


PONSONBY'S PAL!



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WINGATE MAJOR & WINGATE MINOR!

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PONSONBY'S PAL!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Wingate Minor is Wanted!

WHARTON!
Harry Wharton stopped at once as Wingate of the Sixth called to him.

The captain of Greyfriars was looking out of the big doorway of the School House, and there was a worried frown on his brow.

Wharton had just started for Little Side for practice. Bob Cherry's powerful voice was bawling to him across the quadrangle. But Wharton turned back cheerfully to see what Wingate wanted. Though the Remove did not fag for the seniors, and were very stubborn on that point, there were few Removites who would not have done anything for "old Wingate."

"Yes, Wingate?" said Harry cheerily.

"Have you seen my minor?"

"Not to-day."

"I want him," said Wingate. "Will you find him and send him to my study, Wharton?"

"Right-ho!"

"Hold on, though," said the Sixth-Former. "Not if you're playing. I'll find somebody else."

That was just like Wingate. He was always considerate, even towards the most inconsiderable fags.

"It's all right," said Harry, at once. "Only practice, you know. I'll look for Jack and send him along, Wingate."

"Thanks!" said the Greyfriars captain. And he turned back into the house.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came Bob Cherry's stentorian tones—tones which even the celebrated Stentor himself might have envied. "Are you coming along, you slacker? I'm waiting for you."

Harry Wharton hurried across to join his chums. Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh were with Bob.

"Seen Wingate minor, you chaps?" asked Harry.

"Bless Wingate minor!" said Bob.

"Haven't seen him," said Johnny Bull. "What the merry dickens do you want a Third Form kid for?"

"Old Wingate wants him."

"Let old Wingate look for him, then," suggested Johnny Bull.

"He's asked me. Cut along, you fellows, and I'll join you later."

"Bow-wow!" said Bob. "If you're going fag-hunting, we'll help you. What's young Jack been doing?"

"I don't know, but Wingate looked very serious," said Harry. "Looks as if the young bouncer is in some scrape."

Nugent whistled softly.

"I shouldn't wonder," he remarked. "I saw him up the road with Ponsonby of Highcliffe the other day. Pon isn't the kind of chap to do a silly fag any good."

"No fearfully!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh, with emphasis.

"Well, let's find him."

The Famous Five started in search of Jack Wingate of the Third. The Third Form-room was drawn blank, and the captain's minor was not visible among the fags along the passages. Neither was he to be seen in the quadrangle.

"Must have gone out," said Harry, at last. "Hallo, Smithy, have you seen Wingate minor?"

Vernon-Smith, the Bouncer of Greyfriars, halted, and gave the captain of the Remove a curious look.

"Looking for him?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Is his major on his track? I saw old Wingate looking like a thunder-cloud."

"His major wants him," said Harry. "Do you know where he is, Smithy? You look as if you know something about it."

The Bouncer laughed.

"You may have to go over to Highcliffe for him," he said. "Master Jacky has been chumming up with Ponsonby lately."

"What on earth for?" said Wharton. "What does Pon want with a Third Form kid? Jack hasn't much tin to lose at banker, I suppose?"

Vernon-Smith laughed again.

"Perhaps Pon thinks he has," he remarked. "Anyway, they've got friendly. The other day, when Pon was over here, Wingate found him smoking with Snoop in Snoopey's study. He licked him."

"Serve him right!"

"Quite so. Pon thought it an awful cheek for Wingate to lick a Highcliffe fellow, though," grinned the Bouncer. "I fancy Pon was annoyed."

"I shouldn't think being licked by Wingate major would make him very friendly with Wingate minor," remarked Bob Cherry.

"You never know!" smiled the Bouncer.

And, with a nod, he went on his way.

"Blessed if I understand what Smithy's driving at," granted Bob. "Look here, where has that young ass got to?"

"We can't go over to Highcliffe for him, if he's there," said Nugent. "Go and tell Wingate he's done the vanishing trick."

Wharton shook his head.

"Better find him, if we can," he said. "He must be somewhere, bless him! Hallo! Here's Bunter! Bunter, you fat Owl, come here."

Billy Bunter rolled up, blinking at the chums of the Remove through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, I was just looking for you," he announced. "The postman's just been—"

"Bother the postman!"

"He hasn't brought a letter for me," said Bunter sorrowfully. "I think I mentioned to you chaps that I was expecting a postal-order—"

"I think you did—about a hundred times."

"Nearer a thousand," grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, it hasn't come," said Bunter seriously. "Delay in the post, you know, due to this blessed war, I suppose. I suppose one of you fellows couldn't lend me five bob till my postal-order comes?"

"You suppose right! We couldn't," agreed Wharton. "Have you seen Wingate minor?"

"He, he, he!"

The Famous Five stared at William George Bunter as he burst into that unexpected cachinnation.

"Well, what's the cackle about?" demanded Wharton.

"He, he, he!"

"What are you going off like a Chinese cracker for?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!"

"Have you seen Wingate minor?" exclaimed Wharton, exasperated.

Bunter gave him a fat wink.

"I'm not going to give him away," he remarked. "I may have seen him, and I may not. That's telling!"

"That means that you've seen him, I suppose. Where is he?"

"He, he, he! Perhaps he's in the old tower with Snoop and Pon, and perhaps he isn't," grinned Bunter. "Perhaps they're having a smoke party, and perhaps they're not. He, he, he! Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter's cackle was suddenly cut short as Bob Cherry jammed the business end of a boot against his plump ribs. Bunter's cackle changed to a roar. The Famous Five hurried away towards the Cloisters, leaving Billy Bunter rubbing his ribs, and glaring after the juniors with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Caught in the Act!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. looked very grim as they hurried through the old Cloisters in the direction of the ancient tower.

It was a secluded and deserted spot, and hardly ever visited save by fellows of the "gay dog" variety, who wanted to smoke cigarettes out of sight of masters and prefects.

Bunter's information had deeply angered the chums of the Remove. They knew Cecil Ponsonby, the blackguard of Highcliffe, and his manners and customs, very well. The fact that they were on friendly terms with Pon's cousin, Courtenay of the Highcliffe Fourth, made it incumbent on them to be outwardly civil to Ponsonby when they happened to come into contact with him. But if Ponsonby had transferred the scene of his blackguardism to Greyfriars, it was not a case for civility. It was time for a foot to be put down—hard!

"Pass the matches!"

Ponsonby's voice was audible as they came up to the old stone doorway of the half-ruined tower. They knew the cool, drawing tones at once.

An atmosphere of tobacco-smoke smote them as they strode in.

There were three juniors in the dusky room, dimly lighted by the narrow loop-hole windows.

One was Snoop of the Remove, another was Jack Wingate of the Third Form, and the third was Cecil Ponsonby, the dandy of Highcliffe.

Ponsonby removed the cigarette from his lips, and glanced round with a sneering smile at the sight of the five grim faces. Snoop grinned through the smoke. Jack Wingate coloured crimson, and slid his cigarette hastily behind him.

"Good-afternoon, dear boys!" drawled Ponsonby. "Dashed kind of you to be givin' us a look-in. Pass them the smokes, Jack!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Snoop, much tickled by Pon's pleasantry.

Wingate minor coloured more deeply. He, at least, was ashamed of himself.

"So you're here!" said Wharton. "We've been hunting for you, Wingate minor! Your major wants you!"

Wingate minor rose from the stone seat.

"Don't go!" said Ponsonby.

"I—I must, if my major wants me," stammered the fag.

"Oh, rot! Let him wait till you've finished your smoke!" said the dandy of Highcliffe. "Be a man, you know!"

Jack Wingate hesitated, and then sat down again, and the cigarette came into view once more.

"Wingate minor isn't going to finish his smoke," said Harry Wharton quietly. "Neither are you fellows."

Ponsonby shrugged his shoulders, and Snoop scowled.

"Look here; you chaps can mind your own business," said Snoop. "I suppose it doesn't matter to you what we do!"

"Not so far as you're concerned," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "You can be as big a fool as you like, and as shady as you like. But you, Ponsonby, won't be allowed to carry on this game at Greyfriars. You can keep it for Highcliffe, where it seems to be the fashion!"

Ponsonby deliberately blew out a little stream of smoke. Wharton coughed as he caught it full in the face.

"Wingate's licked you once for smoking here," said Wharton. "If you want another licking, that's the way to get it!"

"He's going to get it," said Johnny Bull, who was methodically pushing back his cuffs in his slow, stolid way. "I'm going to lick him!"

"Look here; you fellows needn't interfere," said Jack Wingate. "Pon's my pal!"

"You don't want pals like Pon," said Harry.

"That's my business, I suppose?"

"Well, I suppose it is, in a way," admitted Harry. "I suppose you haven't sense enough to see that that blackguard is twisting you round his finger, and laughing at you in his sleeve for being such a young ass!"

Jack Wingate crimsoned again.

"Look here——" he began.

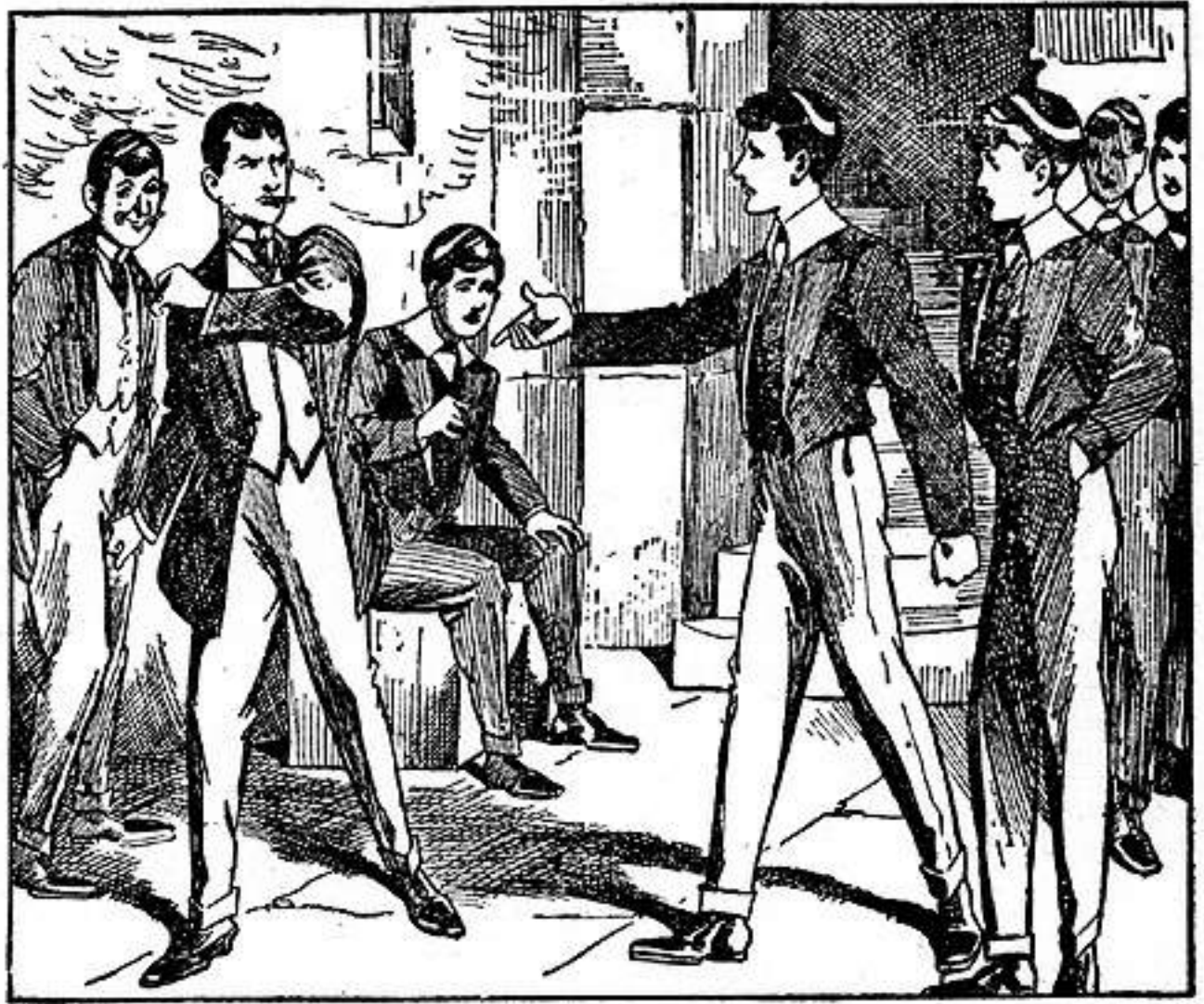
"But Ponsonby won't be allowed to play this game here," continued Harry. "He wants a lesson, and he's going to get it. You can cut off to your major."

