate yesterday!"

"My hat! I shouldn't have thought of that!" said Skinner, with a faint grin. "I suppose I'd better—he's bound to notice my chivvy. Blessed if I'll ever stay up to two in the morning again! It's not good enough!"

Vernon-Smith laughed, and strolled away. The fresh morning air was reviving him. He was made of sterner stuff than Skinner. But he was still feeling very heavy and slack when he came in to breakfast.

He noticed that Harry Wharton's eyes rested on him once or twice, and he wondered whether Wharton suspected. He shrugged his shoulders at the thought. He was not answerable to Wharton.

Mr. Quelch did notice Skinner's seedy looks as soon as he came into the Form-room that morning.

Skinner pleaded sickness, and was sent off to the village to see the doctor at once. He had a stroll through the sum-

mer lanes instead of lessons that morning; but he did not enjoy it much. Neither did he enjoy the medicine the medical gentleman gave him, which he had to take. But that was part of the price he had to pay for being doggish.

Morning lessons over, the Greyfriars fellows were free for the day, as it was Wednesday—a half-holiday.

The juniors came out in great spirits into the sunny quadrangle. Vernon-Smith was not feeling very chirpy, however. Even upon his iron frame his foolish excesses had told heavily.

"Feeling fit?" asked Harry Wharton, as he met him in the quad.

"Why shouldn't I be feeling fit?" asked the Bounder irritably.

"The Redclyffe team will be here soon after dinner," Wharton said. "If you feel up to the game, all serene!"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, you don't look very fit!" said Wharton bluntly. "You know I want you in the team; but if you don't feel up to a tough game, tell me so, and I'll play Rake. We don't want Redclyffe to beat us."

"I'm as fit as a fiddle!"

"Right-ho!" said Wharton. And he said no more.

He had not voiced the half-formed suspicion that was in his mind, and the Bounder smiled sarcastically as the captain of the Remove left him.

He wondered how long it would be before Wharton discovered that he was the old Bounder once again. The discovery must come sooner or later. It would hurt Wharton, he knew; and at heart the Bounder was very fond of Wharton. But just now he did not care.

The discovery was destined to come soon, not late, as a matter of fact.

The Bounder, in flannels, joined the Remove team when the Redclyffians arrived. He would not admit to himself that he was not feeling fit; but he did not look fit. All his old alertness had gone, his quickness of movement and his keenness of glance.

With all his efforts, he could not throw aside the heaviness that clung to him and seemed to slacken him down.

More than one member of the Remove team glanced at him curiously. But if any fellow suspected the folly he had been guilty of, no one alluded to it.

Harry Wharton won the toss, and Greyfriars batted first.

The Bounder was sent in with Squiff to open the innings. The Greyfriars fellows were accustomed to see the Bounder dealing with the best bowling in a masterly way, and they watched Vernon-Smith with confidence, ready to cheer his well-known drives.

A gasp came from the whole crowd. The ball came down, and the batsman shaped at it clumsily—as clumsily as a fag in the Second Form might have done.

Crash!

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Smithy! Oh, crumbs!"

Vernon-Smith glanced down at his wrecked wicket. He was out first ball! With crimson cheeks he walked off the field.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Beaten!

VERNON-SMITH did not meet Wharton's eyes as he came up to the pavilion, and Wharton did not speak to him.

"Man in!" he said curtly. And Bob Cherry went off to join Sampson Quincy Ifley Field at the wickets.

Vernon-Smith passed into the pavilion to escape the angry and mocking eyes of the Greyfriars crowd.

Any batsman might have had bad luck, certainly. Duck's eggs were not unknown among the Remove cricketers, of course. But Vernon-Smith's curious exhibition had not been bad luck—it had been sheer bad play. He had failed to deal with the bowling because he was utterly unfit for the game. His eye was not clear and his hand was not steady. Nobody on Little Side needed telling what was the matter with the Bounder. It was the "old game!"

Wharton knew it as well as anyone else. His lips were closely compressed, and there was a glint in his eyes.

The doubt had been in his mind before the game, and he had asked the Bounder plainly whether he was fit. Vernon-Smith had chosen to play, and to let his side down in this manner. And there was no chance of retrieving his inglorious exhibition, as it was a single-innings match.

It was a wicket thrown away for the Remove at the start.

Wharton said nothing; but he was thinking the more.

The initial success had encouraged the Redclyffians a good deal. The bowling was good, and the fielding very keen. But Bob Cherry and Squiff kept the game going in lively style, and Squiff had scored 20 when he fell.

Harry Wharton joined Bob. Vernon-Smith came out of the pavilion, and stood looking on, with a gloomy brow. He was sportsman enough to feel keenly the damage he had done to the prospects of the team, and his pride was hurt, too, by the wretched show he had made. The Bounder did not look happy.

Dick Rake was standing near him, and he gave him a grim look. Rake would have been played if Smyth had stood out, as he certainly ought to have done in his condition.

Vernon-Smith met his glance, and sneered, and walked away. Several uncomplimentary remarks from the Remove fellows followed him, but these the Bounder affected not to hear.

Harry Wharton was batting in good style, and the score had been well increased by the time he was caught out.

Nugent came next. Bowling and fielding were very good on the Redclyffe side, and though no one else failed quite as badly as the Bounder had done, the last wicket fell with the total at 60.

"Sixty!" growled Johnny Bull. "It would have been a hundred if that silly chump had been fit!"

"He wasn't fit, that's a cert!" said Tom Brown.

"And why wasn't he?" demanded Johnny Bull. "He was fit enough yesterday!"

"We may make it up in the bowling," said Harry Wharton cheerily. "Smithy's strong in that line, anyway."

Johnny Bull gave a snort. "If I were captain, I'd boot him out of the team!" he growled. "You know why he chucked that wicket away, Wharton?"

Wharton was silent. "And there's the St. Jude's match next week," said Bull. "Is Smithy going to play against St. Jude's after this?"

"Never mind the St. Jude's match now," said Wharton. "This afternoon we've got to beat Redclyffe. They're not going to make sixty!"

"They usually make more than sixty."

"Well, we're going to stop them this time!"

Another snort from Johnny Bull. "Where's Smithy?" asked Wharton, looking round. "We shall have to go into the field in a few minutes."

"He went indoors, I think," said Hazeldene.

Harry Wharton nodded, and strode away towards the School House. Vernon-Smith ought not to have been off the ground. He was not to be seen downstairs, and Harry went up to the Remove passage, and looked into his study.

A scent of tobacco greeted him.

Wharton started, and his eyes flashed with anger.

The Bounder was stretched in the arm-chair, with a cigarette between his lips, his knitted brows looking gloomily through a cloud of smoke.

He started and flushed as he met Wharton's gaze, and hastily removed the cigarette from his mouth.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, I'm coming."

"So that's the game!" said Wharton bitterly. He had not intended to speak out till the match was over, but the sight of the Bounder smoking in the middle of a match was too much for him. "You're not doing the square thing by the side, Smyth!"

"I'm all right," said the Bounder doggedly.

"You're not all right!" said Wharton almost savagely. "Do you think every fellow in the Form doesn't know why you showed such rotten form?"

"And why?" sneered the Bounder.

"Because you broke bounds last night with Skinner, and stayed up late, and smoked, and knocked yourself up!" exclaimed Wharton. "Do you deny it?"

"Are you my father-confessor?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

Wharton stared at him. It was quite the old Bounder again—the reckless, insolent Bounder he had once known. It seemed that Vernon-Smith's reform was a thing of the past.

"I'll talk to you later, Vernon-Smith," said Wharton at last. "At present the Redclyffe fellows are waiting for us."

"I've told you I'm ready."

Wharton strode out of the study, and the Bounder, throwing away the stump of the cigarette, followed him. Fane, the Redclyffe skipper, glanced at them as they arrived on Little Side.

"We're waiting," Fane remarked pointedly.

"Right-ho! Sorry!" said Harry.

"Oh, all serene!"

The Removites went into the field. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the champion bowler of the Remove, was given the first over. When the field crossed, Wharton glanced at the Bounder. He was extremely doubtful about giving the ball to Vernon-Smith under the circumstances. Vernon-Smith met his glance with a very disagreeable look. Wharton quickly decided. One over would be enough to prove whether the Bounder was up to howling that afternoon.

"Give it to Smith!" said Harry shortly.

He wanted to give Vernon-Smith every chance; and if the Bounder bowled as he was accustomed to, it meant the fall of wickets. The Bounder's sullen face cleared as he took the ball. It was a chance for him to retrieve his bad luck—to show the Remove generally that he was not to be despised, that he was still of value to his side. He pulled himself together with a great effort, and the first ball he sent down very nearly beat Byng of Redclyffe.

Wharton drew a breath of relief. If the Bounder bowled as of old it would make up, to some extent, for the runs he had not made.

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Squiff fielded the ball, and sent it back. He gave the Bounder a catch, but Vernon-Smith let the ball slip. Somebody yelled "Butter-fingers!" as he stooped to pick it up, and the Bounder flushed.

He bowled again, but it was a rank bad ball, and Byng cut it for 3. This brought Fane to the batting end for the next ball. Fane drove it to the boundary.

Bob Cherry gave Wharton a look, and Wharton nodded. That was to be the Bounder's last, as well as first, over.

Fane was grinning now. He drove the fourth ball hard back in the air—a chance for the bowler. But Vernon-Smith did not even try for the catch.

"They call that bowling!" said Bolsover major to a group of Removites. "Wharton won't play me—thinks I'm not up to the mark! And that's the kind of bowling he thinks is all right!"

"I guess I could lay over that," remarked Fisher T. Fish.

"He, he, he!" came from Billy Bunter. "Smithy's been out on the tiles, you know. He looks ready to drop, doesn't he?"

"There'll be a row if Wharton plays that rotter for the St. Jude's match—I know that!" growled Ogilvy.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh took the ball again when the field crossed over. The Nabob of Bhanipur was, fortunately, in great form, and there were cheers as he took three wickets in succession. The hat-trick had never come along more opportunely.

Peter Todd took the Bounder's place, and after that the bowling was shared among Hurree Singh, Todd, and Nugent, with an over or two from Tom Brown and Mark Linley. More than once the Bounder looked expressively at Wharton, but the captain of the Remove did not meet his glance. When the seventh Redclyffe wicket went down for 55, and the field crossed after the over, Vernon-Smith came up to Harry.

"Am I to have another chance?" he asked.

Wharton's answer was short, ~~if~~ not sweet.

"No!"

The Bounder bit his lip hard.

"I've had bad luck," he said.

"The team's had bad luck, having you in it!"

"Oh, rats!"

That was all. The Bounder's face was sullen as he took his place in the field. Greyfriars had given up almost all hope of the match now. Redclyffe wanted 5 to tie, 6 to win, and they had four wickets in hand. The Remove crowd looked on anxiously as Hurree Jamset Ram Singh bowled again.

"Well bowled!"

Fane was out at last.

"A chance yet!" murmured Bob Cherry.

But it was only a flash in the pan. A 2, and then another 2, brought the Redclyffe score to 59. Then a catch, hopelessly muffed by Vernon-Smith at cover-point, gave the batsman a new lease of life. He immediately turned it to advantage by scoring the equalising run. "Sixty all!" groaned Bob Cherry. "All over bar shouting!"

But the next ball landed in Bob's own palm. Nine down for 60, and last man in!

But the brief hope of the Removites to evade defeat was soon crushed. The winning run came in the next over.

It had been a close thing; but a miss, as Bob remarked, was as bad as a mile. Upon one point all the Remove fellows were agreed. Vernon-Smith had thrown away the match. And in his heart the Bounder had to acknowledge it.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

After the Match!

"CALL that cricket?" Bolsover major asked that question in stentorian tones as Vernon-Smith came slowly off the field.

"Go and eat coke!" snapped the Bounder.

He strode on towards the house with a sullen brow. Bolsover major grunted, and stalked up to Wharton.

"Call that cricket?" he demanded.

"Oh, rats!"

"Rats to you!" snorted Bolsover major. "I can tell you this, Wharton, there'll be a row if you play that seedy, smoky rotter in the next match. I tell you that plainly, and you can put it in your pipe and smoke it!"