"You're not going to touch Ponsonby!" shouted Jack Wingate, with a sudden passionate burst of anger. "Mind your own business!"

"I'm going to touch him—hard!" said Johnny Bull. "Put up your hands, Pon."

He advanced on the dandy of Highcliffe, who coolly put his hands behind.

"Thanks—I didn't come here for a



Pon at Greyfriars! (See Chapter 2.)

scrap," said Ponsonby. "Hooligan roys are not to my taste, dear boy. I think I'll be gettin' off now, Jucky. Greyfriars manners rather get on my nerves."

"You won't go without being licked!" said Johnny Bull grimly.

"Let me pass!"

"That's for a beginning," said Johnny, and his heavy hand fairly crashed upon Pon's handsome, supercilious face.

The Highcliffe junior gave a shout of rage, and sprang upon the Removite. In a moment they were fighting savagely.

Sidney James Snoop sidled quietly out of the room, and retreated from the spot. He was not seeking for trouble with the Famous Five. Jack Wingate looked on at the fight with a sullen, lowering brow. Harry Wharton touched him on the shoulder.

"Your major wants you in his study, Jack!"

"Hang my major! Let me alone!"

"You'd better go, kid!"

"Not till I've finished my smoke," said the fag defiantly.

Wharton looked at him quietly. There was something so absurd in the fag's assumption of mannish airs that it was almost pathetic. It was evident that he was very much under the influence of the leader of the Highcliffe nuts. And that influence Wharton meant to put to end to—whether it was his business or not.

"Cut along, Jack!" he said.

"I won't!"

Wharton tightened his grip on the fag's shoulder, and led him out of the tower. The Third-Former could not resist the strong grasp of the captain of the Remove, though he struggled angrily.

Wharton jerked away the cigarette. He threw it on the ground, and set his boot on it.

"Now, cut off!" he said.

He released the fag. Jack Wingate stared at him for a moment, his fists clenched and his eyes blazing. It was clear that he was meditating an attack, and Wharton smiled as he saw it. But the hopelessness of attacking the captain of the Remove dawned upon the fag, and he swung round and tramped away through the Cloisters.

Sounds of loud trampling and scuffling and panting came from the tower.

Then they ended, and a dishevelled youth came flying through the doorway, to sprawl on the flags outside.

It was Ponsonby of Highcliffe, with his collar and tie hanging loose, his hair ruffled, and his nose streaming red.

Johnny Bull followed him out, calm and stolid as ever.

"Better clear off!" he suggested.

"The betterfulness will be terrific, my esteemed disgusting Pon!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Ponsonby sat up dazedly.

"Oh!" he gasped. "You—you rotter! Ow!"

"Are you going?" asked Johnny Bull. "I've got a boot to help you with if you don't."

Ponsonby staggered to his feet. He gave the grinning Removites a look of hatred, and hurried away through the Cloisters. Ponsonby had had enough.

"Nice kettle of fish!" said Bob Cherry. "Fancy young Wingate turning out like that! He's been such a decent little chap!"

"It's Ponsonby's doing," said Wharton, frowning. "He's twisted the young ass round his finger—it's easy enough to influence a kid of Jack's age, and Ponsonby is as cunning as a Prussian. But he won't play any more of his tricks here in a hurry, I think."

"Let's look for Snoop, and give him a licking, too!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Let's go and get some practice," said Bob Cherry laughing. "Come on!"

And the Famous Five went down to the playing-fields.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Brother or Prefect!

"COME in, Jack!"

George Wingate spoke kindly enough, though his brows were knitted.

The fag's face was sullen as he looked into the study. Evidently Jack Wingate was not pleased by that summons to his major's presence.

He came into the study with obvious reluctance.

"Wharton said you wanted me," he said.

"That's right. I asked him to look for you."

"Well, what is it?"

"Sit down, Jack."

The fag hesitated.

"Are you going to keep me long?" he asked.

Any other fag in the Third Form would scarcely have ventured to bandy words with the head of the Sixth. But Jack was in a rather different position from the other fags.

When he had first come to Greyfriars Jack had assumed airs in the Third on account of his importance as the captain's minor. The Third Form had soon knocked that out of him. Jacky's airs and graces, as Tubb, of the Third called them, led to raggings, and the raggings led to Wingate minor's settling down in his proper place.

But with his brother he could still venture to assume a privileged position. Wingate's ashplant was not so readily forthcoming for his minor as for any other fag.

"Sit down!" Wingate repeated, frowning.

Jack sat down.

"I haven't seen much of you lately, Jack," said the captain of Greyfriars, his eyes on the fag's moody face.

"You never do see much of the Third, do you?" said Jack.

"Well, no; but I don't want to lose sight of you because you're in the Third, all the same."

"You've told me I'm not to think myself any different from the other chaps because my major's captain of the school!" said Jack.

"That's quite so," assented Wingate. "That kind of thing would only make you unpopular. But, though favouritism is out of the question, I want to keep an eye on you—and I intend to! To come to the point, I've got a bone to pick with you, Jack."

Jack did not answer.

"You've been seen in company with a Highcliffe fellow," resumed Wingate. "I was told so by a Sixth-Form chap. Isn't it so?"

"Lots of the fellows know the Highcliffe chaps," said Jack. "Some of the Remove are very thick with the Highcliffe Fourth—Wharton, for instance."

"That's different. I know Wharton's Highcliffe friends—Courtenay, De Courcy, and that set—quite decent fellows. I shouldn't object to your being friendly with them, if they wanted to chum with a fag. I'm speaking of a young scoundrel named Ponsonby."

"I don't see why you should call him names."

"I call him a scoundrel because he is a scoundrel," said Wingate quietly. "I suspect that there are some fellows at Greyfriars who are not quite up to the Greyfriars standard; but a fellow like Ponsonby couldn't stay at this school at all. He would be booted out before he'd been here a week, if he came. Highcliffe is a rotten show, the Head is an old donkey, and the masters are all slackers, and most of the fellows do as they like. It's a kind of school that gets a bad name for the public-school system. I've heard a good bit about Highcliffe, and am quite aware that the seniors there are merry blades, as they call it, and most of the juniors follow in their footsteps. I admire Courtenay for the way he stands up against it in the Fourth. He's a good kid. Ponsonby is one of the very worst."

Jack gave a grunt, but he did not speak.

"I've caught him smoking here, in Snoop's study, and licked him for it," added Wingate.

"You hadn't any right to lick a Highcliffe chap!"

"What?"

"Anyway, there's no great harm in a smoke."

"There's a good deal of harm in it, for a fellow of Ponsonby's age, Jack. It's bad for the health, when a fellow's growing, and it's silly. I shouldn't be hard on a silly kid who tried to smoke for a lark; but there's something wrong about a boy who cultivates a grown man's habits as a regular thing. I've heard other things about Ponsonby, too—that he gambles, and plays billiards at the Three Fishers up the river. It's not my business, as he doesn't belong to this school; but it is my business to see that he doesn't have anything to do with my minor. You see that?"

"No, I don't."

Wingate compressed his lips.

"Have you made friends with Ponsonby, Jack?"

"I've met him."

"More than once?"

"Yes."

"Then you're friends?"

"I suppose so."

"And how do you amuse yourselves?"

Jack was silent.

"Are you aware that you smell of tobacco-smoke at this minute, Jack?" asked Wingate very quietly.

The fag started, and coloured; but he did not answer.

"Have you met Ponsonby to-day?"

"Yes."

"And smoked with him?"

Silence.

"And played cards, perhaps?" exclaimed the Sixth-Former angrily.

"You have no right to catechise me!" said Jack sullenly.

"You seem to have forgotten that I am head prefect," said Wingate. "If you don't care for me to question you as your elder brother, I will speak as a prefect. Have you been playing cards with Ponsonby?"

"I'm not bound to answer a prefect," said Jack. "You can lick me, if you like."

Wingate seemed nonplussed.

"Look here, Jack, this won't do! I can't understand why Ponsonby has taken you up. You're not in his line at all—a mere kid in the Third! He's a precocious little beast, and he can't want a kid's society. Why has he made friends with you?"

"I suppose he likes me."

"Oh, rubbish!"

Jack gritted his teeth.

"You're only a fag, and your pocket-money can't be much of an object to him," said Wingate, puzzled. "He may find it amusing to teach you to be a young rascal. I think he is that sort of a blackguard. That's about it, I suppose. Well, I want you to promise me to have nothing more to do with Highcliffe, Jack."

No answer.

"Do you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Well, will you promise?"

"No!"

Wingate set his lips. But he spoke gently enough.

"Jack, I'm speaking for your good. This fellow is doing you harm. Won't you do as I ask you? You can trust my judgment, can't you?"

"I don't see why you should interfere."

"That means that you won't promise?"

"No, I won't!"

"Very well," said Wingate, with a grim look. "I'll drop the major, and

speaking as the captain of Greyfriars. You're to drop Ponsonby's acquaintance. You're never to speak to him again. That's an order from your head prefect. Understand, Wingate minor?"

"I understand."

"Now, give me your promise that you'll do as I say."

"I won't!"

Wingate picked up a cane from the table.

"If I let you answer me like that, Jack, I should have to let the other fags do the same," he said. "Are you going to toe the line, or are you going to take a licking?"

"I don't care about your dashed licking!"

"Hold out your hand!" said Wingate angrily.

Four loud swishes followed. Jack Wingate squeezed his hands when the infliction was over, and stood looking at his brother with lowering brows.

Wingate pointed to the door.

"You can clear, Jack! Remember what I've told you!"

The fag left the study without a word. His face was sullen and savage, his eyes glittering, as he went. But he left George Wingate with a heavy weight on his heart.

Wingate paced the study for some minutes in deep and troubled thought, and then he called to a fag, and sent him for Harry Wharton.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Tea at Highcliffe!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were crossing from the Cloisters towards the playing-fields when Nugent minor of the Second Form came up.

"You're wanted, Wharton!" called out the fag.

"Hallo! What is it?"

"Wingate's study!"

Dick Nugent went his way, whistling, and Harry Wharton stopped.

"Oh, bother!" said Bob Cherry. "We sha'n't get any practice before we have to start for Highcliffe, at this rate, if we're going to see Courtenay this afternoon!"

"I suppose Wingate's seen his blessed minor by this time!" said Frank Nugent. "What on earth does he want now?"

"Well, I'd better go," said Harry.

"We'll have a ginger-pop while we wait for you," yawned Johnny Bull.

"Tell Wingate to buck up."

Harry Wharton went off to the School House, and his chums lounged into the tuckshop, to wait for him there. Wharton was about a quarter of an hour gone. His face was very serious when he re-joined his chums.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Had a licking?" asked Bob Cherry, as the captain of the Remove came in.

"No, ass! Come along!"

They left the tuckshop together.

"Well, anything up?" asked Bob.

"From the expressiveness of the esteemed Wharton, I should surmise that the upfulness was terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh.

"It's about young Wingate," said Wharton abruptly. "Wingate doesn't mind my telling you fellows, but, of course, it's to go no further. He's found out that Jack is pally with Ponsonby, and the young ass won't promise to chuck him. Old Wingate can keep Pon away from here, but he can't prevent Jack sneaking over to Highcliffe to see him. He thought I might be of use there. We've got friends at Highcliffe, you know, and—"

He paused.

"I savvy!" said Bob. "Jolly thoughtful of old Wingate. In case of doubt, always apply to the Remove."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We may as well get off," said Harry. "We were going there to tea, anyway."

"Right you are!"

The Famous Five sauntered down to the bike-shed for their machines. There they found Vernon-Smith, getting his bicycle out. They wheeled out their machines along with the Bounder.

"Come for a spin through Courtfield, Smithy?" said Bob Cherry, as the six juniors wheeled the bikes out of gates. "Give the Cross Keys a rest this afternoon, my infant. You've got out of the habit—don't start it again!"

The Bounder laughed.

There had been trouble at Greyfriars during the reign of a temporary headmaster while Dr. Locke was away; and the Bounder had been one of the moving spirits of the Greyfriars barring-out.

During that exciting time Smithy had seemed quite a new fellow, and his shady manners and customs had been almost forgotten.

But now that affairs were normal at Greyfriars once more the Bounder had resumed the devious ways which had earned him his nickname.

"As it happens, I'm not going to the Cross Keys," he replied. "I'll come with you if you're going my way."

"We're going to Highcliffe," said Harry.

"So am I; glad of your company."

"Oh!"

The juniors rode away in a bunch.

Vernon-Smith was grinning. Harry Wharton & Co. were going to visit Frank Courtenay, the head of the decent set in the Highcliffe Fourth. It was pretty clear that the Bounder's visit was of quite a different nature. His friends were among the nuts of Highcliffe—Ponsonby and Gadsby and Monson and the rest.

"Seen anything of Pon this afternoon?" Vernon-Smith asked, as they pedalled down the road to Courtfield.

"Yes," said Harry.

"I was going to walk back with him, but I didn't happen on him. I think he was at Greyfriars—"

"He took a thick nose away with him," said Johnny Bull. "I gave it to him."

The Bounder laughed again. He was friendly with Ponsonby, but he did not seem to mind that youth having been given a thick nose. The Bounder's friendships were generally only skin-deep. If he had any real regard for anyone it was probably for Harry Wharton; which was curious enough, for no two fellows could have been more utterly unlike one another. Wharton, too, did not feel quite indifferent towards the Bounder, much as he disliked his ways. There was good in Smithy, mixed as it was with evil.

The juniors rode through Courtfield, and went spinning along the Highcliffe road. They arrived at the gates of Highcliffe in a cheery crowd. A trio of elegantly-dressed youths were chatting there, and they greeted the Bounder warmly, ostentatiously taking no notice of his companions. Gadsby and Monson and Drury did not like the Famous Five.

"Hallo, Smithy!" sang out Drury. "Here you are, old scout! What have they been doin' to Pon?"

"Anything happened to Pon?" asked the Bounder, as he jumped down.

"He came in ten minutes back with a face like thunder, an' a red nose," grinned Gadsby. "Looked mad as a hatter. Been in the wars, I suppose."

Harry Wharton & Co. wheeled their bicycles in, and left them at the lodge, leaving the Bounder with his nutty friends. Frank Courtenay was on Little Side, coaching his men. Football prac-

tice was in full swing at Highcliffe. His chum, De Courcy, was looking on, with his hands in his pockets. The Caterpillar could be an energetic player when he liked; but he did not often like. Frank Courtenay came off the field, throwing on a coat, and joined the Greyfriars fellows.

"Glad you were able to come," he said. "Caterpillar, cut off to the study."

"Right-ho!" yawned the Caterpillar.

He lounged off the ground.

"I've been at it all the afternoon," said Courtenay, with a smile. "I'm getting the team into shape. Highcliffe Fourth are going great guns at footer this season. You fellows will have to look out when we meet you."

Courtenay's keenness was a curious contrast to the slackness of Ponsonby and his set, and most of Highcliffe. There was slackness through Highcliffe from end to end. Most of the Sixth were great "blades," and they had enthusiastic imitators in the lower Forms. It was uphill work for Courtenay to stand against the general dry rot in the school, but he did it well and bravely. The juniors talked footer and the prospects of the coming season for some time, while they watched the practice, Courtenay occasionally calling out to his men in the field; and then they followed the Caterpillar.

On the way to Courtenay's study they passed the apartment of Cecil Ponsonby. The door of that study was closed, but voices could be heard within.

"Your deal, Smithy!"

"Pass the fags, Gaddy!"

"Where are those dashed matches?"

Courtenay coloured a little, but the Greyfriars fellows were apparently deaf. It was no business of theirs to pass comments on Highcliffe manners and customs. They knew that the same kind of thing was going on in the Fifth and Sixth. The masters' system at Highcliffe seemed to be to avoid carefully making any discoveries. So long as they preserved their dozy comfort and ease they did not care what was going on just under the surface.

A search in the Fourth Form studies, or even a walk along the passage sometimes, would have opened Mr. Mobbs' eyes wide as to the peculiar pursuits of some of his pupils. But Mr. Mobbs' chief object seemed to be to keep his eyes sealed. A week-end at Ponsonby's home, where he met titled people by the dozen, was much more to the Form-master than his duty.

Tea was ready in Study No. 3 when they came in. The Caterpillar beamed at them across the table.

"All ready!" he announced. "What do you think of that, Franky?"

"You're jolly industrious all of a sudden," said Courtenay, laughing.

"Yes. I got young Baggs of the Third to fag," yawned the Caterpillar. "Baggs is made happy with two bob, and tea's ready. Sit down, dear boys!" The Caterpillar made a grimace. "A dashed war tea, you know; Franky won't let me splash in war-time."

It was a cheery tea in No. 3, frugal as it was; and the juniors jawed footer till the Caterpillar fled. As he had explained to Courtenay, his constitution would stand only a certain amount of football jaw. And he gracefully excused himself and went "to see a chap."

After tea, however, Harry Wharton came to the other object of his visit. It was rather an awkward subject to approach, and he hesitated a little.

"I'm going to ask you something, Courtenay," he said, at last.

"Go ahead, old scout!"

"About Ponsonby."

"Oh!"

"Of course"—Wharton coloured—"you know I wouldn't pass any opinion about things that don't concern me.

Pon's doings are nothing to me. But he's taken up a fag at our school—a silly young ass in the Third Form. It's Wingate minor, the young brother of our captain."

Courtenay nodded without speaking. The merry reputation of Ponsonby & Co. was a sore point with him.

"Ponsonby chums with some Greyfriars chaps," said Harry. "Some of them are tarred with the same brush, as a matter of fact—"

"There's one in his study now," said Courtenay drily.

"Ye-es. Smithy's not a bad sort, though," said Harry rather hastily. "But never mind that. Pon was smoking at Greyfriars the other day with Skinner and Snoop, and our head prefect caught him, and licked him."

"Serve him right!"

"It seems to have put Pon's back up. Now he's taken up young Wingate, and he's making a silly fool of him. You understand. The silly fag's nothing to him. It's only a trick for getting even with old Wingate. That's how it seems to me, anyway."

"Likely enough."

"Pon won't show his nose at Greyfriars again for a bit. But—but young Jack comes over here—"

"I've seen him."

"Well, you're head of the Fourth," said Harry. "You could stop it if you liked. Will you keep Jack Wingate out of Pon's study?"

"Why doesn't his major stop him?"

"He's tried."

Courtenay thought a moment or two. "All serene," he said. "I'll do it! Jack Wingate sha'n't come to see Ponsonby here. I'll take the law into my own hands on that point."

"Thanks!" said Harry. "If the case were reversed, I'd do it fast enough. The kid is a good little chap, but it's easy enough for a cunning rascal to get influence over him, and—and Pon is a rascal, you know, if you don't mind my saying so."

Courtenay laughed.

"I know he is. All serene! I'll keep an eye open, and speak to Pon—and go a bit further than speaking if needed."

"Good!"

Harry Wharton & Co. rode back to Greyfriars satisfied. They could trust Courtenay to keep his word, and it looked as if the reckless young rascal of the Greyfriars Third would be kept out of harm's way, whether he liked it or not.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby's Pupil!

"FIVE—five ten—five fifteen—five fifteen and fourpence!"

Patrick Gwynne, of the Sixth Form at Greyfriars, was mumbling to himself. There was a little pile of black and red currency notes and coins on the study table before him.

A tap came at the door as Gwynne mumbled over his accounts. The door opened, and Gwynne called out without looking up.

"Faith, and buzz off wid ye, when a fellow's busy with accounts, and they won't come right intirely, at all. Buzz!"

"I—I thought my brother was here!" stammered the voice of Wingate minor.

"Oh, it's you!" Gwynne looked up, and gave Jack Wingate a kind nod.

"Your brother's gone, kid. Anything I can do for you?"

Jack Wingate's eyes rested upon the money on the table for a moment, and a gleam came into them. Perhaps he was thinking of the use he could have put that considerable sum to if it had been

his. It would have furnished capital for quite an extensive plunge in Ponsonby's study.

"I—I wanted George to lend me half-a-sov," he said. "I suppose you wouldn't, Gwynne?"

Gwynne laughed.

"Sure! I don't usually lend money in the Third," he remarked. "But if it's something special—"

"I—I've got to pay for some things, and my allowance hasn't come!"

"All right, kid! There you are!"

Gwynne extracted a red currency note from his pocket and tossed it to the fag, who caught it eagerly. Wingate major looked into the study at the same moment with a footer under his arm.

"Haven't you finished yet, Gwynne?" he exclaimed.

"Faith, and I'll resign this treasurer's job!" exclaimed Gwynne. "It's all the trouble in the world intirely, with you and your minor popping in and out when a gosseon's doing his accounts."

"What on earth are you giving my minor money for?" exclaimed the captain of Greyfriars.

"Because he couldn't find you, Wingate, darling!"

"You ass! What do you want ten shillings for, Jack?"

Jack Wingate's look was defiant for a moment. But it changed under his brother's searching eye.

"I want to pay Mrs. Mible," he said.

"You young ass, have you been running up an account at the tuckshop?"

"I—I didn't know it was running up like that; but Mrs. Mible asked me for the money, and—and I came to ask you!"

"All serene!" said the captain of Greyfriars good-humouredly. "Here's your ten bob, Gwynne. I can make loans to my minor. You'll have to dock it out of your allowance, Jack."

"Yes; yes! Of course!"

"Cut off! By the way, what are you up to this afternoon?" asked Wingate.

Jack hesitated. It was Saturday afternoon, a half-holiday. And perhaps Wingate major was a trifle suspicious, considering the happenings of the previous Wednesday.

"We're beginning footer, George," he said. "Do you want me? I've promised to keep goal for one of our sides."

Wingate smiled.

"Not at all! Cut off, Jack. I hope you'll have a good game. And, look here, you need only dock half that ten out of your allowance. Keep the rest."

"Thanks!" stammered Wingate minor. And he cut off.

Wingate major, quite restored to confidence by the information that his minor was playing footer that afternoon, sat in the window-seat while he waited for Gwynne to finish his accounts. Gwynne finished at last, and he shoved the money and the books into his desk, and the two prefects left the study together.

Meanwhile, Jack Wingate had not gone anywhere near the fags' ground. Tubb and Paget and Bolsover minor, and a crowd more, were punting a muddy footer about, but the captain's minor did not join them. That enterprising youth had scudded out of the gates, and was hurrying along the road to Highcliffe. Jack Wingate had his own way of spending his half-holiday.

Under the genial tuition of Ponsonby, the fag was developing. Lies had never come easily to his lips before he knew Pon. They did not come quite easily now. But they came. Deceit is the defence of the weak against the strong. The fag tried to find a wretched justification in that thought. He had not yet reached the stage—which Pon had passed

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 507.

long ago—of doing wrong without attempting to justify it to himself.

While Jack Wingate was scudding away to Highcliffe to meet his nutty friends there, his major strolled down to Big Side with Gwynne and Walker. The Remove were at practice, and Wingate paused for a moment or two to give Harry Wharton & Co. a look-in and an encouraging word. The Bounder had turned up to practice for once, and he was doing remarkably well, and Wingate gave him a "Bravo!" as he beat Johnny Bull in goal. Then, feeling that a little encouragement might do the fags good, and especially his minor, the captain of Greyfriars walked over to the fags' ground.

Third-Form footer was of a rough-and-ready variety. Mud-collecting seemed to be the chief object.

Wingate smiled at the sight of a heap of panting fags sprawling over a ball, struggling and yelling.

"Hallo! Do you call that footer?" he called out.

"Yow! Keep your silly elbow out of my eye, Paget!" roared Bolsover minor.

"Hallo, Wingate!"

The fags scrambled up.

"Isn't my minor here?" asked Wingate, looking round.

"No; he's not here!"

"Isn't he coming down?" asked the Greyfriars captain, his brows contracting.

"No; he's gone out!"

"Oh, well, get on, and don't worry the ball like dogs over a bone," advised the Sixth-Former.

And he walked away.

Wingate had had a shock. It was pretty plain that Jack had lied to him when he had said that he was going to play footer with the Third. Why had he lied?

The Sixth-Former went directly to the tuckshop. Mrs. Mible was there.

"Has my minor paid you the ten shillings he owed you, Mrs. Mible?" Wingate asked.

The good dame looked at him.