Wharton pushed Bolsover major aside, and walked on. He did not feel inclined to argue the matter with Bolsover. The latter expounded his views at great length, and with a loud voice, to the other Removites. Bolsover major had been at one time pally with Vernon-Smith; but he was very much down on him now. He found the other fellows in full agreement with him. The cricket record was an important matter in the eyes of the Remove fellows, and it was through Vernon-Smith's reckless folly that a lost match had to be marked upon it. There was no excuse to be made for the Bounder. No excuse for his unfitness, considering to what it was due—and, above all, no excuse for his having remained in the team when he knew he was useless. And Wharton ought to have put him out. Bolsover major maintained that, with much approval from the other fellows, forgetting that, had Wharton turned Smyth out before his failure, that step also would have been condemned.

The Famous Five gathered to tea in Study No. 1, and all of them were looking moody. They were sportsmen, and could take a defeat in a sporting spirit. But to be defeated by the utter folly of a member of their own team was a little too bitter.

"It won't do!" said Bob Cherry. "I don't know what you're thinking, Wharton, but there will be trouble if you don't come down heavy. I can't understand the Bounder breaking out again like this. But he's at the old game, and it won't do for cricket."

"The old gamefulness seems to be terrific," remarked Hurree Singh, with a shake of the head. "The esteemed Smyth is more Bounderful than ever."

"Late hours and smoking!" grunted Johnny Bull. "I'd have kicked him off the field, and played another chap!"

"Well, that certainly couldn't have made matters worse," said Frank Nugent. "It was a bit too thick."

Harry Wharton smiled faintly. "Don't all begin on me in chorus," he said. "Of course, I shall have to take notice of this. But I don't want to be too hard on Smyth. He's been a jolly good pal to me!"

"Too hard be blowed!"

"Do you want to chuck away the St. Jude's match as well?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Oh, give me a chance to speak! Smyth won't play against St. Jude's!"

"Well, that's some comfort!"

"And unless he changes his ways mighty quick he won't play for the Remove again at all," said Wharton decidedly. "There's some excuse for his breaking out like this. Quelchey seems to have been down on him when he wasn't to blame—"

"Only his word for that!" growled Johnny Bull. "Quelchey would be a

thumping ass to trust him—I know that!”

“I think he wasn't to blame, anyway. He's gated, as it seems, for nothing. It seems to have got his back up.”

“Are we going to lose cricket matches because his Highness is pleased to get his back up?”

“No, ass! But one swallow doesn't make a summer. If he chooses to toe the line, and play the game, I think we can look over this. It depends on the line he takes. Anyway, he won't play against St. Jude's on Wednesday. That's settled. That may be a lesson to him. I'll have a talk with him later, and put it plainly—”

“Why not now?”

“Well, it's not much good scrapping with him,” Wharton said. “That's what it would come to, if I jawed him now. I'd rather keep him in the team if possible. If we break with him, it means that he's more likely to go to the dogs in his old way. We don't want that. Just remember, you fellows, how he stood by me a little while back!”

“Something in that!” agreed Nugent. “The Bouncer's really too good a chap to go blagging like Skinner and Snoop.”

“You're right, I suppose,” said Johnny Bull, after a very long pause. “But it looks to me as if Smithy's going the old way, and means to keep it up.”

“Well, we can give him a chance. I'll have a talk with him in a friendly way to-morrow.”

And with that the subject dropped. Harry Wharton's decision was a wise enough one. Vernon-Smith was in his study, fully expecting a visit from the captain of the Remove, and prepared for angry recriminations. He was smoking after tea; not because he specially wanted to, but because he knew it would fan the flame of Wharton's anger when he saw him with a cigarette in his mouth.

But Wharton did not come. The sullen resentment and exasperation in Vernon-Smith's breast gradually died down. He threw his smoke away and rose, and paced about the study in a restless mood. If there was to be a row with Wharton, he wished the fellow would come, and get it over. But as his mood grew calmer, he grew less and less inclined for a row. After all, he had been to blame. He knew that! He was prepared to be defiant and insolent—to Wharton. But from his own thoughts there was no escape. And he knew that later he would regret a quarrel with Wharton, too.

He stared moodily from the window in the gathering dusk, thinking of the change that had come since he had stood there the previous day.

“I've been a fool!” So his thoughts ran. “But—but the die's cast now. There's no going back; and—and I don't want to go back, either. But it was too rotten to let the fellows down like that. What's the good of denying it?” He shrugged his shoulders. “I'll be jolly careful in future—if this blows over. They sha'n't have any cause to complain in the next match. I'll play up against St. Jude's, by gad! But—but if this doesn't blow over—if I'm turned out of the team—”

And the Bouncer's brow grew dark again.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Against Orders!

HARRY WHARTON looked for the Bouncer the next day after lessons. It was time to have his little talk with the reckless Removeite, and Wharton meant to talk in quite a friendly way. He knew

that it was a sense of injustice that had caused the Bouncer to turn to his old scapegrace paths, and he hoped that it was only momentary folly, and that it was over.

It was easy enough to yield to angry feelings; but Wharton did not want it upon his conscience that, for want of a little patience, he had helped to drive a fellow who had been a chum—in a way, at least—and was capable of better things, further into the slough of reckless folly. For some time he could not find Vernon-Smith, but he found him at last—chatting in the gateway with an extremely elegant and well-dressed youth—Cecil Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe.

Ponsonby had been one of the Bouncer's most intimate friends in his wild days. It was evident that the acquaintance had been renewed.

The Bouncer's look was defiant as he caught the involuntary frown on Wharton's face. Ponsonby smiled.

“I've been looking for you, Smithy,” said Harry.

“Well, you've found me.”

“I wanted a talk with you.”

“I suppose it will keep,” said Vernon-Smith. “I'm talking to Ponsonby just now.”

“Oh, yes, it will keep,” said Harry, biting his lip. “I did not know you were on such friendly terms with Ponsonby.”

“Oh, we're great pals,” said Ponsonby airily. “We've had our little differences at times; but bygones are bygones—what?”

He grinned at Vernon-Smith.

“What-ho!” assented the Removeite.

“Well, are you comin'?” asked Ponsonby, with one eye on Wharton, who stood nonplussed. “Gaddy and Vavasour are lookin' forward to your visit—it will be quite like old times. Come on!”

“Dashed if I don't!” said Vernon-Smith, as if suddenly making up his mind.

Wharton touched him on the arm as he was moving out of the gateway.

“Smithy, old chap, you're gated, you know!”

“I'm going out, all the same!” said Vernon-Smith coolly. “I'm gated for nothing, and you know that!”

“Perhaps! But—”

“Well, I'm going. You can go and tell Quelch if you like!”

Wharton's face crimsoned.

The Bouncer followed Ponsonby into the road, and they sauntered away together in the direction of Highcliffe. Wharton went back into the quadrangle with a troubled brow. His own talk with the Bouncer had to be postponed, but that was not a matter of much moment. But this flagrant defiance of his Form-master's orders meant more trouble for Vernon-Smith. He was detained within gates by the strict order of Mr. Quelch, and he had walked out of gates in full view of a dozen fellows, and of Gosling, the porter, whose duty was to report him. The utter recklessness of it troubled Wharton.

“Well, have you had your jaw with Smithy?” asked Frank Nugent, as Wharton joined his chums on the cricket-ground.

“No. He's gone out.”

“I saw him,” said Johnny Bull drily, “with Ponsonby!”

“Well, we can't help it,” said Harry. “Let's get on to cricket.”

Wharton impatiently dismissed the matter from his mind, and devoted himself to cricket practice. He wanted to do the best he could for the Bouncer, but his patience was wearing out.

Vernon-Smith had not returned at tea-time, and it was not till late calling-over that he put in an appearance. Mr.

Quelch was taking the roll-call, and the Bouncer slipped into Hall almost at the last moment and answered to his name.

The Remove-master gave him a steely look.

After the roll-call, when the fellows were dismissed, he rapped out:

“You will go to my study, Vernon-Smith, and wait for me there!”

“Yes, sir,” said the Bouncer, with a drawl in his voice that made the Form-master's eyes gleam.

“You're in for it, Smithy!” remarked Skinner, as they left the Hall.

Vernon-Smith gave a shrug.

“You've been to Highcliffe?”

“Yes.”

“Had a good time?”

“Topping!”

“He, he, he!” cackled Billy Bunter.

“Was it bridge or banker, Smithy?”

“Go and eat coke!”

Vernon-Smith went to the Form-master's study, and waited there quite calmly. He knew that Gosling must have reported him, and that there was trouble in store.

Mr. Quelch's brow was very grim when he came in.

“You have been out of school bounds, Vernon-Smith!” he rapped out.

“Not out of bounds, sir,” said Vernon-Smith calmly.

“Where have you been?”

“To see some fellows at Highcliffe, sir. Highcliffe is within school bounds.”

The Remove-master compressed his lips.

“Not for you, Smith, since my order to you! I explicitly commanded you to remain within gates till further orders!”

“I don't see why I should not have the same freedom as the other fellows, sir.”

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

“Is that the way to reply to your Form-master, Vernon-Smith?”

“I say what I think, sir.”

“You appear determined, Vernon-Smith, to set yourself up against my authority,” said the Remove-master quietly. “I need not tell you that such insubordination will not be permitted! Your present conduct leads me to take a much harsher view of your conduct on Thursday.”

“Indeed, sir?”

“Yes, indeed!” said Mr. Quelch sharply. “You have deliberately disobeyed the most explicit orders! I shall cane you severely!”

“I am ready, sir,” said the Bouncer coolly.

“Hold out your hand!” said Mr. Quelch harshly.

Swish, swish, swish, swish!

Vernon-Smith winced, in spite of his iron self-control. But he uttered no sound.

“You may go, Vernon-Smith!”

The junior went.

“Had it bad?” asked Skinner, who was waiting for him in the passage.

“Yes,” said the Bouncer, between his teeth.

“It was a jolly risky thing to do,” said Skinner. “You'd better be a bit more careful, Smithy. No good asking for trouble!”

Vernon-Smith went up to his study without replying. His breast was full of bitterness. He prided himself upon being hard; but the caning had been severe, and he moved restlessly about his study for some time squeezing his hands. It was time to begin his preparation but he did not even think of it.

Since his reform the Bouncer of Greyfriars had been a steady worker, but that, it seemed, was to go along with the rest.

A tap came at the door a little later, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 487.

and Harry Wharton entered. Vernon-Smith met him with a savage glance.

"If it's a sermon, I don't want it!" he said. "I've had enough of that from Quelch, and you can save your breath, Wharton!"

It was not an agreeable reception. "I'm not going to sermonise you," said Wharton tartly. "I've got to have a few words with you, and the sooner it's over the better! I'm putting up the list for the St. Jude's match this evening, and I thought you'd like to know how matters stood from me first."

"Does that mean that my name won't be in the list?" asked Vernon-Smith, with a sneer.

"Do you expect it to be there, after the show you put up in the Redclyffe match?"

"I was off colour then. That won't happen again."

"I think it's very likely to happen again, if you keep on as you've begun," said Harry.

"So it's to be a sermon, after all?" sneered the Bounder.

"Look here, Smithy—"

"I'm not in the mood for it!" The Bounder strode to the door, and threw it wide open. "There's your way out, Wharton!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bitter Blood!

HARRY WHARTON did not move.

His temper was rising; but he held it in check. He was determined that if a definite break came it should not be the fault of any hasty resentment on his part.

The Bounder's manner was hard to bear; but Wharton bore it quietly, with a self-control that would have surprised most of the Remove fellows.

Vernon-Smith looked at him with mocking inquiry, as he stood with his hand resting on the table, his handsome face flushed a little, but calm.

"Are you going?" he asked.

"Not yet," said Harry quietly. "You may as well close the door, Smithy. I came here to speak to you as a friend. We've been pretty good friends for some time, and if all that comes to an end it won't be by any wish of mine."

The Bounder thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and lounged towards the window. In spite of himself he was moved a little by Wharton's patience, and still more by the reference to a friendship which had meant much to him.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, more amicably.

"I've had to take your name off the cricket list," said Harry. "I don't want to rub it in, Smithy; but you're no fool, and you can see for yourself that you chucked away the last match. I couldn't play you in the next—the fellows would scalp me, for one thing, and I should deserve it."