"Master Jack didn't owe me ten shillings, sir!" she replied.

Wingate breathed hard.

"Did he owe you anything, ma'am?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, it's all right—a mistake!" muttered Wingate.

He left the tuckshop abruptly. His minor had lied to him twice. And where was he now, with the money he had obtained by false pretences? The evidence was too clear for Wingate to doubt it, but he felt staggered. It had come to this already—lies and deceit. Ponsonby of Highcliffe was an able tutor!

Wingate was not very cheerful on the Sixth-Form ground that afternoon, and his play did not give promise of great things for the season.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Courtenay Puts His Foot Down!

"TROT in, dear boy!"

Cecil Ponsonby removed the cigarette from his lips, and spoke with great cordiality, as Jack Wingate looked shyly into his study at Highcliffe.

Gadsby and Monson were there, also smoking. Gaddy was idly shuffling a pack of cards.

Jack Wingate came in, and closed the door. The nuts of Highcliffe exchanged a grin. The fag was very amusing to them.

Ponsonby, smarting under the well-deserved licking George Wingate had given him at Greyfriars, had elaborated that curious scheme for revenging himself. Ponsonby was as revengeful as a Hun. He never forgot or forgave an

injury. The big Sixth-Former of Greyfriars was out of reach of his revenge, it would have seemed. But Ponsonby's ideas of revenge were far-reaching and utterly unscrupulous. With cool and cynical wickedness—a quality upon which Pon rather prided himself—he had set out to revenge himself upon Wingate major by corrupting his minor. And poor Jack had fallen only too easily under the influence of the older fellow.

The nuts found it amusing. They won the fag's pocket-money; but that was little enough, in their eyes. It did not pay for half the cigarettes they smoked.

It was only a make-weight. To see the foolish fag smoking, swearing, and gambling was extremely amusing, from Ponsonby's point of view. If it led to the sack for him from Greyfriars, Pon could have asked nothing better. That would be a blow at Wingate which would hurt a good deal more than a licking. Whether it culminated in the sack or not, it was certain to lead to trouble and disgrace in the long run; and if, when trouble came, Jack should apply to Pon for help to get out of it, he was quite certain to discover the kind of pal Pon was.

Jack Wingate sat down at the table with the three nuts, and the cards were shuffled. The foolish fag was immensely flattered at the notice taken of him by the superb dandies of Highcliffe, whom he greatly admired. And if some of their ways had disgusted him at first, he was rapidly growing accustomed to them. He was never likely to become quite so complete a rascal as Pon, but he was well started on the way.

But that little game in Ponsonby's study was destined to be interrupted. The cards had scarcely been dealt when the door was flung open, without a knock. Frank Courtenay strode in. He was in footer garb, with a coat on over it. His face was flushed.

He had sighted the Greyfriars fag crossing the quad, and had come off the football-ground. And he had not come in a very good temper.

Ponsonby removed the cigarette from his lips, and gave the captain of the Fourth a look of supercilious insolence.

"Quite an unexpected honour, by gad!" he remarked. "You might have knocked at the door; but trainin' tells, I suppose. They never knock at the door in your slum, I suppose, dear boy?"

Jack Wingate looked at Courtenay rather nervously. Somehow, Frank's healthy, flushed face made him feel uneasy in the smoke-laden atmosphere of Ponsonby's study.

"I saw Wingate minor come in here," said Courtenay, without heeding Ponsonby's speech. "I came to stop this!"

"To stop what, by gad?" ejaculated Monson.

"What's going on here?"

"You cheeky rotter!" panted Ponsonby. "Are you goin' to begin interferin' in my study now?"

"Yes, when you have silly fags here to teach them smoking and gambling," said Courtenay calmly. "You wouldn't dare to do it if the masters in this school were doing their duty."

"Better go an' tell Dr. Voysey and the rest your flatterin' opinion of them!" sneered Gadsby.

"Never mind that! Young Wingate isn't coming here again, and he's going now," said Courtenay. "It's no good talking to you, or appealing to your sense of decency—you haven't any. Clear out, young Wingate, and don't come here again!"

The fag, with crimson cheeks, rose from his chair.

Ponsonby pushed him back.

"Don't go!" he said, between his

teeth. "This is my study, and that inter-ferin' cad can't give orders here!"

"We shall see about that!" said Courtenay grimly. "Wingate, get out of this study at once, and clear off from Highcliffe! Do you hear?"

"I—I—"

"Ho's not goin'!" said Ponsonby, white with rage, and holding the Greyfriars fag in his chair.

Ponsonby's supercilious coolness was gone now. That the captain of the Fourth disliked intensely the rascality in his study he knew. The fact only aroused him. But that Courtenay should put his foot down in this way was a facer. He had never dreamed of this!

But Courtenay meant business. He came towards the table, and laid his hand on Jack Wingate's shoulder.

"Get up, young 'un!" he said, not unkindly. "My advice to you is to keep clear of these rotters—they're rotten to the very core, the lot of them! They won't do you any good. Anyway, this isn't going on any longer at Highcliffe. Clear off!"

The fag made a movement to rise, but Ponsonby held him.

"Let him go, Ponsonby!"

"I won't!" hissed Ponsonby.

Courtenay gripped the wrist of the dandy of the Fourth, and, with a twist, forced him to louse the fag.

Ponsonby uttered a cry of pain.

"Now, get out, young Wingate!"

Jack, with faltering steps, moved to the door. He was trying to feel angry and resentful; but Courtenay's scorn and indignation brought shame to his face and to his heart. He had no word to say for himself.

"Stop, you young fool!" shouted Ponsonby, springing to his feet. "Back up, you fellows! We're not goin' to stand this! Pile on the cad!"

He sprang at Courtenay, his eyes blazing, and Monson and Gadsby, almost equally enraged, backed him up.

Frank Courtenay did not recede a step.

He did not fear the slackers of the Fourth, though they were three to one. He faced them with his hands up and his eyes glittering. His fierce look was enough for Monson, at least, who fell back, muttering something. Cecil Ponsonby was made of rather sterner stuff than his comrades, and he attacked hotly, and found himself sent spinning with a crashing blow on the point of the jaw. Ponsonby crashed into a corner, and Courtenay advanced on Gadsby, who dropped his hands in haste.

"Hold on! I'm not in this!" stammered Gadsby.

"Get out of our study, you ruffian!" shouted Monson. "You can take that snivelling fag with you if you like!"

Courtenay, with a contemptuous look at the nuts, turned to the door. He pushed Jack Wingate out, and closed the door.

"Now, cut off to Greyfriars, kid," he said. "If you've any sense, you'll keep out of that kind of game in future. Anyway, you can't play it here. Cut off with you!"

And the fag, with crimson cheeks, descended the stairs before Courtenay, who saw him out of the school gates before returning to the football-ground. There the Caterpillar met him, with a somewhat ironical smile.

"Been savin' the merry innocent from the clutches of the deceivin' Pon, dear boy?" he drawled. "Still standin' up for morality an' things—what? What a grand uncle you'd make, Franky!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Courtenay.

And the Caterpillar grinned, and went back to footer.

Meanwhile, there was gnashing of teeth in Ponsonby's study. Pon sat and nursed his chin, which felt as if it were no longer

there. Monson and Gadsby looked sullen, but they were grinning, too, at intervals. They seemed to find something rather amusing in the downfall of the great Pon.

"Ow, ow, ow!" said Ponsonby.

"Why didn't you smash him, dear boy?" said Monson.

"Oh, shut up! Why didn't you?"

"Too hefty for me," said Monson candidly. "These dashed lower class chaps hit too hard for my taste."

"I'll make him pay for it!" growled Ponsonby. "And as for that scrubby little beast, Wingate minor—"

"I'm afraid that game's up!" grinned Gadsby.

"Rot!"

"Well, he can't come here any more without a row with Courtenay, and that's not good enough! And you can't carry it on at Greyfriars, under his major's nose. That brute, Wingate major, is rather too heavy-handed."

"More ways than one of killin' a cat," said Ponsonby. "It means meetin' him out of gates, that's all."

"Lot of trouble for nothin' "

Ponsonby gritted his teeth.

"Wharton came over here and put Courtenay up to this," he said. "I know that. I'm sure of it. The low cad wouldn't have thought of it on his own. He's never interfered in my study before—not on his own, like this."

"I dare say you're right. But—"

"They're puttin' their heads together to keep that little cad out of my wicked hands." Ponsonby smiled—an evil smile. "Well, Courtenay and Wharton and Wingate major are goin' to be disappointed. I'll make that fag into such a little scoundrel—he's willin' enough, as far as that goes—that he'll be a disgrace to his school, an' very likely get sacked. That's what I'd like better than anythin' else. I'll make his major sorry for layin' his hands on me, the cad! And it will be one in the eye for all of them, all round! Hang the lot of them!"

And Pon, muttering curses, stamped out of the study, and slammed the door. From the study window Gadsby watched the dandy of the Fourth hurrying down to the gates. It was evident that Cecil Ponsonby had not yet done with the Greyfriars fag. Outside the gates of Highcliffe he was beyond interference by Frank Courtenay. Gadsby shrugged his shoulders, and settled down to a game of banker.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy in a New Role!

"**A** DSUM!" panted Wingate minor. The fag, red and breathless with running, came into Hall just in time to answer to his name at calling-over.

Mr. Quelch, who was taking the roll, glanced at him; as he answered breathlessly, but made no comment.

Vernon-Smith, in the ranks of the Remove, glanced at him, too, curiously. When the fellows came out of Hall, the Bouncer dropped his hand on Jack Wingate's shoulder.

The fag looked up sullenly, but his face cleared as he saw who it was. Since Wingate minor had taken up his new role of gay dog, he had thought a good deal more of Smithy, the black sheep of the Remove. He would have been glad to cultivate Smithy's distinguished acquaintance; but the Bouncer had no use for acquaintances in a fag Form.

"Hallo, Smithy!" he said quite civilly.

"I'd like to give you a few words of advice, young 'un," said the Bouncer, "if you'll honour me with your attention for a minute or two. Step into the window here."

"All serene!"

"You've been over to Mighcliffe?" asked Smithy, as the fag followed him into the deep window recess.

"Yes."

"Much of a game?"

"Courtenay came in and turned me out," said Jack, biting his lip. "He knocked Pon down in his own study. Cheeky cad!"

The Bouncer chuckled.

"Poor old Pon! So you lost your game?"

"No. Pon came out after me, and we played in the old barn," said Jack. "I—I've had bad luck."

"Good!"

"I don't reckon it's good," said Wingate minor sullenly. "I've lost all my tin, and goodness knows where any more is coming from!"

"Now, look here, kid!" said the Bouncer quietly. "I dare say you know that I've played the giddy ox at times—"

"Everybody knows it!"

"H'm! Well, as a chap who's been through it, and found out that there's nothing in it—nothing but Dead Sea fruit—I'm going to give you a tip to keep clear of it," said the Bouncer. "Keep away from Ponsonby, and don't play the goat. That's a tip."

"I thought you were going to ask me to a game in your study," said Jack Wingate, disappointed.

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

"Look here—"

"No, you look here, my son. You're a good little chap, when you're let alone; too good for this kind of thing," said the Bouncer kindly. "There's your brother, too, a ripping good sort. You ought to think of him. Keep clear of playing the fool. There's nothing in it, and it will land you into trouble sooner or later. You know, I'm not goody-goody, and you can depend on my advice. I—Hallo, I didn't see you, Wingate!" broke off the Bouncer, colouring, as the captain of Greyfriars looked into the window recess.

George Wingate gave the Bouncer a very friendly glance.

"I was looking for my minor," he said. "I couldn't help hearing what you were saying, Vernon-Smith. You're not quite the fellow I should have expected to hear giving good advice to kids."

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't generally do it," he said. "Nothing for you to complain of in what I was saying to your minor, Wingate, I think?"

"Not at all. I'm glad I heard you," said Wingate. "It's made me think better of you, and prevents me from believing some queer whispers I've heard about you. Come with me, Jack!"

He led his minor away, leaving the Bouncer with a sarcastic smile on his lips.

A good deed, it is said, is never wasted, and the kindly impulse which had led the Bouncer to speak to Jack Wingate certainly had not been wasted. Vernon-Smith was very careful and very cautious, but rumours about him were certain to spread, and evidently the captain of the school had heard something. But George Wingate was not likely to distrust a junior whom he had heard giving good and sensible advice to his minor, who was undoubtedly in need of it.