"You mean you're making that the excuse to turn me out of the team?"

"I don't mean that, and you know it, Smithy."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. He seemed in his most wilful and unreasonable mood this evening.

"This is what I mean," said the captain of the Remove. "I've left you out of the St. Jude's match. That couldn't be helped. But I hope it won't be necessary to go further than that. I want you to play for the Remove all through the season. But I can't play a fellow who may turn up for any match in an unfit state for play. Be reasonable, Smithy!"

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"What's all this leading to?"

"Your private affairs don't concern me, of course. But it is a disappointment to see you taking up the bizney we all thought you were done with for good, Smithy."

"I thought a sermon was coming!"

"You're too good for that kind of thing," said Harry, unheeding. "You're worth a thousand of a fellow like Pensonby, and it's pretty rotten to see you palling with him, and playing his rotten game! Is it worth while?"

"If I think it is, I suppose that settles it!"

"If that is your view, I sha'n't mention it again," said Harry. "I suppose it's no business of mine. But there's a point that concerns me as cricket captain. If you begin the old game—smoking and card-playing and late hours and that kind of thing—it must mean that, at any time, you may be in the state you were in yesterday, and that you can never be relied on as a player. How can you keep your place in the team on those lines? I put it to you as a reasonable chap."

No reply.

"About the St. Jude's match, it's settled," said Harry. "But the St. Jim's match comes next on the list, and I'd give a good deal to have you in the eleven against St. Jim's. You're worth your weight in gold to the side when you're in form. I've always said so. But how can I count on you for the St. Jim's match, if you might be breaking bounds the very night before the match and knocking yourself up? I want to be able to rely on your being in good form."

The Bounder was still silent.

"Well, haven't you anything to say, Smithy?"

"Only that my private affairs are my own concern," said the Bounder coolly. "I've tried a new line, and it's failed. I've found it precious dull at times, but I've stuck it out. Now I'm suspected and watched and gated, just as if I'd never turned over a dashed new leaf at all! Well, I've chucked it! That's settled! There's no going back on that! I don't see why it should make any difference to the cricket, though. I don't want to cut cricket."

"You can't expect to run the two things together."

"I don't see why not!" the Bounder sneered. "Even if you set up as a censor of morals, you've nothing to complain of so long as I keep my end up at the game!"

"Did you keep your end up against Redclyffe?"

"Still harping on that? I shall be more careful next time. If you play me against St. Jude's, I undertake to be in tip-top form!"

Wharton shook his head.

"I can't do that, Smithy. I've told Rake already he's to play. Besides, the fellows are all wild at the way you let us down, and I simply couldn't do it. There will be grouting enough if I play you against St. Jim's!"

"So I'm kicked out of the team for one failure?"

"You're left out of one match," said Wharton quietly. "It wasn't the failure, but the cause of the failure. Hang it all, Smithy, a fellow doesn't play in every match at the best of times! Every fellow who can really play has to have a look in sooner or later, when it can be managed without risk to the side!"

"I know that. Play Rake as often as you like against Temple & Co. of the Fourth!" sneered the Bounder. "But the St. Jude's match is a tough match, and you want the best men, and you know it. But for what happened yesterday, you wouldn't have thought of giving Rake my place!"

"That's true enough."

"Do you think Rake will play as good a game as mine?"

"Not if you were in form, but far and away better than the game you played yesterday!"

"Can't you let that rest? I've admitted it was rotten, and I've told you it's not going to happen again!"

"That's all I wanted you to say," said Wharton. "Your name goes down for the St. Jim's match the week after next, then!"

"Hold on a minute!" said the Bounder, with a glitter in his eyes. "Never mind the St. Jim's match now. Am I playing against St. Jude's?"

"I've told you—no!"

"Then it comes to this—that I'm turned out! Everybody knows that in the ordinary way I should have been in the team. I've been a naughty boy, and I've been called over the coals by my highly moral skipper, and told to get out—what?" The Bounder laughed savagely. "Well, that's not good enough! The whole dashed Remove will be cackling at me over it, and laughing in their sleeve! It's not good enough!"

"It can't be altered, Smithy. Do be reasonable!"

"Well, if it can't be altered, there's nothing more to be said. But give me a rest from the sermons," said Vernon-Smith. "I'm fed-up with them. And I'll make your new favourite, Rake, sorry for ousting me, too!"

"Rake hasn't ousted you. I offered him the place, and if Rake hadn't taken it I was going to ask Ogilvy!"

"Anybody rather than me!" sneered the Bounder. "Bunter or Fish, I suppose, rather?"

"Don't be an ass, Smithy! Look here—"

"Oh, we've jawed long enough!" said Vernon-Smith. "I've shown you the door once. It's still there!"

Wharton's eyes blazed, and his hands clenched. Vernon-Smith gave him a mocking look. But the captain of the Remove controlled his temper, and left the study, a light, ironical laugh from the Bounder following him. Skinner came into the study, grinning.

"Been rowing with the Great and Only?" he asked. "I met his lordship in the passage, looking like a merry thundercloud!"

The Bounder lighted a cigarette.

"Good!" said Skinner. "I'll have one, Smithy. I say, I hear that Rake's going to have your place in next Wednesday's match. Is it true?"

"So Wharton says."

"You'll have trouble with that gang, as you used to, if you kick over the traces, old scout!" chuckled Skinner.

"I'm expecting that," said the Bounder coolly. "And if Wharton thinks that I'm to be dropped out of the team so jolly easily, he's mistaken. Rake won't play for the Remove next Wednesday!" Skinner whistled.

"I don't see how you'll stop him if Wharton puts him into the eleven," he remarked. "The great Panjandrum's word is law!"

"Rake mayn't be fit to play!"

"He may get a terrific hiding from a fellow whose place he has collared!" said the Bounder, with a glitter in his eyes. "He mayn't be fit for cricket afterwards!"

"I—I say, Smithy, I'd draw it mild if I were you," said Skinner uneasily. The Bounder's fall from grace had delighted his old associate, but Skinner was getting alarmed. There might be too much of a good thing. "If you piled in on a chap and clobbered him just before a match the Remove would jolly nearly lynch you!"

"They'll have the chance, then" said

the Bounder coolly. "That's what I'm going to do!"

"Well, it's no business of mine," said Skinner, as he sat down to his preparation. "I'd go slow if I were you, though!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Rough on Rake!

VERNON-SMITH was an object of considerable interest to the Remove fellows during the next few days.

The list for the St. Jude's match was on the board, and Dick Rake's name was in it in place of Vernon-Smith's. The Remove fellows rather wondered how the Bounder would take it.

He took it quietly enough.

Most of the fellows had expected a row between Vernon-Smith and the captain of the Remove, but it did not come.

Whatever the Bounder was thinking, he kept his own counsel.

In other matters, it was only too clear that the old Bounder had come to life again. In former days Vernon-Smith had been pally with Loder and Carne, and the fast set in the Sixth. Those sportive seniors had been very much down upon him when he ventured to turn over a new leaf and dispense with their select society. They had let him alone at last, however. The Bounder was a dangerous enemy.

Now the old terms were revived, and Vernon-Smith dropped into Gerald Loder's study of an evening sometimes, the Remove fellows knowing very well what he dropped in for. The millionaire's son was a very welcome guest among the blades of the Sixth.

The Bounder, with his hard, determined character, his recklessness, and his wealth, had always filled a prominent place in the little world of the Remove. He might be disliked, feared, or even hated, but he could not be ignored. Whether as a friend or as an enemy, he had to be reckoned with. Even in his most blackguardly days he had won a certain amount of admiration for his nerve, his coolness, his unflinching courage.

Now that he had fallen into his old ways once more he was welcomed with open arms by the shady set among the juniors as their natural leader. Skinner and Snoop and Stott looked forward gleefully to a revival of his old rivalry with Harry Wharton.

The captain of the Remove would not have matters all his own way with the cool, determined Bounder against him as of old. But as yet Vernon-Smith had not broken with the Famous Five.

He came down to cricket practice occasionally, and showed all his old form as a rule. His eyes glittered sometimes as they turned on Dick Rake, who was slogging at practice as a new member of the eleven. Rake was glad enough to have a place in the eleven, and he was determined that the St. Jude's match should be the game of his life. He had jumped at Wharton's offer, naturally enough.

Skinner wondered whether the Bounder was keeping to the rascally plan he had mentioned in the study.

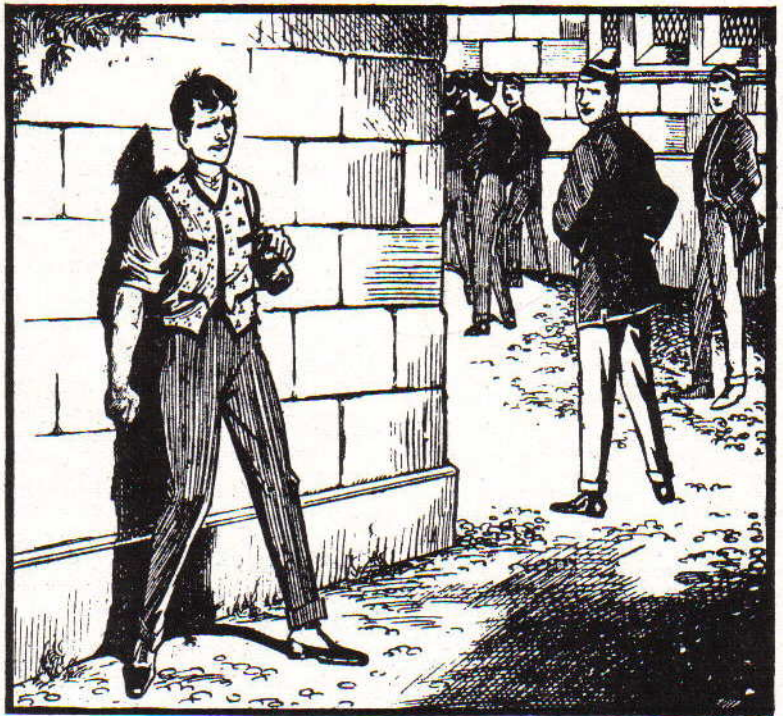
On the following Tuesday he had proof enough. After prep most of the juniors were chatting in the Common-room, when Vernon-Smith came in. Dick Rake was chatting cheerily with the Famous Five when the Bounder came up to the group.

"I've been looking for you, Rake," said Vernon-Smith, in so peculiar a tone that several fellows turned their heads to look at him.

Rake nodded good-humouredly.

"Well, here I am, Smithy!"

"I've got something for you, Rake."



Licked and Left! (See Chapter 13.)

"Eh? What is it?"

"That!"

Smack!

Vernon-Smith's open palm struck Rake across the cheek with a crack like that of a pistol-shot. It rang through the Common-room.

Rake staggered back more surprised than hurt.

"What the dickens—" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Are you mad, Vernon-Smith?" shouted Wharton.

The Bounder gave him a cool smile.

"Not at all, dear boy. Ah, would you?"

His hands went up as Rake, recovering himself, and crimson with anger, rushed upon him.

"Stop them!" shouted Wharton.

"Go it, Smithy!" yelled Skinner.

But a dozen fellows closed in on the fighting juniors. Wharton and Bob Cherry grasped Rake, and pulled him back, and the Bounder was seized by Johnny Bull, Peter Todd, and Tom Brown, and dragged away by main force.

"Let me get at him!" roared Rake, struggling furiously.

"Easy does it!" said Bob Cherry.

"Let go, you fool! Let me get at him!"

"Let him come on," said Vernon-Smith, with cool insolence. "I'm going to lick him sooner or later, and he may as well have it now."

"Hold that cad!" said Wharton. "Be quiet a minute, Rake! Vernon-Smith, what are you picking a quarrel with Rake for?"

"That's my business!"

"No need to ask the rotter!" growled Johnny Bull. "Because he's turned out of the team, and Rake's put in!"

"Rotten cad!" snorted Bolsover major.

"Look here, Rake," said Wharton.

"You can't fight Smithy to-night. The St. Jude's match is to-morrow, and you can't play with a black eye."

"I'm going to smash him!" roared Rake furiously. "Do you think I'm going to have my face smacked by that smoky cad?"

"But, look here—"

"Oh, let me go!"