The Bouncer laughed softly. His luck was amazing, there was no doubt about that. Wingate's opinion might stand him in good stead some day, if his sins came home to him. Still smiling, he went up to his study to smoke a cigarette with Skinner.

Wingate led his minor away to his study in the Sixth. The fag was sullen

and apprehensive. George Wingate closed the door. Jack shifted uneasily under his glance.

"You did not tell me the truth this afternoon, Jack," said the captain of Greyfriars very quietly.

"I—I—"

"You went out, instead of playing footer as you told me."

"I changed my mind."

"You did not owe Mrs. Mimble money, and you did not pay her."

The fag started.

"You—you've been—"

"Where have you been, Jack?"

Silence.

"Have you still the ten shillings?"

No answer.

"I never thought you would come down to lying, Jack," said Wingate. "Can't you see that this is serious, kid? Do you want me to report you to the Head?"

Jack started again.

"You—you wouldn't—" he muttered.

"I'm bound to treat you like any other fag, unless you take my advice, and give me a chance to go easy with you," said the captain of Greyfriars. "I want to go easy with you, Jack. Won't you let me?"

"I—I've done nothing!" muttered Jack.

"Tell me where you've been, then."

"I—I went to the cinema. I spent the money. You can have it back out of my next allowance."

"Never mind the money. That doesn't matter. If I could only believe you—" muttered Wingate.

"It's true."

"I suppose I'm bound to take your word," said Wingate, after a very long pause. "But you lied to me once, Jack, only to-day. You must understand this—unless you make a clean breast of it, and let me be assured that you're keeping clear of blackguardly games, I can't help you. If anything comes to my knowledge, I'm bound to report it to the Head, in your case the same as in that of any other fag. Don't put me in such a position. Have you anything to tell me, Jack—as your elder brother?"

"No!" muttered the fag.

"Very well! I shall have to look into the matter as a prefect, then. That's my duty. You can go!"

Jack Wingate left the study, his face pale. There was some doubt in his mind, a twinge of remorse in his heart.

But on the following morning, when most of the Greyfriars fellows were going out for Sunday walks, Jack Wingate's walk led him in the direction of Highcliffe. The moth was fluttering round the candle, with the certainty of getting his wings burnt badly sooner or later.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Money Wanted!

HARRY WHARTON had dropped into Vernon-Smith's study after lessons on Monday for a talk on the subject of footer, when Wingate minor tapped at the door and looked in. Wharton was seeking to induce the Bouncer to take up footer seriously for the season, and Smithy seemed half-inclined to yield to his arguments. The captain of the Remove paused as the fag looked in timidly.

"I—I— Can I speak to you, Smithy?" asked Jack Wingate.

"You can if you like, when Wharton's done," said the Bouncer, with a smile.

"Well, I'm about finished," said Harry. "I'll give you another look-in, Smithy—you don't feel inclined to come down to the punt about now?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 507.

"Not just now."

Wharton left the study. Wingate minor did not speak till he had gone, and he closed the door carefully after the captain of the Remove.

Vernon-Smith eyed him curiously.

"Well, have you been painting the town red again?" he asked. "You're a funny little animal!"

"I—I say, Smithy, you—you seemed friendly on Saturday, and—and I thought I'd come to you—"

"You want some more advice? Go ahead!"

"Not exactly."

"What do you want, then?"

"I—I saw Pon yesterday. I say, Smithy, have you ever played poker?"

"Yes, you young ass!"

"It's a stunning game," said Jack. "Pon taught me. You want some capital, and a lot of nerve. You might win an awful lot of money, though."

"You were playing poker on Sunday?" said Vernon-Smith. "My hat! You're improvin'. You grubby little rascal!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!" said the fag. "Look here, Smithy, I'll tell you about it. I had a ripping hand—four queens and an ace, only—only I hadn't enough tin to cover what Pon put up, so I had to pass out. Pon won the pool with a rotten hand, simply because I hadn't any capital. If I'd had a few pounds, I could have cleaned him out—and Pon's rich, you know. Fancy bagging ten or twelve pounds, Smithy!" The fag's eyes glistened.

"My hat!" murmured Vernon-Smith.

His look was half cynical half compassionate. The greed of the gambler had taken hold of Wingate minor. His youthful face hardened as he was speaking, and looked strangely old.

"I have great luck," continued Jack. "Pon says I'm lucky. He says some fellows are born with luck at cards, and I'm one of them. I was winning all the time, till Pon suddenly raised the pot two pounds in a lump, and I couldn't cover it, and had to let him take it—see? If I'd had the money—" He paused.

"Look here, kid," said the Bouncer, kindly enough. "Ponsonby's a bad egg. He's not a fellow for you to know."

"You're pally with him."

"I'm not a silly fag," growled Smithy. "I can look after myself."

"Do you think I can't?"

"Oh, crumbs! You young ass, of course you can't! Can't you see that Pon is simply playing you for a mug?" exclaimed the Bouncer impatiently. "He lets you win to draw you on, and then clears you out at the finish by putting up a sum he knows you can't cover. Pon's a bad egg."

"I don't believe it."

"Well, it's no good talking to you, then. What was it that ancient Johnny said? 'Though you bray a fool in a mortar, yet will not his folly depart from him.'" The Bouncer laughed. "Go ahead till you get fed up. I suppose it's the only way. Your pocket-money will give out soon, I imagine."

"It's given out already," said Jack ruefully. "That—that's what I've come to see you about, Smithy."

"Oho!" The Bouncer whistled. "Is that it?"

"You've got lots of money, Smithy! Will you—will you lend me five or six pounds?"

"Great pip!"

"I—I know it sounds like beastly cheek to ask—"

"I should jolly well say so!"

"But—but I'm lucky, you know. I'm practically sure to win—in fact, quite sure. I feel it. Now, look here, Smithy,

if you lend me a fiver, I'll hand it back to you in a few days at the latest!"

The Bouncer roared with laughter.

Jack Wingate stopped, looking at him sullenly. He did not quite expect the Remove fellow to make him that loan, though he hoped. Vernon Smith laughed till the tears came into his eyes.

"When you've done!" said the fag.

"Oh, you're too funny to live!" said Vernon-Smith. "You young ass, you've got about as much chance of winning Pon's money as the Kaiser has of capturing the British Fleet! Not that I'd lend you money to gamble with, in any case."

"You gamble yourself!" exclaimed Jack Wingate angrily.

"That's my business, not yours."

"Well, it's my business, then, if I gamble, hang you!"

"Quite so, so long as you don't employ my money to do it with," said the Bouncer coolly. "I draw a line at that."

Wingate minor's eyes gleamed desperately.

"Look here, Smithy, lend me the money! I know you've got lots. Lend it to me, then!"

"Oh, get out!"

"It—it wouldn't pay you for me to tell some people some of the things I know about you, Smithy!" muttered the fag.

Vernon-Smith started as if an adder had stung him.

"What?" he gasped.

"I don't want to—but—but you can lend me five quid, Smithy—"

"My hat!" The Bouncer drew a deep breath. "You little scoundrel! To think of extorting money from me—by threats! Pon's got a promising pupil in you, I must say! Do you understand that this is the way to get to prison?"

"I must have some tin!"

"You won't get it here," said the Bouncer grimly. "What you'll get here, my son, is a dashed good licking, which is what you want!"

He caught up a walking-cane, and made a stride towards the fag.

"Hands off!" muttered Jack Wingate, his eyes glittering. "Hands off, or—"

Vernon-Smith's grip was on his collar the next moment.

The fag was swung round in the Bouncer's powerful grasp, and the cane rose and fell with energy.

Lash, lash, lash!

Wingate minor yelled and struggled. But he was an infant in the hands of the Bouncer. Vernon-Smith did not release him till he had administered a sound thrashing.

Then he opened the door, and tossed the fag, panting and quivering, into the passage.

"Now clear!" he said grimly.

Jack Wingate glared at him for a moment or two, with clenched fists and burning eyes. Then he slunk down the passage.

"I say, Smithy—" Billy Bunter rolled up, greatly curious. "What's the row, eh? What were you licking young Wingate for?"

"Find out!" snapped the Bouncer.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"You might tell a fellow," urged Bunter inquisitively. "What did he want, eh? What did you pitch into him for, Smithy? Give it a name!"

Instead of giving it a name, the Bouncer gave Bunter a shove, and the Owl of the Remove sat down, with a roar. Vernon-Smith went back into his study. He laughed as he lighted a cigarette. The descent to Avernus is always easy, and Jack Wingate was evidently making rapid progress to that attractive destination—the dogs!

An attempt at blackmail to get money

to gamble with was very thick; but the Bounder's drastic method had nipped that in the bud. But Vernon-Smith wondered curiously what the young rascal would do next.

He shrugged his shoulders, dismissed the matter from his mind, and went down to Little Side to join in footer practice. Wingate minor had gone to the Sixth Form passage. Some vague idea of borrowing the money from his brother was in his mind; but outside Wingate's study he paused. What was the use? George would guess what he wanted the money for, and would be more likely to give him a licking.

From Wingate's study there sounded a murmur of voices. Jack recognised his brother's voice, and the Irish accent of Gwynne of the Sixth. The thought of Gwynne brought back into his mind what he had seen on Saturday in Gwynne's study. The little pile of red and black currency notes seemed to dance before his eyes. He shivered.

The fag's face was pale now. His eyes glittered feverishly.

He glanced round cautiously. Already there was a sense of guilt upon him. There was no one in the passage. Gwynne was at tea with the captain of Greyfriars. He was not likely to return to his study yet.

Almost before he knew what he was doing Jack Wingate had slipped into Gwynne's study and closed the door after him.

It was five minutes later that he came out and hurried away, with a face like chalk.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Four of a Kind!

"YOU fellows comin'?"

Cecil Ponsonby asked the question, as he gave his tasteful necktie a final touch before the looking-glass.

Monson yawned, and Gadsby grunted. "What's the good?" said Gadsby. "I'm not walkin' out to meet dashed fags. Bother enough when the little beast could come here. Why not chuck it?"

"I'm not comin'," said Monson, shaking his head. "Too much fag! I should think you were fed up with that silly kid by this time, Pon. There's no money in it, either. Dash his silly half-crowns!"

"I shouldn't wonder if he's raised the wind," smiled Ponsonby. "He was awfully bucked yesterday at so nearly cleaning me out. I dealt him four queens to encourage him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How could he raise the wind?" said Gadsby. "His brother won't stand him anything, now he's suspicious. How can a Third Form kid raise anythin' worth while?"

"Ways and means!" smiled Ponsonby. "From the way he looked yesterday, I fancy that dear boy is prepared to take any measures to raise the wind, and try his luck at poker again. I've got an idea that he will contrive to borrow the money—somehow!"

Gadsby looked startled.

"Pon!" he muttered.

"Well?"

"I—I say, it's too thick! Besides, if—if the vicious little beast should do anythin' of that sort, it might come back on us!"

"What rot! If he talks about us, we deny it all point-blank," said Ponsonby coolly. "They can believe what they like at Greyfriars. I fancy they'd find it hard to convince Mobby that we weren't model youths. If necessary, I'd ask Mobby down to my place for a week-

end to meet a marquis. That would make Mobby quite certain it was a rotten slander against us."

"Well, I know you're too deep to be caught, Pon; but—but—"

"But what, you ass?"

"I don't quite like it! After all, the kid's done you no harm."

"His brother has," said Pon, showing his teeth in a smile. "I'm getting at his brother through him, as I told you. I'm not going to let him drop—yet! You fellows can come or not, as you choose."

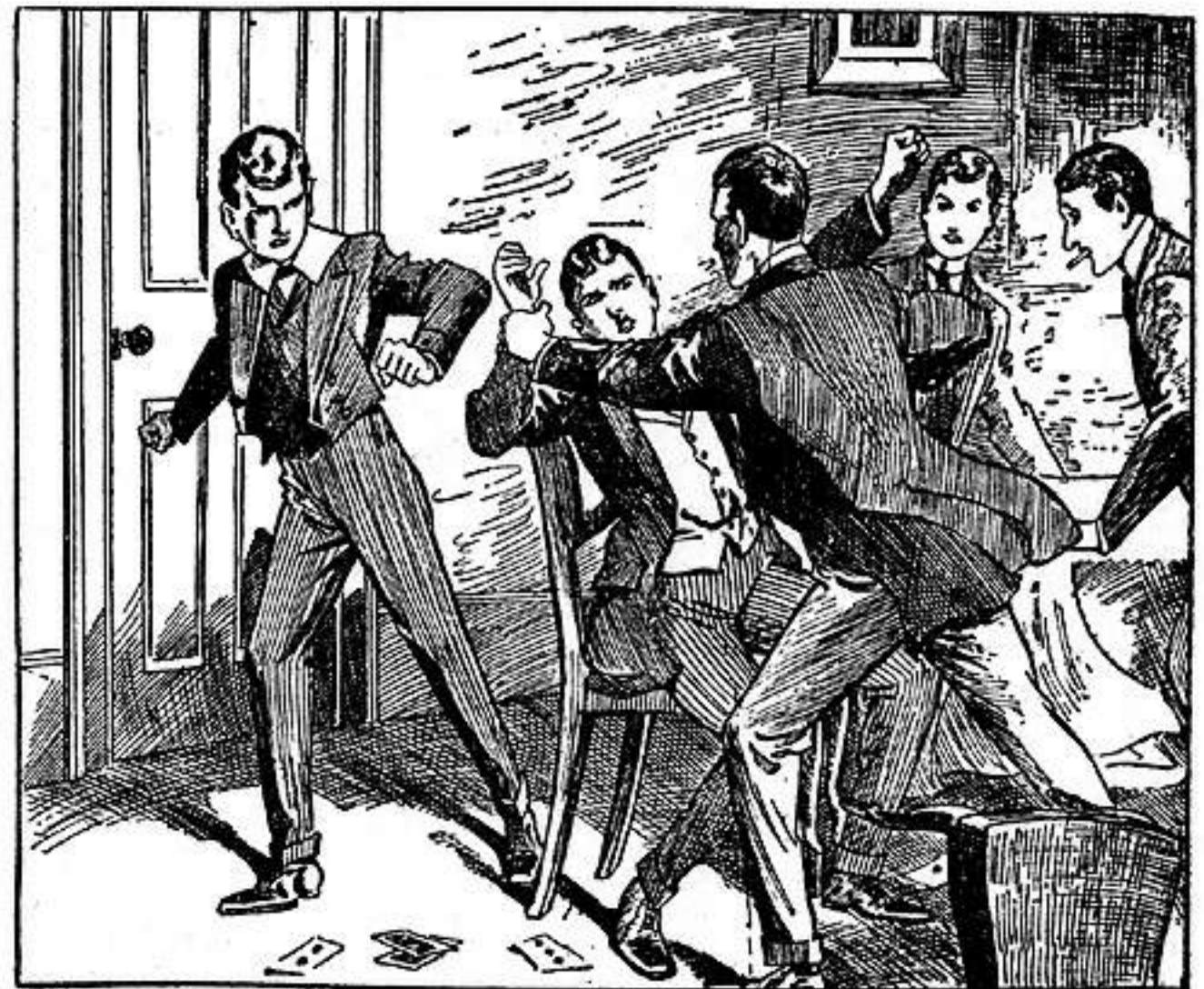
"Well, I'm not comin'," said Gadsby shortly.

"Same here! It's not good enough!" said Monson.

"Please yourselves!"

And Ponsonby strode from the study. He passed Courtenay and the Caterpillar in the hall as he went out, and smiled. Courtenay had put a stop to Jack Wingate's visits to Highcliff. It had done little good. Ponsonby was not to be defeated so easily as all that.

The Caterpillar glanced curiously after Ponsonby.



Pon at home! (See Chapter 6.)

"Pon looks very cheery, Franky," he remarked. "Somethin' up against somebody, I fancy. I wonder who's the happy victim?"

Ponsonby was indeed looking, and feeling, cheery. He had nearly finished with Jack Wingate. From gambling to stealing is not such a very long step; and Pon had little doubt of the way his wretched dupe was going. Pon reflected that Wingate major would have reason to be sorry for having laid hands upon his elegant person at Greyfriars, if indeed his dupe did take that fatal plunge.

He smiled as he sauntered into the barn, a mile or so from the school. Jack Wingate was there.

The fag was seated on an old beam, and he rose as the Highcliff junior came in. His face was pale, and his eyes had a troubled look.

"Oh, here you are!" said Ponsonby airily. "Sorry if I've kept you waitin', kid."

"It's all right," muttered Jack.

"Any trouble at Greyfriars?" asked Ponsonby, eyeing him curiously.

"N-no."

"You look a bit off colour."

"I'm all right. Have you got the cards?"

Ponsonby suppressed a laugh.

"Yes, I think I've got them, kid."

"I—I've raised the wind," said Jack Wingate. "I—I've borrowed some tin, Pon. I—I'm well heeled, you know."

"Good!" yawned Ponsonby, sitting down on the beam. "I suppose I must give you your revenge, young 'un, though I'm pretty certain that you'll clean me out this time."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Jack, more brightly.

Ponsonby produced the cards, and shuffled them.

In a minute more the game of poker was in progress. When Ponsonby was playing with a fellow like Vernon-Smith he did not venture to assist fortune by the various devices he was acquainted with. Smithy was too sharp for that. Marked cards were no use against the Bounder. He was too well acquainted with dodges of that kind. But the

foolish fag was like wax in Ponsonby's cunning hands. The Highcliff sport cheated him almost openly.

That poker game was not a long one. The deal fell to Jack, and Ponsonby passed, after looking at his cards, leaving Jack to bag the ante. It was only a shilling. Then Ponsonby dealt, and Ponsonby had his own way of dealing when he was opposed to an inexperienced young duffer like poor Jack.

Jack's eyes glistened as he found himself in possession of four aces and a king. Four of a kind, ace high, was an almost invincible hand. Only a straight flush could beat it.

Ponsonby regarded his hand with a doubtful expression after the draw. His dubious look was quite enough to convince Jack that he did not possess the straight flush necessary to beat four aces.

"You—you're not going to pass, Pon?" mumbled Jack, dismayed at the idea that his splendid hand might be wasted on bagging a couple of shillings.

"Oh, I'll see you through," said Ponsonby. "I'm a sport. Play up!"

Money rattled into the tin can they were using as a pool.

No limit was fixed to the game. Ponsonby, with a well-assumed air of bravado, tossed in a ten-shilling note.

Jack Wingate covered it at once.

"Hallo! You're game!" said Ponsonby, with a smile.

He paused, as if considering, before he put in another stake. Wingate minor watched him feverishly. Ponsonby dropped in a pound note at last.

The fag grinned.

His belief was that Ponsonby was bluffing, and trying to force him out by raising the stakes high.

But Jack was well heeled, as he had said, on this occasion. A feeling of great satisfaction took possession of him. He was going to win a handsome stake, and keep the money he wanted to return to Gwynne's desk. The wretched boy hardly realised that he had stolen the cash. He had borrowed it to use as capital in the poker game, that was all. If it was not returned—He hardly dared think of that! It must be returned! He must win—he must!

He placed a pound note and a ten-shilling note in the pool.

Ponsonby whistled softly.

He just covered the bet, and left it to Jack to raise again if he chose. The fag's eyes glistened. Another thirty shillings went in. Jack was grinning with glee now, flattering himself that he was leading Ponsonby on to bluff. In a few minutes now he would take the pot with his four aces.

Ponsonby put up his money again and again, and each time Jack covered it; and then, as his last money went into the pot, he called.

Excepting for a few shillings, all the fag's money was in the tin can, and he could not have stood another round.

"Show up, Pon!" he said.

He laid down his cards, face up, and showed the four aces and the king. The Highcliffe junior smiled.

"That's a strong hand," he remarked.

"Beats yours, I think?" grinned the fag.

"Not quite."

"Wha-a-at?"

Ponsonby, with cool deliberation, spread out his cards. He showed a five, six, seven, eight, and nine, all of hearts. It was a straight flush!

With a yawn, Ponsonby stretched out his hand to the tin can, and scooped in the money.

Jack Wingate watched him with starting eyes.

"You—you—you've won!" he articulated.

"Yes; a straight flush beats four of a kind," assented Ponsonby, as he slipped the stakes into his pocket-book and closed it.

"I—I thought you had a rotten hand!"

"Did you?"

"You—you looked like it! I thought you were bluffing."

"I wonder what put that idea into your head?" yawned Ponsonby. "Well, it's your deal, Jack."

Jack did not move.

"Tired already?" asked Ponsonby, smiling.

"I—I'm stony!"

The Highcliffe junior rose.

"Another time—what? All serene!"

"I—I—I'll play you for IOU's, Pon."

"Sorry! I'm not collecting impot paper," said Ponsonby. "Cash game, my boy. All serene! You nearly had me that time, you know. Next time—"

"You—you're not going?" stammered Jack, rising to his feet, his face white and his knees knocking together.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 507.

"Anythin' to stay for?"

"I—I—I—" Jack's voice trembled.

"I say, Pon—I— Look here! Could you—could you lend me that money—for a week or two—"

"Jokin', I suppose?" smiled Pon.

"N-no! I— The fact is—"

Ponsonby looked at his watch.

"By gad! I shall miss Vavasour in Courtfield!" he exclaimed. "I forgot I'd got an appointment! Ta-ta! See you another time, Jack. Drop me a line, you know."

He walked out of the barn, whistling. Ponsonby did not think there would be another meeting with his dupe. He knew that the Third Form fag could not have obtained so much money by honest means. He had finished with Jack Wingate. He smiled cheerily as he sauntered home to Highcliffe.

Jack Wingate stood in the barn silent, white, almost stunned. Now that the purloined money was irretrievably gone he realised, for the first time with clearness, what he had done. What was going to happen when Gwynne missed the money? He might not miss it for a day or two; but when he did—

A groan left the lips of the wretched fag. His steps were faltering and unsteady when he left the barn at last.

He had had his little flutter. He had played the "sportsman." He had flouted his brother's kindness and the

*Eat less
Bread*

Bounder's advice. He had had his own way!

And there was the bitterness almost of death in his heart as he moved, with dragging steps, home to Greyfriars.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry's hand dropped on Jack Wingate's shoulder as he came slowly across the quadrangle.

Jack jerked himself away.

"Let me alone!" he snarled.

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed Bob, in astonishment. "What's the matter with you, kid?"

"Find out!"

The fag tramped on, leaving Bob Cherry staring after him blankly.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Bob.

He was half inclined to follow the fag and pull his ears; but he refrained. He had been struck by Wingate minor's pale and troubled look, hence his greeting. But the fag did not seem to be in want of sympathy.

"Nice manners they have in the Third!" grunted Bob, as he joined his chums. "Did you see that?"

"The badfulness of the manners was terrific, my worthy Bob!" remarked Hurree Singh. "There is something upful with the esteemed and unpleasant little beast, perhapsfully."

"I jolly nearly gave him a good clout-

ing!" growled Bob. "What on earth's the matter with him?"

Johnny Bull grunted.

"Been over to Highcliffe, I fancy," he said.

"Courtenay put a stop to that," said Wharton. "He might be meeting Ponsonby outside, of course. I'm afraid there's something wrong."

"Let's give him a hiding. He needs one."

"Fathead!"

Wingate minor went on to the House, without a glance at the Famous Five. More than one fellow glanced curiously at his pale face. In the hall he found some of his friends of the Third—Paget and Tubb and Bolsover minor.

"Hallo! Here he is!" said Tubb. "Why haven't you been down to footer practice, young Wingate?"

"Hang footer!"

"By gad, we seem to be in a merry temper!" remarked Paget. "You're going the right way to get a thick ear, Jacky!"

"Oh, ring off!"

Jack Wingate tramped on, and the fags gave him wrathful looks as he went. But Ponsonby's wretched dupe did not give them a thought. There was a weight on his mind, a terror in his heart, that drove out all lesser matters. The thought of the stolen money haunted him. Somehow, he had not realised at the time that he was stealing it. He had not meant to steal it. He had meant to win in the poker game, and then return the five pounds ten shillings to Gwynne's desk, whence he had taken it. He had been excited, feverish. He had not given himself time to reflect. What had he done? What was going to happen to him?

He thought of his brother now. But that came too late. He could picture George's horror and disgust if he confessed. Besides, Wingate major was not rich. He could not have replaced the money if he had wanted to. A sum like that did not grow on every bush. And, if Wingate major could have found the money, and had chosen to, what was he to say to Gwynne? Would Gwynne agree to keep the theft secret when he was told? Jack knew that he would not. Why should he?

The game was up!