"I tell you—"

Rake tore himself loose, and rushed at Vernon-Smith again. Those who were holding the Bounder let him go then.

Ogilvy closed the door discreetly. Masters and prefects were not wanted in the junior Common-room just then.

The fight was soon going hot and strong, with a crowd of juniors round the combatants.

Wharton stood dismayed and undecided. After a slogging match like that, it was pretty certain that Rake would not be much use in the cricket team the next day, and Wharton could not help discerning the Bounder's object. The brutal, hard-hearted cynicism of the Bounder's plan shocked and troubled him.

The Remove captain would gladly have stopped the fight, but he could scarcely stop Rake avenging so open an affront. Rake was a good-tempered fellow as a rule, but he was in a blind fury now, as was not surprising under the circumstances. His rage, indeed, placed him at a disadvantage. The Bounder was cool as ice, calculating as a machine. Never had the Bounder been in better fighting form. Physically he was no better than Rake, but he was more skilled, and now he was using all his skill with deadly coolness, while Rake gave himself away by his excitement and rage.

Every fellow in the room, except Skinner and Snoop, was hoping to see the Bounder thoroughly licked; but from the beginning it was pretty plain that that would not happen. His drives got home with savage force, and Dick Rake reeled under them. He stuck to his adversary gamely, however, and Vernon-Smith received a good deal of punishment.

But punishment did not seem to affect the iron-nerved Bounder. He pressed Rake harder and harder, and Dick was too plucky to give in so long as he could stand. He went down at last, and the Bounder looked down upon him with a mocking smile.

"Had enough?"

Rake panted. "You cad! You rotter! I'll lick you yet!"

"Come on, then!" said the Bouncer, laughing cynically.

Rake made an effort to rise, but he sank back again. He was done. Ogilvy quietly helped him to his feet, and Rake leaned heavily on the Scottish junior.

"Bravo, Smithy!" chortled Skinner. Bob Cherry spun round, with flashing eyes, and a back-hander sent Skinner staggering.

"You rotten cad!" roared Bob, glaring at the Bouncer. "You've licked Rake, and now you may lick me, if you can! Put up your hands!"

Vernon-Smith put his hands in his pockets and stopped back.

"Nuff's as good as a feast," he said coolly. "I'll tackle you to-morrow, if you like!"

"You'll tackle me now, you cur!" But Wharton pulled Bob back. The Bouncer had come out of the fight well, but he was not in a condition for another slogging match; and fair play was due, even to a rotter.

"Leave him alone now, Bob." "You know why he's set on to Rake?" shouted Bob.

"Yes, I know—at least, I think I do. But give even that cad fair play. He can't fight you now."

"He'll fight me again soon!" said Rake thickly, with a deadly look at the Bouncer. "This isn't the finish. Next time we'll see!"

"Come up to the dorm, old chap," said Ogilvy. "You can't be seen with a face like that."

He led Rake from the Common-room. Vernon Smith, with his hands in his pockets, strolled out. A hiss from the crowd of juniors followed him, even Billy Bunter and Fisher T. Fish joining in it. There was no glory of victory for the Bouncer. All the sympathy was with Dick Rake, and the Bouncer had never been so unpopular in his Form.

When Wingate of the Sixth came into the Remove dormitory, he spotted Rake's bruised face at once, and stared at him. "Hallo! Fighting?" he exclaimed.

"Yes." "Without gloves, from the look of you!" "Yes."

Wingate glanced round the dormitory. There were signs enough on Vernon-Smith's face to show who had been Rake's adversary.

"You've been fighting with Rake, Vernon-Smith?"

"Oh, yes!" said the Bouncer, with a drawl.

"I shall report you both to Mr. Quelch in the morning. Now, turn in, all of you!"

The next morning the two juniors were duly reported, and as Dick Rake was silent as to the facts of the case, punishment fell impartially upon both. A caning, five hundred lines, and detention for two half-holidays rewarded them—which was certainly hard lines on Rake. The Bouncer grinned as he left the Remove-master's study. Poor Rake did not feel like grinning. His chance of playing for Greyfriars against St. Jude's had gone.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Putting the Stopper On!

"RAKE, old chap, how do you feel?"

Dick Rake gave the captain of the Remove a dolorous grin. He was feeling exceedingly seedy, and he looked it. One of his eyes was closed.

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and he could only blink with it, and the gaze of the other was extremely uncertain. Strong and sturdy as he was, he felt rocky all over.

"Rotten!" he said. Wharton gave him an anxious look. "What about the match this afternoon?" he asked.

"N.G.!" said Rake. "I'm keen enough; but it's no good my saying I'm any good for the match; I'm not! I couldn't blink along the pitch, and with my optics in this state I should see two or three balls coming down, and I don't know which one I should hit."

Harry Wharton laughed. Rake was taking his ill luck in a cheery spirit, though it was hard on him.

"Well, I thought I would ask you," said Harry.

"Anyway, you don't want to play a chap with a black eye," said Rake. "Even if you did, I'm no good to-day. May as well own it."

"Right-ho! I'm sorry!" Wharton knitted his brows. "I can't help think that Smithy knocked you out on purpose."

"I know he did! I'm going to tackle him again for it, too, as soon as I can see straight enough to slog him!" said Rake grimly.

"Good luck, old chap!" The Remove were going in to morning lessons when Harry tapped Robert Donald Ogilvy on the shoulder.

"Like to play this afternoon?" Ogilvy's eyes danced.

"Of course I would, fathead! Do you want me?"

"Yes." "Good egg! Rake's out, I suppose?"

"Yes; he's not fit."

"It was a rotten trick of Smithy. I dare say I shall have a fight with him next," said Ogilvy, laughing.

"You won't!" said Wharton grimly. "If Smithy picks a row with you, Ogilvy, you're not to fight him till after the match, at least."

"I can't stand it if he smacks my face, as he did Rake's, Wharton," said Ogilvy doubtfully.

"He won't do that. I'm going to keep an eye on him. Mind, Ogilvy, we're depending on you, and you're not to knock yourself up!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Remove went into their Form-room, Ogilvy looking very cheerful. The Remove soon knew that Ogilvy had Rake's place for the afternoon's match, and most of the fellows approved Wharton's selection, while sympathising a good deal with Rake.

Skinner whispered the news to Vernon-Smith, and the Bouncer's eyes glinted as they rested on Ogilvy.

After morning lessons, when the Remove came out, the Bouncer came up to Ogilvy in the passage.

The Scottish junior looked at him coolly, quite on his guard.

But the Bouncer's evident intention was frustrated.

Harry Wharton, with gleaming eyes, ran between.

"Stand back, Smithy!"

"Is Ogilvy going to hide behind you?" sneered the Bouncer.

The Scottish junior's eyes blazed. The taunt drove all considerations of cricket from his mind, as the Bouncer knew it would. He pushed Wharton aside.

"Let him come on!" he exclaimed.

"Hold Ogilvy, Bob!" said Wharton.

"I'll deal with Smithy! If you're spoiling for another fight, Smithy, come on, you rotten cad!"

"I'm going to lick the fellow who's got my place in the eleven!" said the Bouncer coolly.

"You're going to lick me, or take a

licking!" said Harry grimly. "Come on!"

Vernon-Smith laughed, put his hands in his pockets, and walked away.

"Look here—" began Ogilvy hotly.

"Oh, dry up!" said Bob Cherry. "Do you think we're going to let Smithy crock the team one after another? You can scrap with him after the match, if you like—after I've done with him!" added Bob.

Ogilvy nodded shortly. He did not feel grateful.

The Bouncer's taunt had hit him hard, and he was anxious to get his hands upon Vernon-Smith. But he knew that his comrades were right. After a fight with the hard-hitting Bouncer he would not be in a condition to play against St. Jude's.

The Famous Five made it a point to keep Ogilvy in sight till dinner-time. The Scottish junior was angry and impatient at the idea of being looked after. But the Co. had their way.

The Bouncer gave Ogilvy a mocking smile at dinner, which very nearly drew a missile across the table at his insolent face, in spite of Mr. Quelch's presence. The Scottish junior sat fairly writhing with suppressed anger.

After the meal was over Harry Wharton & Co. kept with him as he left the dining-room. It was pretty clear that Ogilvy needed more watching than the Bouncer, as a matter of fact.

Vernon-Smith passed them in the Hall, and gave a sardonic laugh. Ogilvy spun round, and Johnny Bull caught his arm.

"No, you don't!" said Johnny.

"Look here, I'm not going to stand this!" exclaimed Ogilvy.

"You're wanted in the match!" said Wharton.

"You'd better come out for a little walk, and calm your naughty little temper," said Bob Cherry, taking Ogilvy's arm. "This way!"

Bob Cherry marched Ogilvy down to the gates, and marched him down the lane. The St. Jude's team was not expected for an hour, and Bob intended to keep the new recruit out till the time for the match.

Vernon-Smith strode away to the gates, with the intention of following them; but he found Harry Wharton in path.

"Stop!" said Harry curtly.

"I'm going out!"

"You're not going out!"

There was a pause. Then the Bouncer shrugged his shoulders, and sauntered into the quadrangle. Gosling was watching him from his lodge, prepared to take his name down for report if he ventured out of gates.

Vernon-Smith went to his study, beckoning to Skinner to follow him.

Skinner followed him into No. 4 in wonder.

"What's the game?" he asked.

"Wait a minute."

The Bouncer sat at the table, and dashed off a note, and sealed it in an envelope.

"You know I can't go out of gates," he said. "Gosling's watching—"

"And Wharton!" grinned Skinner.

"You'd better chuck up the game, Smithy. If you handle Ogilvy as you did Rake, it means a Form ragging at least!"

"I want this note taken to the Cross Keys," said Vernon-Smith, unheeding.

"It's for Jerry Hawke. You'll take it, Skinner?"

Skinner hesitated.

"It's risky, in the daytime," he said.

"You can go by the towing-path," said Vernon-Smith. "You can sneak in the back way easily enough. Dash it all, you've done it before!"

"Oh, all serene!" said Skinner, taking the note.

The Bounder smiled as his study-mate departed.

Skinner supposed that the note to Jerry Hawke had reference to betting transactions. But it was not turf speculations that the Bounder was thinking of now.

Skinner passed Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull, who were chatting in the gateway. They were there to stop the Bounder if he attempted to leave the school; but they had nothing to do with Skinner.

He was Smithy's pal, but they could not suppose that he had taken on the task of tackling Ogilvy. The Scottish junior would have knocked him out in the first round without turning a hair.

Vernon-Smith did not approach the gates again. He remained in his study for some time, and after that strolled down to the cricket-ground, where some of the fellows were gathering for the match.

Skinner rejoined him there, and the Bounder gave him a quick, inquiring look.

"All serene!" said Skinner. "I've seen Hawke, and given him the note. He seemed surprised."

"What did he say?"

"He said you could rely on him."

"Good!" said the Bounder. "Did you see anything of Ogilvy and Bob Cherry?"

"Yes. I passed them in the lane!" Skinner chuckled. "Ogilvy was looking like a bear with a sore head."

The Bounder laughed.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Caught Napping!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry and Ogilvy were seated on the stile in Friardale Lane. Ogilvy looked moody and restive, but Bob chatted away cheerfully.

Three rough-looking fellows came across the fields behind, from the direction of the Cross Keys, and stopped at the stile. The juniors jumped down to let them pass over, and they crossed the stile into the lane, and then closed round the two Removites.

"What the dickens—" ejaculated Ogilvy.

To the astonishment of the two Greyfriars juniors the trio closed in on them, with evidently hostile intent.

Bob and Ogilvy backed against the stile, and put up their hands.

"What's the game?" exclaimed Bob, in angry amazement. "What the dickens do you mean— Oh, my hat!"

The next moment he was hitting out. Ogilvy backed him up gamely.

But the two schoolboys, sturdy and plucky as they were, had not much chance against three grown men.

They were grasped and secured, and they struggled in vain in the grip of the three hooligans.

"Kim on!" grinned one of them. "This 'ere way, young gents!"

"What on earth are you up to?" exclaimed Bob. "What do you want?"

"Only want you to come for a little walk! This 'ere way!"

"Look here—"

The astonished juniors, struggling savagely, were dragged over the stile, and their captors hurried them across the field by the shortest cut to the cover of the wood.