He had had his flutter; and now he could confess and take his punishment, or he could wait till he was found out. His people would have to make the money good, and he would have to leave Greyfriars—lucky to escape so cheaply! A less lucky fellow would be sent to a reformatory or a prison for what he had done. He realised that now. He was a thief, branded in his own eyes and in those of everyone else.

At that moment he hated Ponsonby.

Ponsonby had led him into this! After all, why had the Highcliffe fellow singled him out—a mere fag, miles below the notice of the dandy of Highcliffe? Was his motive friendship? If he was friendly, why couldn't he play on for IOU's, and give the fag another chance?

He had walked off with the money—the stolen money. Ponsonby had been the ruin of him—Ponsonby had brought him to this, and now was coolly throwing him over. The wretched fag hated him for it—he hated himself—he hated everybody!

He went to the Third Form-room, but there were fags there, and he moved away again. He went to the dormitory to be alone, and remained there till he had to come down to evening preparation.

Prep was a long-drawn-out horror to him that evening. When the Third went to bed, Jack Wingate turned in without

a word to his Form-fellows. He did not sleep much that night.

The next morning he came down with a pale face and aching head. He caught sight of Gwynne in the quadrangle, and dodged out of his sight.

All through that day he was on tenterhooks.

As soon as Gwynne missed the money he would make the loss known, of course. There would be investigation to find the thief.

Would they think of him?

Wingate major was sure to think of him at once. He had lied to obtain a small loan on Saturday, and his major knew very well what he had wanted it for. The discovery of a theft of ready money would not leave Wingate major in much doubt. He might even have been seen leaving Gwynne's study that Monday afternoon—he could not tell.

If he could have brought the money home and replaced it all would have been well. But—

After lessons that day Wingate minor wheeled out his bicycle, and rode over to Highcliffe. Ponsonby could help him—Ponsonby must help him! He could, and he should!

But as the fag entered Highcliffe School Frank Courtenay stepped in his path.

Courtenay had seen him come in.

"Cut off!" he said briefly.

"I—I want to see Ponsonby!" said Jack huskily.

"Well, you can't! I've told you that!"

"I—I must! You don't understand! I—I'm not going to play!" Jack gave a harsh, almost hysterical laugh. "It's not that! I—I must see Ponsonby, or—or I'm ruined!"

Courtenay gave him a quiet, searching look. Then he stepped aside. Whatever Jack wanted, it was pretty clear this time that he had not come to be a sport!

Wingate minor ran up to Ponsonby's study.

Cecil Ponsonby was sitting on the corner of the table, chatting with Gadsby and Vavasour and Monson. He raised his eyebrows as Jack Wingate came in.

"By gad! That kid again!" grunted Gadsby.

"Can I speak to you, Pon?" faltered Jack.

"Certainly! Go ahead!"

"Alone, if you don't mind."

"Rot! Get on, or get out!"

Ponsonby's manner was not so friendly as of old. Jack's expression was enough to tell him what the fag had come for, and Pon was "not taking any."

"I—I—" Jack's face was scarlet. "Will you—will you lend me some money, Pon?"

"By gad!" murmured Vavasour.

"No," said Ponsonby coolly.

"I—I want it badly—"

"Really?"

"I—I borrowed the money I lost yesterday," muttered Jack. "I shall get into a frightful fix if—if I don't settle up! Lend it to me for—for a few days—"

He broke off miserably as Ponsonby smiled.

"You lost some money yesterday?" asked Ponsonby.

"You know I did—over five pounds."

"How should I know?" asked Ponsonby, raising his eyebrows. "If you've lost money, the best thing is to apply at the police-station, or put an advertisement in the local paper offering a reward."

Jack stared at him, while the nuts burst into a chuckle. Pon's humour was irresistible.

"You know very well what I mean!" panted the fag. "I lost money to you—that game of poker in the barn, Pon—"

"Are you dreamin'?" said Ponsonby pleasantly. "What barn?"

"You—you remember—"

"I think you're dreamin'. I never went near any barn yesterday that I know of. As for playin' cards, it's a thing I'd never do. I hope I've been too carefully brought up for that!"

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

Jack Wingate set his teeth.

"Will you stop fooling?" he burst out.

"Look here, Pon, I must have the money! I'll settle with you later—but I must have it!"

"This isn't a charitable institution," remarked Ponsonby. "Neither have I taken up the money-lending business! Shut the door after you!"

"If it comes out, it won't do you any good!" muttered Jack.

"If what comes out?"

"About us gambling—"

"Have you been gamblin', you shady young blackguard? One of your merry habits at Greyfriars—what?" Ponsonby pointed to the door. "Get out!"

"What?"

"I'm not a particular chap, but I draw the line at gamblers," explained Ponsonby. "You're shockin' my friends an' me by even talkin' about such things. Get out!"

"You lying rotter!" yelled Jack. "Do you mean to say you deny winning my money in the barn yesterday—"

"Monson, would you mind kickin' that noisy fag into the passage?"

"You cad!" shouted Jack. "You rotter—"

Ponsonby slid from the table, took Wingate minor by the ear, and led him out of the study.

"Clear off!" he said pleasantly. "Spin your yarn if you like, my tulip, and prove it if you can! But don't worry me with your shoutin'!"

He sent the fag spinning along the passage, and went back into his study and closed the door.

Jack Wingate staggered to his feet. From Ponsonby's study came shouts of laughter. With a heart as heavy as lead the fag went back to his bicycle.

There was nothing more to be done at Highcliffe. He knew Cecil Ponsonby now in his true colours!

But the knowledge had come too late!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Takes a Hand!

HARRY WHARTON stopped in the hall when the Greyfriars fellows came out of the dining-room after dinner the next day.

"Come on!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"You're coming out?"

"I'll join you—don't wait."

"All serene!"

The Co. went out into the quadrangle, and Wharton waited till Jack Wingate came out of the dining-room with the Third.

Jack moved away from the rest of the fags, with a moody face. Wharton joined him.

"I want to speak to you, kid," he said, in a low voice.

Jack gave him a haggard look. A savage reply trembled on his lips; but he checked it. There was kindness in Wharton's face, and the wretched fag was in need of kindness then.

"What is it?" he muttered.

"Come up to the study!"

"All right!"

Wharton did not speak again till they were in Study No. 1 in the Remove passage. Jack stood by the table, waiting. His face was pale, and there were dark circles under his eyes. For two nights he had slept little.

"You're in trouble, kid," said Wharton. "You know I know the way you've been going on. You've come a mucker. Anybody can see that. Everybody's

beginning to notice how queer you look. You're givin' it away."

"I suppose I am," muttered Jack. "I can't help it! You don't understand—"

"Tell me what's the matter, and if I can help you I will," said Harry quietly. "Old Wingate's been very decent to us, and we owe him something. What's the matter?"

Jack winced a little.

It was for his brother's sake that the captain of the Remove took an interest in him, not for his own. Wharton, a Remove fellow, cared that much about "old Wingate." How much had he, George's brother, cared?

There was remorse and repentance, as well as misery in the fag's breast. He knew well enough now how much better it would have been with him if he had listened to his elder brother. If he had had the chance over again—

"Well?" said Harry. "Come, get it off your chest, Jack! You've been playing the giddy goat; but I know who's chiefly answerable for that. Have you landed yourself into something?"

"Yes," muttered Jack.

"Can I help you?"

The fag brightened for a moment.

"Can you lend me five pounds fifteen?"

"Hardly. Are you in debt, does that mean?"

"N-no! Not exactly." Jack turned to the door. "Let me go! You can't help me. You wouldn't if you knew, either."

Wharton's face became very grave.

"Don't go, Jack! Tell me what you've been doing, and I'll see what can be done. Anyway, I shall say nothing. You know that."

Jack hesitated.

But the burden of his wretched secret was almost too great for him to bear. He longed to tell someone—someone who would at least temper condemnation with pity.

"You'll keep it dark?" he panted.

"Of course!"

"I borrowed some money to play with that hound, Ponsonby." Wharton smiled slightly. Jack's nobby friend at Highcliffe had become "a hound." "I—I lost! And—and I can't—can't—"

"You can't pay up the money you borrowed?"

"N-no."

"Won't the chap wait a bit?"

Jack did not answer, but the look on his face was sufficient to enlighten the captain of the Remove. His face hardened.

"You said you borrowed the money, Jack? Do you mean—"

"I—I only meant to borrow it," whispered Jack. "I was going to put it back. But—but Gwynne doesn't know!"

"Gwynne?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens!"

"I—I never meant to be a thief," groaned the fag. "I swear I never! I—I saw Gwynne doing his accounts the other day, and he had the money on the table. That put it into my head. And—and on Monday—"

"Gwynne hasn't missed it yet?"

"He can't have, or there'd have been a fuss."

Wharton paced the study in silence. He had seen easily enough that the fag was in serious trouble, and, for old Wingate's sake, he would gladly have helped him. But he had not expected this.

"I know I've been a fool!" groaned Jack, in utter wretchedness. "I—I was a silly fool! I don't know what came over me. It seemed so different, the way Pon put it all—he has a way of putting things. I thought he was friendly. The rotter! What am I going to do,

Wharton? I never meant to keep the money, I swear that. But—but I had it!"

"Ponsonby won the money from you?"

"Yes."

"If he knew, he might be willing—"

"I've tried that. I went over there yesterday, and—and he denied ever having played with me, and turned me out of the study."

Wharton compressed his lips. He had half expected to hear that. He knew Cecil Ponsonby.

"You've been an awful little rascal!" he said, after a long pause. "But—but old Wingate! Good heavens! It would jolly nearly break his heart, I think if this came out. Something will have to be done!"

Wharton paused. There was compassion mingled with the scorn he felt for the wretched fag; but it was of the captain of Greyfriars he was thinking chiefly. Jack, after all, was only the instrument of Ponsonby's revengeful malevolence. Wharton thought of Wingate, and what he would feel if his young brother were shown up before all the school as a thief, and he shuddered at the thought. Old Wingate, of whom the whole school was so proud, one of the best fellows breathing, to be covered with disgrace and shame by the cunning contrivance of that Highcliffe blackguard!

But what was to be done? As Wharton cudgelled his brains, he heard a sound in the passage. It was the Bounder, whistling a snatch from an opera as he passed the door.

Harry pulled the door open quickly.

"Smithy! Hold on a minute!"

"At your service," said the Bounder, turning back, with a smile. "I'm off to Highcliffe, though—don't say footer!"

"It's not footer. Come in!"

Vernon-Smith came in, with a curious glance at Wingate minor.

"Jack, you don't mind if Smithy knows—he will keep mum?" said Wharton. "You can trust Smithy."

"Thanks, awfully!" said the Bounder, laughing. "I may point out that I am not generally considered a very trustworthy person!"

"I know better," said Harry quietly.

"I've no right to bother you, of course."

"Oh, rats!" said Smithy cheerfully.

"I'm your man. Is young hopeful landed at last? I noticed his face to-day. What has he done—forged a cheque or robbed a desk?"

Jack gave a cry.

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

"Has it come already? My dear kid, you needn't be surprised. I could see the way you were going. After trying to extort money from me by threatening, it wasn't a very long step to borrowing somebody else's cash without permission. And I knew you'd come to it. Pon knew it, too! That's why he was taking the trouble to twist your round his finger, you little fool!"

"You can laugh," muttered Jack. "I—I've a jolly good mind to go and drop into the river, and chance it. I feel like it!"

"Don't be a fool!" rapped out Wharton sharply.

"Excuse my smiling," said Vernon-Smith. "Of course, I know it's serious—the seriousness is terrific," as Inky would say. "I'll do anything I can—I've got rather a regard for old Wingate. He's such an innocent old duck, and has the wool pulled over his eyes so easily that a fellow can't help liking him. Give me the yarn. I'm the man to help you!"

Jack faltered out the miserable story again, and the Bounder became grave enough as he listened.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 507.

"What do you think, Smithy?" asked Wharton, when the fag had finished. "I've got some money in the bank; but Gwynne may miss his money at any moment—there may not be time."

"You want to hush it up?" asked Vernon-Smith.

Wharton blushed.

"Jack's told me in confidence, so I can't give it away, anyway," he said. "For old Wingate's sake, I'd like to see the little fool clear. It's Ponsonby who's more to blame than he is. Pon knew he couldn't have got all that money honourably."