In a couple of minutes they were under the trees, and screened from sight.

But they were hurried on farther into the depths of the wood, still resisting, though in vain.

"'Ere you are!" said the leader of the three hooligans—a thick-set man with a broken nose. "Don't you be afeared, young gents! We ain't going to 'urt you!"

"We're not afraid of you, you stupid brute!" shouted Bob. "Let us go at once!"

"Not jest yet, sir!"

The gentleman with the broken nose drew some cord from his pocket. His companions held the two juniors while he fastened the cord, securing Bob's arm to Ogilvy's, and then his leg. Then the helpless juniors were pitched into the grass and released.

They sat against a tree, blinking at the grinning hooligans.

Unless it was a rough, practical joke, the two juniors could not guess what could be the meaning of this extraordinary attack.

"Nice an' comfy?" asked the broken-nosed gentleman. "That's all right! Don't you git up, or I shall be bound to knock you down—see?"

"What are you playing this fool game for?" shouted Bob.

"That's telling, young gents."

The broken-nosed man sat on a fallen log, and lighted a pipe. His two companions, chuckling hoarsely, disappeared through the wood.

Bob Cherry and Ogilvy looked at one another blankly.

Tied as they were, and with the ruffian watching them close at hand, they had no chance of escape. They could only await the pleasure of the broken-nosed individual.

"Will you tell us what this means, my man?" asked Bob Cherry at last, in tones of concentrated anger.

"Nix!"

The distant chime of the hour in Friardale floated faintly over the woods. Bob Cherry started. It was two o'clock.

"Time we got back!" muttered Ogilvy. "Stumps are pitched at half-past two, Bob."

Bob fixed a fierce look upon the ruffian.

"Look here, my man!" he said as quietly as he could. "I don't know what you mean by this trick; but we're booked for a cricket-match this afternoon, and we've got to get back. Do you understand?"

"That so?"

"We want to get back to Greyfriars," said Ogilvy. "Look here, let us loose! We shall miss the cricket-match!"

The broken-nosed man chuckled over his black pipe, but did not answer.

"My hat!" muttered Bob Cherry suddenly.

A suspicion had shot into his mind, illuminating it.

This outrage appeared utterly objectless, and yet the rascals must have had a reason for their conduct. The broken-nosed man had evidently settled down to watch them and keep them prisoners. Why? While they were kept in the wood the St. Jude's match would be on at Greyfriars, and they would miss it, and Ogilvy would not, after all, take Dick Rate's place in the eleven. As in a flash Bob Cherry saw the Bounder's hand in what had happened.

"Smithy!" he said, between his teeth.

"Smithy!" repeated Ogilvy.

"Don't you see?" Bob was almost gasping with rage. "It's Smithy! This brute isn't doing this for nothing. Smithy put him up to it, to make you—and me—miss the St. Jude's match!"

"Oh, crumbs! But—but Smithy's within gates—"

"He's sent word to this rotter somehow," said Bob. "It's clear enough."

"I—I suppose it is. We're done!"

"Look here, you boozy scoundrel!"

said Bob between his teeth. "I know you've been paid to do this."

The broken-nosed man chuckled.

"You'll be prosecuted, you rotter!"

"Haw, haw!"

"Look here, let us go, and I'll stand you five, bob!" exclaimed Bob desperately.

"Oh, dry up!"

"I'll make it a sovereign!"

"Make it a 'undred," said the broken-nosed man humorously, "and then, maybe, I'll consider it. You shut up an' take a little rest!"

Bob, his face aflame, struggled with the cord, and Ogilvy exerted himself with energy. But they could not get loose. Bound as they were, they struggled to their feet. The ruffian rose from the log, and, with a heavy sweep of his arm, sent them sprawling in the grass again.

"You keep there!" he said. "I'll 'urt you next time!"

The juniors sat up dazedly. They were hurt already. There was no help for it—no escape.

With feelings more easily to be imagined than described, the two Greyfriars juniors sat chafing in the grass, while the broken-nosed man smoked and watched them warily.

The minutes crawled by on leaden wings.

The juniors heard the hour strike again and again from the distant village. It was not till six o'clock had sounded that their release came. Then the broken-nosed man stretched himself and yawned, and put away his pipe. He untied the whipcord that secured the juniors, and jerked it away. It was evident that he had been instructed to keep them prisoners till that hour, and then to release them.

Without a word to the juniors, he plunged into the wood and disappeared.

Bob Cherry and Ogilvy stretched and rubbed their cramped limbs. Then, with grim faces, they set out for Greyfriars.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder's Chance!

"HERE'S St. Jude's!"

"Hallo, Lunn!"

The visiting team had arrived. Harry Wharton greeted them cheerily on the Greyfriars ground.

Vernon-Smith, lounging outside the pavilion with Skinner, watched them with a sarcastic smile.

"Bob Cherry and Ogilvy haven't come back," Skinner remarked to the Bounder. "Looks as if they'll be late."

"Yes, doesn't it?" smiled Vernon-Smith.

"Jolly queer that they should stay out! They knew the time stumps were to be pitched."

"Must have!" agreed the Bounder.

Skinner gave him a quick, suspicious look.

Two or three fellows sped down to the gates, looking perplexed.

"Not in sight!" said Frank.

"Where on earth can they be?" exclaimed Wharton. "They can't have forgotten the time, surely?"

"Put other chaps in instead!" snorted Bolsover major. "I'm ready for one."

"Oh, rats!"

Wharton, with a worried face, asked Lunn, the skipper of St. Jude's, to wait a little. Lunn nodded a cheery assent. Ten minutes passed, but there was no sign of the absentees.

"We can't keep St. Jude's waiting any longer," said Wharton at last to his

comrades. "Bob must have forgotten the time, I suppose."

"Can't have been an accident?" said Mark Linley.

"I don't see how there could. Anyway, we've got to begin, and I shall have to put in somebody else."

Wharton wrinkled his brows. There were a good many of the Remove on the ground, and he looked over them. Dick Russell came up as he beckoned to him.

"You'll be wanted, Russell."

"Right-ho!"

Then Wharton had to think.

Penfold had gone for the afternoon, and Dolarey was out of gates with Hazeldene and Newland. They were not available. But another man was wanted for the team.

Wharton's eyes rested on the Bounder. As if in anticipation that he might be wanted, Vernon-Smith was on the spot, lounging by the pavilion.

That the Bounder was in fine form Wharton knew; he had seen him at practice the previous day, and Smithy looked fit enough. Under ordinary circumstances, Wharton would not have hesitated a moment. He would have called on Vernon-Smith to play for the Remove.

But the circumstances were not ordinary. Vernon-Smith had been dropped from the eleven for that special match, and since then he had acted in so utterly rotten a way that he had made himself the most unpopular fellow in the Form. Giving him the vacant place in the team was like rewarding him for his brutal attack on Rake.

Yet, for the sake of the team and the winning of the match, that was exactly the thing it was up to Wharton to do.

"You can't play the Bounder!" said Squiff, reading his thought in his face. "It would be too thick—after what he did to Rake."

"We shall miss Bob," said Harry. "Rake can't play; Pen's not here. We don't want to be licked."

"Well, do as you think best, of course."

"I don't want to play him. But—" Wharton broke off, and hurried across to Dick Rake, who was sitting down by the pavilion. "Rake, old chap—"

"Hallo!" said Rake, with a dismal blink.

"I—I suppose you couldn't—"

Wharton did not go on. It was only too clear that Rake could not play.

"Try Smithy," said Rake, with an effort. He was not feeling cordial towards the fellow who had injured him; but he was a sportsman, and the Remove cricket honour was dear to him. "Give Smithy a show, Wharton. He's fit this time, anyway."

Wharton nodded, and turned away. He found himself face to face with the Bounder.

"I'm here if you want me," said Vernon-Smith.

Wharton did not speak for a moment. The St. Jude's fellows were polite, but they were getting impatient, and showing it plainly.

Harry Wharton had to make up his mind; and he was well aware that the Bounder's inclusion in the team probably—almost certainly—meant the difference between victory and defeat, in the absence of Bob Cherry and Ogilvy.

He came to a resolution.

"All right! Get into your flannels."

"Right-ho!"

Harry Wharton tossed for innings with Lunn of St. Jude's. St. Jude's won the toss and batted first, and when the Remove fellows went into the field the Bounder of Greyfriars went with them.

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THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Well Played!

"SMITHY'S playing!"
"Good old Smithy!" chuckled Skinner.

Skinner had a suspicion in his mind—a very strong suspicion. He could not help connecting the absence of Bob and Ogilvy with the note he had taken to Mr. Hawke at the Cross Keys. And Skinner felt a tremendous admiration for the astuteness of his pal, Smithy was the old Bounder once more—cunning, unscrupulous—dangerous, in short.

Skinner did not voice his suspicions. He wondered whether trouble was to follow for the Bounder. Great as was his admiration at Smithy's cunning, he did not intend to admit any share in the matter when the hour of reckoning came.

The juniors round the ropes were surprised enough to see Vernon-Smith once more in the ranks of the Remove cricketers. But the game he played soon made them glad to see him there.

The Bounder was at the top of his form.

In the second over he caught Lunn, a really neat catch. Wharton gave him the bowling, and two wickets fell in quick succession.

It was a good start for Greyfriars, and cheers for the Bounder rang round the cricket-ground.

His faults were forgotten for the moment; even poor Rake, looking on, and seeing Vernon-Smith in the place he should have filled himself, joined in the cheering.

Applause was like wine to the Bounder. He dearly loved the lime-light. He seemed to be his best self now, with his very soul in the game.

Vernon-Smith and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh did most of the bowling, and the St. Jude's batsmen found them equally dangerous. The innings ended with 70 as the St. Jude's total.

Harry Wharton opened the Remove innings himself, with Peter Todd at the other end. When Todd fell, the Bounder took his place. He soon showed himself to be in great form. The runs piled up. Wharton and the Bounder settling down to a long partnership. The score was 80 when the Bounder was bowled at last. And Wharton followed him out soon afterwards. Only three wickets were down, and the St. Jude's first innings' total was already left behind.

The Remove batsmen went in with smiling faces after that. Nobody else did much, however. The innings closed for 110.

Vernon-Smith seemed to be enjoying something of his old popularity by this time. He had done great things for his side. Indeed, some of the Removites were beginning to hope for a win with an innings to spare. St. Jude's opened their second innings with a leeway of 40 runs to make up.

Vernon-Smith was enjoying the game—and his triumph! Perhaps, too, there was some idea at the back of his mind that a handsome win for the Remove, due to his aid, would help to stand between him and condemnation when the kidnapped juniors returned. No one except Skinner suspected, so far, that Bob Cherry and Ogilvy had been forcibly kept away from the match. Their absence was a puzzle; but in the excitement of the game the Removites had little time to think about it.

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh bowled the first over, and the last ball driven back by the batsman gave him a chance. He jumped at it. There was a loud cheer as the dusky nabob held up the ball.

"Good old Inky!" said Wharton,

clapping him on the shoulder as the field crossed. "Let's have some more of that!"

The dusky junior grinned ruefully. "The catchfulness was good," he admitted. "But the bangfulness on my esteemed paw was terrific. I have an absurd damage."

"Oh, rotten!"

Vernon-Smith bowled the next over. After that Wharton looked anxiously at the nabob.

Hurree Singh shook his head.

His hand was cut between first and middle finger, and his bowling was over for the day. It was unlucky for the Remove, in the full tide of success; but it was the chance of the game. Tom Brown was given the ball.

The New Zealand junior was a good bowler; but St. Jude's were on their mettle. Runs came slowly; but the defence was sound. A good many overs had been bowled before St. Jude's had scored a dozen runs, but only one wicket was down.

Vernon-Smith took the ball again, and his eyes gleamed as he started his over. He was in a mood to conquer.

The batsman's middle peg somersaulted.

"How's that?" grinned the Bounder.

"Out!"

"Well bowled, Smithy!"

There followed another yell as the next wicket tumbled to the next ball. But that was not the end. The next man in met with the same fate, and the Greyfriars crowd roared.

"The hat-trick! Hurrah!"

St. Jude's looked decidedly serious now. Four down for 12 was not much of a figure with so much leeway to make up. The ambitions of the Saints began to be limited to the hope of making Greyfriars bat again. A win for the visitors did not seem on the cards.

A catch at cover-point by the Bounder elicited another roar. Harry Wharton gave him an appreciative glance.

The Saints stone-walled now, and there was no break in the monotony for some time.

"There won't be time for us to bat again, at this rate," grumbled Bolsover major.

"We're safe on the first innings," remarked Wibley.

"Hallo! There goes the Bounder again! Go it, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith was putting all he knew into the bowling. The St. Jude's score had crept up slowly to 22. The batsmen were very, very careful; but the Bounder now was too good for them. Round the field a roar rose and swelled as one wicket went down and then another and then a third. It was the double hat-trick for Vernon-Smith!

"Bravo, Smithy!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Well bowled!"

Eight down for 22. There were long faces among the St. Jude's fellows now.

Another spell of slow play, in which a single came here and there. The score topped 30. Another wicket went down. Thirty-five! Last man in was putting up a struggle, with Lunn at the other end. Thirty-seven! Thirty-nine!

Bolsover major grunted.

"Why don't they buck up?" he demanded. "We shall have to bat again now! Squiff ought to have downed that wicket when he chucked in."

One more to save an innings defeat! Lunn had the bowling. The St. Jude's skipper meant at least to make Greyfriars bat again.

Tom Brown was bowling, and Lunn was glad to see that it was not Vernon-Smith. He got on to the ball hard.

But a lithe figure in white ran, leaped

—an upstretched hand was in the way—
smack!

Then there was a roar.

"Well caught!"

"Good old Smithy!"

"Greyfriars wins!"

Lunn looked glum and shrugged his shoulders. Greyfriars had won by an innings and a run.

Vernon-Smith tossed up the ball, and caught it again, with elation in his face. He had proved, if it needed proving, that he could not be spared from the Remove Eleven. Some of the fellows, indeed, were remarking that it was lucky that the absentees had not turned up for the match, and that the Bounder had been given that chance.

Vernon-Smith came off the field in the midst of a cheering crowd. Dick Rake joined heartily in the cheering.

The St. Jude's fellows took their defeat cheerily. Their brake rolled away, leaving the Removites in an eminently satisfied mood. A crowd of Remove cricketers were in the school shop, refreshing themselves with ginger-pop after their exertions, when Billy Bunter yelped:

"He, he, he! Here they come—too late for the game! He, he, he!"

The absentees had arrived.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Called to Account!

BOB CHERRY strode in at the school gates with a grim brow. Ogilvy was looking no less savage.

The two juniors had missed the St. Jude's match. They had passed the St. Jude's brake, returning, as they came up to the gates.

How the match had gone they did not know, though they observed, in passing, that Lunn & Co. did not look like victors.

But whether the match had been won or lost, their reckoning with the Bounder had to come.

"Hallo, Bob! Where on earth have you been?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Did you forget all about the match?" asked Bolsover major sarcastically.

"Where's Vernon-Smith?" shouted Bob.

"Here I am," said the Bounder coolly.

"Had a nice walk?"

"You roared!" roared Bob.

"You rotten, plotting rascal!" shouted Ogilvy.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. Skinner discreetly disappeared. This was not a scene he was anxious to figure in.

Harry Wharton interposed as Bob was striding straight at the Bounder. He dragged the excited junior back.

"Hold on, you ass! What are you going for Smithy for?" exclaimed Wharton. "What has Smithy done?"

"I'll tell you!" Bob's eyes were blazing, and his voice trembled with rage. "Do you know where we've been? We've been tied up in the wood, watched by a rotten hooligan, and kept prisoners till six o'clock!"

"Bob!"

"My hat!"

"A likely story!" yawned the Bounder. "Why don't you say at once that you forgot all about the match, and let it slide?"

"You lying rotter!" shouted Ogilvy. "You put those hooligans up to collaring us!"

"Pile it on!" sneered the Bounder. "This is getting quite interesting!"

"My esteemed chums," said Hurree Singh, "the thickfulness is somewhat terrific!"

Harry Wharton compressed his lips. He was beginning to understand now.

"Tell us exactly what happened, Bob," he said quietly.

The Remove fellows gathered round to hear. Very peculiar glances were cast at Vernon-Smith. The Bounder stood calm and collected. He had expected trouble to follow his treachery, and he was prepared to face it. Whatever happened, the Bounder's nerve was not likely to be found wanting.

Bob Cherry, in angry tones, told what had happened in the wood. There was a buzz from the juniors as he finished.

"That rotter put them up to it!" he said. "We were deliberately kept there till a time it was certain the match would be over, and then let go! They didn't do it for fun, I suppose! They were put up to it, and Vernon-Smith put them up to it!"

"And now he's got to pay for it," said Ogilvy.

Wharton looked at the Bounder.

"What have you got to say, Smithy?"

"Nothing!"

"You admit it?"

The Bounder was silent for a moment. His hard, reckless nature prompted him to admit it, and fling his defiance in the teeth of the Remove. But he paused.

"Well?" rapped out Wharton.

"You know I haven't been out of gates," said the Bounder. "That's answer enough."

"That's true," said Nugent.

"Of course, he sent word to those rotters!" said Bob. "I remember they came from the direction of the Cross Keys. Smithy's got friends there. He sent them word, somehow. If he didn't go out, some pal of his took the message."

"Skinner!" shouted Johnny Bull. "We saw him go out soon after you. Where's Skinner?"

"Find Skinner!" said Harry Wharton, his brow growing very dark.

Vernon-Smith laughed lightly.

"You needn't trouble about Skinner," he said. "Skinner took a message from me to a chap this afternoon. He would tell you so."

"A message to the Cross Keys?" asked Wharton.

The Bounder nodded. He knew that Skinner would own up to what he knew, if called to account. Skinner's nerve was not like the Bounder's.

"That settles it!" said Bob Cherry. "I knew it all right, anyway. Smithy, you cad, you scheming sneak, haven't you the pluck to own up now you're found out?"

The Bounder's eyes blazed.

"I think I have!" he said. "I own up, and be hanged to you! I wanted my place in the team, and I got it! So put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

There was a shout from the Removites. Vernon-Smith faced the crowd of them unflinchingly. Wharton pushed Bob Cherry back again.

"You unspeakable cad, Vernon-Smith!" he said. "You bashed Rake, like a rotten hooligan, to crock him for the match, and you hired a gang of blackguards to kidnap two chaps in the team. After this we shall know what to think of you! You played a good game for Greyfriars this afternoon, but the Remove doesn't want a treacherous, plotting rascal in the eleven. You won't play for the Form again so long as I am captain!"

The Bounder's lip curled sardonically. "Perhaps you won't remain captain," he suggested. "Perhaps somebody above your weight will shift you, Wharton!"

"Perhaps!" said Wharton contemptuously. "But it won't be you. I don't think it's possible for any fellow to be more despised than you are by the whole Form. Now you've played your dirty trick, you've got to answer for it.

You'd better come behind the gym, Bob."

"Anywhere you like, so long as we don't lose time!" growled Bob.

"Look here, this is my bizney!" exclaimed Ogilvy warmly. "You can leave the cad to me, Bob Cherry!"

"Take it in turns," suggested the Bounder coolly. "I dare say I can oblige you with a licking each!"

"Oh, ring off!" said Wharton. "Leave it to Bob, Ogilvy."

The juniors crowded away behind the gym—a sheltered spot, screened from view from the School House. The gym itself was no place for this encounter. Gloves were off!

Bob Cherry and Herbert Vernon-Smith peeled off their jackets.

Bob's face was dark with anger, but he was cool enough.

But Vernon-Smith was cool as ice.

He had a chance, at least, and he was not insensible to the kudos that was to be won by defeating so redoubtable a champion as Bob Cherry.

The reckoning had come. He knew that Wharton meant every word that he said. There was no room for the plotter, the schemer, in the Remove Eleven. That was closed to him. Henceforth he was up against the Famous Five—against them in everything, all along the line. And the defeat of Bob Cherry would be the beginning of their downfall!

But, win or lose, he had unbounded pluck, and was ready to stand up to any amount of punishment. Ogilvy seconded Bob, and Bolsover major, after some hesitation, stood forward as the Bounder's second. Temple of the Fourth kept time with his handsome watch.

There was a thick crowd round the ring. The juniors looked on breathlessly. Both combatants were angry, keen, determined, and full of pluck. For four rounds the result seemed undecided, and both showed signs of wear and tear. Then, slowly but surely, the sturdy Bob got the upper hand, and in every round that followed the Bounder was losing—fighting on pluckily—but losing.

He knew it, and his eyes burned with rage, and with dogged courage he stood up to the slogging fists, game to the last!

Nine rounds had been fought out grimly, and then the Bounder of Greyfriars lay on the ground, gasping, his eyes half closed. Bob Cherry, hard hit, but still game, stood erect.

Temple began to count.

The Bounder staggered to his feet. Bob stood back to give him a chance to rise.

"Hang you! Come on!" hissed the Bounder.

Crash!

Vernon-Smith was down again. He groaned as he lay. Temple counted, and this time the count was not interrupted.

"Out!"

The Bounder did not move.

Ogilvy quietly helped Bob on with his jacket. The juniors left the spot. Vernon-Smith sat up dazedly. Bolsover major stretched out a hand to help him, and he shook it impatiently off. Bolsover looked at him curiously, and walked away.

The Bounder leaned heavily against the wall of the gym, his head throbbing, his breath coming in thick gasps. He had said to himself that this should be the beginning of his struggle to down Harry Wharton & Co. That thought came back into his mind now, with bitter significance. Was this defeat an omen?

(Don't miss "THE BOUNDER'S MATCH!"—next Monday's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 23.—DICKY NUGENT.

DICKY NUGENT is the first representative of the fag contingent to be included in the Greyfriars Gallery. His chum Gatty, and Tubb of the Third, and that unspeakable little specimen, Sammy Bunter, will appear sooner or later, with perhaps one or two others. But Dicky has first place, though one is not at all sure he deserves it!

A spoiled child this, the younger son of an indulgent mother. Dicky has some of his brother Frank's weakness, but lacks a good deal of his loveliness.

Frank has borne a good deal for Dicky's sake—more than most brothers would have borne. He was playing in a Form match on the afternoon when Dicky came, and the youngster resented his not coming to meet him at the station. Bunter was willing to take on that job, and, of course, the steps of Bunter wandered to the tuckshop—the one building of real importance at Greyfriars from Bunter's point of view.

There Bulstrode and his toady, Snoop, found them, and because Bulstrode was up against the Famous Four he took charge of Dicky, with intent to nourish any seeds of blackguardism he might find in him.

He found some. The youngster was only too ready to smoke cigarettes and play cards. He was flattered at being taken up by Bulstrode, and ready to be cheeky to his brother and his brother's friends. But Tom Brown, coming in, refused to have a fag smoking in his study, and a row between him and Bulstrode ensued.

The guileful Bunter easily persuaded Dicky to go and put himself to bed in Mr. Quelch's room—they did not tell him it was Mr. Quelch's room, of course. The master heard his breathing in the dark, believed that a burglar was concealed under the bed, and fetched Mr. Prout with his rifle.

It was Monsieur Charpentier who discovered Dicky in the bed—you could not expect Mr. Prout to do that!

Dicky gave Bunter away, and was ragged by his Form as a sneak. He could not see the justice of it, and threatened to write to his mother and get her to take him away—a threat regarded very coolly by the Second.

Then he kicked Wingate's shins, and was thrashed for it. Furious at this, he sought revenge, hurled a great stone at the skipper, knocking him senseless, and would have been expelled had not good-natured Wingate begged him off.

More than once after that it must have occurred to Frank Nugent that it would have been no bad thing had Nugent minor had the sack. For worse things came. The youngster was not so much vicious—though the gambling spirit was in him—as weak and easily led away by notice from elder fellows. He was taken up by Loder and the other Sixth Form black sheep, and ran their miserable errands for them. It was through an attempt to make a scapegoat of Dicky that Carberry was expelled. A good day for Greyfriars that, but nothing to the credit of Nugent minor!

Dicky had his redeeming qualities, even in those days, however. He showed up well when, asked by Wingate to look after Sammy Bunter on that sweet youth's first day at school, he stuck loyally to his job in spite of Sammy's impossible ways, and did not give Bunter minor the licking he had been asking for until the time was up.

He even stood up for Sammy against the mighty Coker, telling that potentate that Sammy was under his protection. And he was not afraid to speak up to Mr. Quelch when Bulstrode—major brought his bullying tactics into the Second Form-room, where Dicky had just given Bulstrode minor a well-deserved hiding.

He chummed up with Gatty and Myers, too, and Gatty and Myers are sound and decent youngsters, albeit inky. But Dicky was always a little too big for Second Form boots. When he ran into Mr. Quelch, and was rebuked, he showed cheek, and was sent home for a week to meditate on his sins.

It did not suit Dicky to go home, and he had money, and Inky's younger brother was expected at the school—while Inky was absent. So what did Dicky? He stained

his face, and turned up in the character of Inky minor. Yes, and took in the whole school, too!

If he had never done anything worse than that! True, it was not he, but Bunter, who had Mauly's fifty-pound note. Bunter had not stolen it; he had found it, and was keeping it for a reward. But the evidence against Dicky was strong, and he would have been expelled had not Frank come forward and taken the boy's supposed guilt on his own shoulders for their mother's sake.

In the nick of time the Bounder discovered the truth. It should have been a lesson to Dicky Nugent; but, if it was, it did not last long.

Later he got gambling with Ponsonby of Highlife, and owed that specimen of the aristocracy five pounds, and, moreover, insisted that the money, being a debt of honour, must be paid—which was right in a way, but one cannot keep one's honour by smirching it. And again Frank sacrificed himself for his brother, and even his chums were allowed to believe him a thief or an embezzler. But Wan Lung cleared up that mess. It was by using Dicky as a bait that Vernon-Smith got Frank expelled; but in that matter the younger brother was guilty of nothing worse than folly and wilfulness.

When Mrs. Nugent, the mother of the boys,



Dicky Nugent

quarrelled with her husband she came to Greyfriars to take Dicky away with her. He could not go to meet her at the station; he had to go with Gatty to see a man who had a bull-pup for sale. Frank went, and tried to reason with his mother. She would not listen, and she enticed Dick away. But he had no mind to stay, and he wrote to Gatty, and Gatty and Myers sent him money to run away to school with—an unusual kind of running away. It was through Frank, not Dicky, that father and mother came together again.

But, in spite of all his faults, Dicky has become the acknowledged leader of the Second, which would seem to show that there is a good deal in him besides the faults. He has all his Form's fondness for herrings cooked on pens or knives by a smoky fire—a queer taste! He leads the Form at footer, and the Form did not spare him when overweening ambition on his part got them a match with the Remove—and a licking by 25 goals to nil! It was Dicky who visited the goldsmith at Courtfield to find out how much the Form could have, cash down, for the Coker Cup—when won. But the Second did not win that trophy!

And it was Dicky who pulled Gatty out of the river when Bolsover major funk'd the danger. That was something to set down on the right side of the account, anyway.

He has gone straight of late, and, indeed, when he went wrong it was never of his own unfettered free will. Others must take more than a small share of the blame. But he might have been more grateful to Frank, the best and most forgiving of brothers!

The Editor's Chat!

For Next Monday :

"THE BOUNDER'S MATCH!"

By Frank Richards.

In this week's story we have read how the Bounder—with no slight provocation, it is true—fell away from grace, and returned to his old ways. Next week will be told how the rift between him and those who had been his friends widened, and how he set his crafty brain to work to get even with Wharton for his exclusion from the Remove Eleven. In the dodge upon which he hits Temple, Dabney & Co. have a share; but they are little more than the tools of the Bounder, who displays all his old astuteness and unscrupulousness. Yet he is not quite the Bounder of old, though he may appear so at times. The friendships he has made are not wholly dead, though this new quarrel has come between him and the fellows he likes best. And he finds himself hard put to it to stand Skinner, while Skinner cannot understand him. In brief, he never quite loses one's sympathy, even at his worst; and he wins distinction in the cricket-field, which causes many at Greyfriars to take lightly the trick of which he has been guilty.

A CURIOUS COMPLAINT.

I have received a letter of complaint from the father of a reader who has the curious notion that I am in some way to blame for the boy's getting the sack from the office at which he was employed. He was sent to the bank, and took a copy of the MAGNER from his pocket to read on the way. His errand was to pay in money, and when he reached the bank counter he found himself two Treasury notes short of the correct amount. These notes, he said, he must have lost by pulling them out with the paper, and failing to notice them as they dropped—which is quite possible, but points to carelessness of a gross kind, if true. His employer sacked him—so the story continues—not for losing the notes, but for reading "penny trash!"

And his father wants me to insert his name and address, so that people can sympathise with him and join in cursing me!

Now, I fail to see that he deserves sympathy, or that I deserve blame.

I should have sacked that boy, I think. I might have let him stay if quite certain of his honesty. But I should not have sent him to the bank again. Honest he may be; trustworthy he is not. It was the worst kind of carelessness to put the notes into the same pocket in which the paper was, and to take that out without a thought of them. But he might have put them in the same pocket with his handkerchief, and if he had, and the same thing had happened, would everyone who had had any share in the manufacture of that handkerchief have been to blame?

Reading on an errand may not be just the right thing to do. I think I could forgive that, though. It is no worse than a halt to look at a fallen cab-horse, or to chat with a chum, or to gaze into a shop-window; and surely these are faults easily condoned.

"I myself," said the father, "have never read any of these penny papers." He seems to consider this a distinction. Well, perhaps it is. There are not many people who can say the same thing—not many so dull of brain that they have never wanted wholesome, bright fiction. But the man who has never read a paper is plainly disqualified from passing judgment on it; and the employer who sacked a boy not for losing money, but "for reading trash," is probably another man of the same type—and a foolish tyrant to boot! Who is he that he shall say what his employes are to read?

Your Editor

IN A LAND OF PERIL!

By BEVERLEY KENT,

Author of "Officer and Trooper," "Cornstalk Bob," "A Son of the Sea," etc., etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Bob Musters and Ted O'Brien, an Irish boy, escape from the clutches of Faik, a mascalzo adventurer who is in pursuit of a secret treasure in the African wilds. Faik is working in collusion with Jasper Orme, Bob's cousin, at Cape Town. The two lads are captured by the natives of the Inrobi tribe, who also surround Faik's party. Faik has done the chief of the tribe a bad turn in the old days, and tries to place the guilt on Bob; but, thanks to a Scotchman named MacGregor, and a friendly native—Mendi—he fails in his plot. Bob is acclaimed chief on the death of Kazna, the former leader. The comrades save Faik from the vengeance of the tribe, then push on after the treasure, but are waylaid by Mopo and a strong force. Mopo, who is Bob's deadly rival, is beaten off, with his braves, and Galza, a messenger from the Inrobi, comes to their camp.

He brings tidings of Mopo, who is in pursuit. The companions elude Mopo by diving into the lake, and they find a wonderful underground country, inhabited by a tribe of weird people unlike the human race. These strangers they overcome, secure the gold, and then, after amazing adventures, find themselves back in the world they had quitted. Mopo and Faik, with a strong party, are on their tracks.

(Now read on.)

Mendi Brings News.

"The savages are clearing out. That chap has rallied them together. I suppose he is next in command to Mopo!" Bob cried a few moments later.

"Then stay still. Don't make them remember us," MacGregor urged. "If they noticed us they might swarm down and finish us off before bolting themselves. What are they doing now?"

"They're not going to bolt. He's lining them up for a fight," Bob said.

"Are they facing us?"

"No; they're facing the direction of the rifle-shots. Now they're beginning to move. They've stopped. Some are hanging back. He's beating them on. He's got them on the run."

Ted and MacGregor raised themselves on their elbows and watched intently. The savages were moving out of the wood.

"There's a muckle in this," MacGregor said. "Ah, they've stopped! Aibhins they've found out that the alarm was groundless. Now, lads, let's take our chance. We may be too late if we don't. Make for the left, awa' from the river. They'll feel sure we've gone back to it."

He rose to his feet and began to run.

"Come on! Come on!" he cried.

"We'll keep up with you," Bob answered. "We don't intend that you should be left behind. Either we all escape, or else we all go down together."

Out of the wood they ran, and on to a plain, the old Scot keeping up pluckily running. But before long he had to stop.

"I canna do it!" he said, gasping hard. "Go on, and I'll follow!"

"Don't worry, Mr. MacGregor," Bob said quickly. "They're not on our track yet. Just walk as fast as you can. We're safe enough."

The old man began to move on. The rifle-shots were not repeated; a great silence brooded everywhere. They anxiously waited for the next sound.

Before them a great hill rose up, plain to see in the starlight, and they made for it, after looking behind to observe if they were being followed. They had gone well over a mile when at last MacGregor sat down.

"I maun hae a few meenits' rest," he said. "And say, Bob, how far do ye think we are from yon hill? Your young eyes are far sharper in this light than mine."

"It's hard to judge, but I should think it's a couple of miles away," Bob replied.

"If we can get there we're safe enough till the morning, anyhow," MacGregor

remarked. "They're searching along the bank of the river for us now, I expect."

"And they'll sink the raft, and we'll lose our ammunition," Ted said. "Well, that can't be helped, though if we had a rifle and cartridges we might be able to keep them back. We're fairly on our lonesome now, ain't we? It will be a lucky job if we get out of all this with our lives."

"Ted's getting down in the dumps again," Bob said, laughing. "We've had a big bit of luck, I reckon, in escaping so well from these savages, and he's not satisfied. It's because he's so hungry, I suppose. Let us hope, Ted, we'll find food somehow as we go along."

"I had forgotten about grub, and now I feel starving because you reminded me of it," Ted grinned. "I've a good mind to go back and see if these savages are out of the camp still. If they were I could get some."

"The risk wad be too great, and the chances are we'll find enough to live on," MacGregor said. "And now I'm ready to push on." And he stood up.

"Have you formed any idea yet as to what those rifle-shots meant?" Bob asked, as they resumed the journey.

"I've been thinking hard, of course," the old Scotchman answered; "and Mendi and Galza may be mixed up in it. We'll hear from Mendi in the morning."

"He will be able to find us?"

"That's certain. But he canna get on our tracks till daylight."

They kept on at the pace MacGregor set, and before long the ground began to rise somewhat sharply. In another half-hour they had come to the foot of a precipitous mountain. The ascent was difficult, and they constantly tripped over loose stones. Here there was no vegetation, only boulders, large or small, everywhere.

The top reached at last, they decided to spend the night there, despite a cold wind that swept across the crest. From this crest they would be able to scan, in the morning, the country around for many miles, and thus detect the presence of an approaching enemy.

Bob and Ted rolled a number of boulders together in a circle, thus forming a fortress, and the two lads agreed to keep watch by turns. They calculated that day would break in about four hours.

Ted took the first watch, and was relieved by Bob in due course. Nothing had happened. Ted had not even heard a noise in the distance.

Leaning over the boulders, Bob kept a sharp look-out. He knew that savages usually attacked in the very early dawn. So as the stars began to disappear and a grey hue gradually crept over the sky, his anxiety increased. And as the light grew clearer his anxiety was heightened by the fact that a mist hung over the plain.

He could see neither river nor plain, only the trees. The savages might be approaching. He waited eagerly for the sun to rise and banish the mist, and already the first red flush was creeping up on the horizon when he heard, not far away, a stone go clattering down the mountain.

At once he awoke Ted. They listened, their hearts thumping hard.

"I don't see how they could have spotted us yet," Ted said. "Perhaps there are some wild beasts up here, and that accounts for what you heard. If Mopo's crowd are creeping up on all sides, it's a bad look-out. But if—Hist! What's that?"

Something metallic had struck a stone. "They're coming!" Bob said. "Tell Mr. MacGregor, but don't speak loud. We must bolt down the other side. It's our only chance, and a poor one. Unless we hurl down the rocks, and try that way to—Ha! There's one of the crowd already!"

Out of the mist a native had stepped. He was coming quickly up the hill.

"He's got a rifle!" Ted gasped.

"Why, it's Mendi!" Bob cried, much relieved. "Hi, Mendi! So you found us all right?"

The cry awoke MacGregor, who quickly arose.

"What's up?" he asked. "Did I hear ye say that—"

"Yes, Mendi is coming up the mountain. Look, he's yonder!" Bob said, with joy. "But what is he carrying on his back?"

Eagerly they watched the faithful black boy, who waved a hand in salutation. But he did not smile; on the contrary, his face was set hard. When twenty yards away he spoke.

"Oh, white chief, 'tis well I have overtaken thee ere the mists have fled," he began. "For the jackals are searching for thee with vengeance in their evil hearts, and of a certainty they would find thee had I not made haste!"

"Are they close behind you?" Bob asked. "Nay, they are three miles away, and moving quickly away," the black boy answered. "But of what avail would that be? Have they not the eyes of the eagle? And can they not see the work of man?"

He dropped two of the bags which had not been used for the gold on the raft, and pointed to the fortress the Britishers had made.

"He's right!" MacGregor affirmed. "We were safer here than anywhere else during the night, for at least we could not have been rushed very easily, but we should have knocked down those boulders before daylight. Roll them away now, lads. And, Mendi, in which direction are Mopo and his crowd?"

Mendi pointed to the east.

"They travel thither, oh Barelegs," he said.

"Then we'll e'en gang doon the other side of the mountain!"

"Nay, there would be greater danger there," the black boy replied; "for those with iron tubes would see you!"

"He means white men," Bob said.

"Whitefaces with black hearts!" Mendi answered, his face dark with anger.

"Well, let us get down these boulders, and then we'll clear out and hear 'a' he has to say," MacGregor urged. "He has much to tell. That is evident."

"We need but to move a small space," Mendi asserted. "There are stones behind which we can rest, and yet watch whilst we eat. But—"

"Eat!" Ted almost shouted. "You've managed to loot some grub, have you? Of all the splendid fellows, Mendi— But let us get to work and sheer off. Oh, for a meal of some sort!"

The boulders were soon dispersed, and behind large rocks the party took cover before the sun, rising, had sucked up the mist. Before them now the vast plain stretched out to the horizon, and as the heat increased the air became more rarefied, and they could see minute objects very distinctly. Mendi had begun to tell his tale whilst they ate ravenously.

"I followed Mopo, as thou bidst me, oh chief," he said, addressing Bob, "and he walked like one who knew his way. And he drew nigh to the river, and there he stood, and in a loud voice he shouted in the darkness.

"And I, who was but a few yards behind, wishing his axe was mine, that with it I might cleave his skull in twain, heard an answering call. And the voice was a harsh one, like the croaking of a great frog. And Mopo went on, and I followed, but for a moment I stopped.

"For I was near the flat boat put together craftily by the wise Barelegs, which bore us safely from that land of horrors, and I remembered what it carried, and I knew the man Mopo was on his way to meet. So I ran to the river, and I got yonder iron tube.

"And then I followed, running like the zebra or creeping like the snake, and I saw the two black hearts meet. I saw the owl's eyes and the neck of a crane."

"Great Scott! He means Faik!" Ted gasped.

(Continued on page 16.)

"And then they spoke together, and turned to come my way, and I hastened before them, asking myself many questions. For of what use was it to come back and say what I had seen, when they meant death to all? And how was I to make them flee? Then, trembling, I raised the iron tube, and, shuddering, I pulled the latch. And a great noise followed, and the tube, as if in a fury, struck my shoulder and jumped away. But, afraid though I was, I picked it up and ran.

"And the owl-eyed one fired. And then as I ran I came near to more men, and they fired also. And I turned away, and ran I knew not where; and the owl-eyed one fired the more, and the other men fired also. But I sped on.

"And then I saw the traitors of my tribe coming in a body; and, keeping away as they drew near, I passed them, and got to the camp; and it was empty, for you had gone. Then did I know you were safe, and a great happiness was mine.

"And I took of the food of the traitors as much as I could carry, and went away and hid. And when all was quiet, I went to the raft again, and there I got those pellets which burst in the iron tube, all that lay there. And when Mopo and the traitors and him of the owl's eyes had gone some way I began to search without fear, and thus I tracked you. I have spoken!"

For a full minute a tense silence followed. Then Bob held out his hand.

"Mendi, we have to thank you that we are still alive," he said. "Never can any of us forget this! Shake hands! You are as brave a man as any in all Africa!"

"Ay, ay!" Ted agreed. "As true as steel!" "Ye're right, lad," MacGregor assented. "It's not the colour, but the heart that counts. And Mendi has a heart of gold, as he proved, and not for the first time, last night. And now there's a lot more we maun find out if yet we are to escape!"

A Fresh Disaster.

As MacGregor spoke he had been gazing with puckered eyes across the veldt. His many years passed there had given him, despite his age, a keenness of long-distance vision by daylight which neither Bob nor Ted had yet had time to acquire.

Mendi's face was lit up with joy. "What else is left for him to tell?" Ted asked.

"He spoke of a party who fired besides the shots from Faik," the old Scot replied. "Who do you think they are?"

Bob's eyes began to kindle. "We heard from Gaiza when he joined us that Faik had sent down to Cape Town," he said.

"Yes; that is what is in my mind," MacGregor said.

"Then my rascally cousin, Jasper Orme, has come up here!"

"I fear so. Faik expected him, and was waiting for him. Mopo went to meet Faik, when Mendi fired, and Faik shot at him, Orme and his party, thinking they were attacked, fired wildly in the darkness. All was confusion. But they had plenty of time to come together and clear up the mistake."

"It's like this, then," Bob remarked. "Not only have we Mopo against us, but also Faik and this band of armed scoundrels whom my cousin has got together."

"And we've also got that old villain Kaasokiki, who was the first rotter we dropped across on our journey up, and who hasn't forgotten by a long way," Ted suggested.

"He's a long distance off," Bob said.

"Still, even if we manage to slip past all these fellows, he'll be waiting for us," Ted pursued. "Heigho! We've a big game to play, and no mistake!"

MacGregor was stroking his beard, a habit he had when in deep thought.

"Mendi, did ye come across any of these white men who fired?" he asked.

"I fed hither and thither, as I have told," Mendi answered. "But once I saw a great cart and some oxen."

"Humph! They're well equipped," MacGregor remarked. "I fancy, Bob, your cousin has put all the money he could scrape together into this venture. It's neck or nothing with him and Faik now. Either they maun wipe us out in these lonely parts, from which the story of our deaths will never travel to civilisation, or else they must become outcasts for the rest of their lives. They're in a desperate position, and they won't stop at anything. And Jasper Orme has left nothing to chance. He'll be pro-

visioned for several months, with plenty o' rifles and a pile of ammunition, too."

"We can outwit them," Bob said.

"That's oor one chance," the old Scot agreed. "But, if my eyesight doesna deceive me, they are already working to prevent that. Mendi, look yonder, where the far kopje is, near the horizon. What seest thou moving there?"

The black boy gazed long and intently.

"Lo, I see some wild cattle," he replied.

"And they are but a small herd. And I see men, too, and they are not white men."

"So I thought. And look away to the left, about five miles from the river. What seest thou there?"

"I see cattle."

"Anything else?"

"I see also the wheel of a cart."

"Precisely! I thought that, but I wanted to make sure," MacGregor remarked, drawing a deep breath. "So you can guess how it is, lads," he went on. "They've all had an indaba, and fixed up their plans."

"And what are they?" Ted asked.

"They've lunged out reconnoitring parties in search of us. Whichever way we go, they hope to head us off. Orme is ready to attack if we make for the south. Mopo is to the north, if we fall back before Orme."

"And Faik?" Ted inquired.

"He may be either with Orme or with Mopo, or he may have taken another post with some to help him," MacGregor answered. "The question noo is what are we to do? Did any of these men see ye near the raft, Mendi?"

"That I cannot say, oh master," the black boy replied. "But none did that I know of."

"We can get down the mountain without them observing us," Bob said. "Mopo can only see this side of it. If we go to the east we'll be out of the range of his vision. And I fancy Orme won't see us, either."

"Yes; Orme couldn't see us from where the cart is, anyhow," MacGregor agreed.

"And what's to be our move after that?"

"We must get the treasure we have hidden," Bob said firmly. "For if we delay they may find it."

"There's no time to be lost, and we're certainly not going back to Cape Town empty-handed after all we've gone through," Ted said.

MacGregor nodded.

"It's a big risk; but we've taken a good few already, and we haven't come to grief," he said. "Weel, let us get on the move. We'll follow Mendi down the mountain. These black fellows know how to hide better than white men. We'll do just as he does."

Taking the rifle and the two bags, they started, having explained to Mendi what they wanted him to do. Sometimes, and always following his example, they crawled on their hands and knees; sometimes they trailed along the ground; sometimes they were able to walk upright for a space. At last, tired and covered with dust, they reached the level ground.

Here to conceal themselves further was impossible, for they could not know from what vantage point the enemy might be watching the plain. Their best safeguard was speed, and they pushed on rapidly.

In about an hour's time they drew near to the river, and their hearts began to beat fast with hope, and also with apprehension. For until they actually reached the river they could not know whether the raft had or had not been seized. Bob ran on ahead.

They saw him get to the river-bank. At once he turned and waved his hat, and Ted could hardly restrain a whoop of delight.

"They didn't find it," he said to MacGregor. "So we're fairly safe now, whatever happens. If it comes to the worst we can take to the water again."

"It's easy to pick a man off with a rifle

at close on fifteen hundred yards, and I bet Orme will hae good marksmen with him," MacGregor replied, in a grim voice. "But we're safer with the raft than without it, that's certain. Now we must all get to work."

The raft was as they had left it. Bob's face was bright and triumphant.

"Now to fetch the gold," he said. "And then, Mr. MacGregor, don't you think we had better wait here till nightfall, hidden by the bank, and then push off in the darkness? If we go fifty miles by water we can take another line to Cape Town, and be half-way there before these scoundrels give up the search for us as hopeless."

"We maun wait for Gaiza," MacGregor said. "But we can go up the river a bit and come back at night. And now I think Mendi had better go and reconnoitre, whilst we are fetching the treasure. It would be a bad job if we found our way to it cut off when trying to return."

Bob explained to the black boy what was wanted.

Having seen him start, the three Britishers made for the cache.

They had only a few hundred yards to go, and Bob and Ted pressed on. Bob showed Ted where it was, and they eagerly pulled the bushes away. Then, lying flat on the ground, they stretched their arms down full length.

"This hole is much deeper than I made out from what you said," Ted remarked, a trifle ruefully. "I can't get a grip on anything."

But Bob had jumped to his feet. His face had gone pale. Without answering his chum, he lay flat again and searched. Then he groaned.

"What's up? Have you strained yourself?" Ted asked.

Bob's eyes were full of misery.

"They've been here!" he said. "The gold has been taken away!"

"What!" Ted gasped.

"It has! I could easily feel the top bags just as I put them in," Bob continued. "I hadn't to drop them; I could just lay them on the others."

Ted arose and staggered back.

"They've stolen them!" he cried, hot anger in his voice. "They've robbed us of all we risked our lives to win. But they won't keep the treasure. I know they won't. They'll have my death on their hands also before I give in! I'll fight them to the bitter end!"

"Same here!" Bob said, jumping up.

At that moment MacGregor joined them. From a distance he had seen their agitation, and had guessed its cause.

"They've been here first?" he suggested.

"Yes," Ted panted.

"Then let us get back to the raft at once and sheer off," the old Scotsman urged, clutching Ted to calm him. "They're watching for us. They've set a trap. The first thing is to think of our lives, for dead men can't get back their rightful dues. Bob, come along! Ye're always level-headed."

"Mr. MacGregor is right, Ted," Bob said. "We must first get clear. And we must remember Mendi. If we fall he's done for, too. Come on! Come on!"

He led the way, and Ted followed. They all hurried to the raft, and had just stepped aboard it when a shriek turned the blood cold in their veins.

Mendi burst out of a thicket. He was pursued by two powerful scoundrels. He limped, and they were overtaking him. One had a rifle raised to club him.

"He can't save himself!" Bob cried. "And last night he saved us! If he dies, then I'll die, too!"

And, with no weapon but his fists, he sprang off the raft.

(Next week's issue will contain another splendid instalment of this exciting story.)

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