"Naturally. Pon's done with him now. Well, it's simple enough. Pon can be made to hand the money back; it can be shoved into Gwynne's desk, and everything in the garden will be lovely."

"Of course, Ponsonby ought to be made to give it back," said Harry. "I've no doubt he cheated that silly kid—winning money by cards from a fag is cheating, anyway. But surely—"

"That's all serene! I'll get it from Pon!"

"But can you?" exclaimed Wharton, in astonishment.

"You bet! How much was it—five-fifteen? My dear chap, I'm going over to play poker with Pon now!" said the Bounder coolly.

"You ass!" exclaimed Wharton impatiently. "You're talking like that young idiot himself now! How do you know you'll win the money from Ponsonby?"

"Quite simple. Pon cheated Jack, because he's sharper than the young fool. I'm going to cheat Pon, because I'm sharper than he is. After I've cheated five pounds fifteen out of him I shall play fair—I always do on my own account. Easy as fallin' off a form!"

The Bounder nodded, and walked out of the study, leaving Wharton dumbfounded. Wharton had hoped that the cool, clear-headed Bounder would be able to give some advice, but such a plan as this he had never dreamed of. He made a stride towards the door, but Jack Wingate caught his arm.

"Let him go, Wharton! You say Ponsonby cheated me—well, then, it's fair for Smithy to get the money back the same way!"

"But—"

"Can you lend me the money?"

"No!"

"Then let Smithy alone!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry looked in. "Are you coming down to the footer, Wharton, you slacker? Come on!"

And Bob marched his chum down to Little Side. Vernon-Smith, with a smile on his face, was pedalling easily over to Highcliffe School. Jack Wingate mooched miserably about the quadrangle, waiting with feverish anxiety for the Bounder to return.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Lesson for Life!

"GOOD old Smithy! Here we are again!"

There was a chorus of welcome as the Bounder of Greyfriars appeared in the doorway of Ponsonby's study at Highcliffe.

Ponsonby and Gadsby, Monson and Vavasour were there. They were glad to see the black sheep of Greyfriars. Smithy had had bad luck on his last visit. He had left six or seven pounds among the nuts. Pon & Co. had high hopes of reaping a second harvest.

Vernon-Smith dropped into the chair Pon pulled out for him, and Gaddy looked the door. Monson produced smokes and cards.

The Bounder picked up the pack, and shuffled the cards carelessly. Ponsonby set a silver bowl on the table for the pool.

The deal fell to Vavasour, and a round was played. Smithy was on Vavasour's left, so the next deal fell to him. Then the Bounder was ready for business!

Vernon-Smith was a curious mixture. He was a master of the cards, and there were few dodges of the professional card-sharper that he was not acquainted with. He could, if he had so chosen, have cleaned out the nuts every time he played. But he did not choose. When he was with the swindling set of sharpers at the Cross Keys he played them at their own swindling game without the shadow of a scruple. At other times he never dreamed of using his peculiar gifts. He had great knowledge and great skill, and iron nerve; but he never played foul. He would rather have lost his last shilling. But for once, for Jack Wingate's sake, he intended to exercise his peculiar gifts—to the exact extent of five pounds fifteen shillings. When that exact sum was bagged and set aside, Fortune would decide for the rest.

It was a curious scheme, shady as most of the Bounder's schemes were; yet the motive was good. It could not quite be called cheating, to take back the plunder from a cheat and return it to his victim. The exact degree of honour in such a method the Bounder did not consider.

Ponsonby's eyes glistened as he looked at the hand he had received in the deal. That Smithy was manipulating the cards did not even dawn upon the nuts. They sometimes assisted Fortune themselves, when they deemed it safe; but they were hopelessly clumsy in comparison. Pon had received four of a kind—kings. It was a strong hand. Vavasour and Monson and Gadsby also looked satisfied, in spite of their endeavour to appear indifferent. Strangely enough, each of them had a good, strong hand. They were all prepared to go it.

Ponsonby raised the stake to five shillings, and his companions followed suit. By the time the game came round to Vernon-Smith it required seven-and-six to come in. The Bounder dropped in three half-crowns. It went round again, and the Bounder made it ten shillings. Another round, and the stake rose to a pound, and Monson, with a last glance at his cards, dropped out. A full hand was not strong enough for this. Vavasour followed his example, losing faith in his three jacks. The game was left to Ponsonby, Gadsby, and the Bounder. Another round, and another, and Gadsby passed. Then the Bounder paid up and called.

"Oh, keep it up!" said Ponsonby. "Be a sport, you know!"

"I call you!" said the Bounder, unmoved.

He laid his cards on the table.

Ponsonby muttered a curse. Four kings were no use against a straight flush. It was Jack Wingate's experience over again, but this time the dandy of Highcliffe was the victim. The Bounder, with a smile, raked in the pool.

"Smithy's got the luck this time!" remarked Vavasour.

Vernon-Smith extracted the coin and currency-notes from the silver bowl. There was more than five pounds fifteen shillings. He took that amount, and left the rest in the bowl.

"Hallo! Take up your plunder!" said Gadsby, with a stare.

Vernon-Smith smiled, and shook his head.

"Leave it there, and call it a jackpot," he said.

"What rot!"

"Oh, let a chap have his way!"

"All serene, if you're ass enough!" said Ponsonby, laughing.

The poker game went on, and the pot fell to Gadsby. He pocketed it with great satisfaction. The Bounder had done with his dodges. He had Jack Wingate's five pounds fifteen in his pocket, and his play after that was strictly above-board.

Half an hour later he rose to go.

"Not going yet!" exclaimed Gadsby.

"Sorry—I've got an appointment," said the Bounder. "I'll drop in later, if you like, for another game—say an hour's time!"

"Oh, do!"

And the Bounder took his leave.

He wheeled out his machine, and rode away to Greyfriars. Jack Wingate was in the school gateway when he jumped down.

He gave the Bounder a look of haggard inquiry.

"Smithy!" he breathed.

"You young ass!" growled the Bounder. "I've left a good game in the middle on your account! Blessed if I know what I'm such an ass for!"

"Have you got the tin?" breathed Jack.

"Yes, of course."

"Oh, good! You're a ripping sort, Smithy."

"Oh, rats!"

The Bounder dragged the currency notes from his pocket, and crumpled them into Jack Wingate's hand. The fag panted with relief.

"Hold on!" said Vernon-Smith quietly. "Don't be in a hurry, my infant! I want something of you before you cut off with that money."

The fag trembled.

"Smithy! Let me go! I—I'll pay you some time—"

"You young fool!" The Bounder laughed mockingly. "You won't pay me, and I don't want you to. It's not my money; it's Gwynne's!"

"What do you want, then?" muttered Jack feverishly.

"I want your promise, honour bright, to leave off playing the fool, and to keep away from Ponsonby for good," said the Bounder quietly.

Jack breathed with relief. He had had a lesson he was not likely to forget!

"You duffer! I'll promise, of course! Do you think I want to have anything more to do with that cad, after he turned me down as he did?"

"Good! That's all!"

Wingate minor hurried to the School House. Most of the Sixth were on the footer-ground, and the Sixth Form passage was clear. The fag trod cautiously into the sacred quarters of the Sixth. As he passed his brother's study he heard a sound of pacing footsteps within. Gwynne's study was vacant. He crept into it with beating heart. His hands trembled as he fumbled with Gwynne's desk. A minute more, and the money was replaced.

Jack stepped out into the passage again, almost giddy with relief.

He crept down the passage again, but he paused outside his major's study. The steady tramping of feet was still going on. He hesitated long outside the door, and then, impelled by an impulse he hardly understood, he tapped.

"Come in!"

The fag entered.

Wingate major was alone, and his face was wrinkled with troubled thought. His eyes rested grimly on Jack.

"So it's you!" he said.

"Yes, George," said the fag timidly. "I—I say! Were you—were you worrying about something? I heard you moving about—"

"I was thinking of you, you young rascal!" said Wingate. "You know that."

"I—I thought so! I—" Jack broke off.

"Well?"

"I—I'm sorry!" The fag's face was crimson. "George, old chap, I—I'm sorry I've been such a fool—such a beast. It's over now—honour bright! I don't know what made me do it; I was a silly fool! You—you can take my word, can't you?"

Wingate's face softened.

"You've been in trouble, Jack," he said. "I saw it in your face! It's been remarked on. I knew the kind of trouble it must be."

"It's over now. I—I was in trouble! Smithy helped me out of it—"

"Vernon-Smith of the Remove?"

"Yes. He's a good sort. He—he's made me promise not to have anything more to do with Ponsonby. I'm going to keep that promise, George! You—you needn't be waxy with me any more!"

Wingate smiled. The anxious earnestness in the fag's face was proof enough that he meant what he said. Wingate asked no questions.

"All serene, Jack! Least said soonest mended," he said. "Come down to the footer-ground, and I'll give you some coaching!"

The big Sixth-Former left the study, with the fag trotting by his side. Wingate's rugged face was clear now. A weight was off his mind. Vernon-Smith was looking on at the Remove game, and he saw them coming down, and smiled a little. Harry Wharton joined him by the ropes.

"All serene, Smithy?" he asked.

"Looks like it!" smiled the Bounder, with a nod towards the captain of Greyfriars and his minor. "I fancy you were rather down on my little game, Wharton; but the result seems satisfactory."

Harry Wharton glanced towards Wingate and the fag, and he nodded. It was evident that the trouble there was at an end. And Wharton felt his heart lighter for it. And the Bounder, too, was in an unusually satisfied mood as he sauntered away—to keep his engagement in Ponsonby's study in Highcliffe!

The Bounder had done wrong that right might come of it, and he felt no remorse. He did not consider himself a hero by any means. The time might come when he would realise that, making every allowance for the circumstances, the trick he had played was a trick possible only to a blackguard—to a fellow who had dipped his hands far too deeply into the dye of rascality!

(DON'T MISS "COKER THE REBEL!" — next Monday's grand story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday :

"COKER THE REBEL!"

By Frank Richards.

This is a good example of the type of story which makes special appeal to a very large section of my readers—perhaps even to the majority. But they would get tired of it if they had it every week. Variety counts for much in this, as in other matters.

Merely to say that Coker plays the leading part in a Greyfriars yarn is sufficient to indicate that that yarn is one of the humorous variety. For only Horace Coker can take Horace Coker seriously. To everyone else he is matter for mirth.

Stirred by the example of the Remove's successful rebellion against the tyranny of Mr. Jeffreys, Coker takes Mr. Prout in hand.

Mr. Prout is no tyrant, and Coker would not be likely to handle him successfully if he were. But that is not Coker's opinion.

Coker considers that prefects should be chosen from the Fifth Form as well as the Sixth. There should be four Fifth Form prefects, of whom, of course, Coker should be one. Or, if that is too much, there should be one Fifth Form prefect, and Coker should be that one. Coker has an open mind, and really does not mind much which alternative is adopted.

So Coker bucks against Mr. Prout, and—
The result you will know next week!

SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER!

You naturally expect something special on such an occasion, and we have never failed you yet.

But what I am going to tell you about is something apart from the extra-long Greyfriars yarn which will, of course, be a feature of our Christmas issue, and the short stories which will help to make it attractive.

Two years ago a special supplement, giving information about the leading characters in the stories, was issued. The number containing it soon went out of print; but requests for it have never ceased since, and I have had hundreds of letters asking me to reprint it.

Until I knew that we were going to have a real Christmas Number this year I could see no chance of doing this. The space could not be spared in an ordinary issue.

But the supplement will be just the very thing to make the Christmas Number complete.

It will not be a mere reprint of the 1915 supplement. Fresh information will be included, and the facts will be marshalled in rather a different manner. Everything will be brought up to date, and the characters dealt with will include not only Greyfriars, but Highcliffe and Cliff House. Altogether, I am tolerably sure that those of you who are lucky enough to possess the former supplement will consider this an improvement on it; while those who have not been able to get it need never worry about it any more!

ARE YOU READING

the "Gem" serial? And if not, why not? **"THE TWINS FROM TASMANIA"** is its title. It deals with Highcliffe, Greyfriars, and Cliff House, and the consensus of opinion among "Gem" readers seems to be that it is IT!

FOOTBALL NOTICES.

Places in Teams Wanted By :

G. Goodall, 39, Reform Street, Battersea, S.W. 11—aged 16.

Two players—halves or forwards—age 17—3 mile radius.—T. W. Davies, 25, Paragon Road, Hackney, E. 9.

G. Singleton, 219, Plashet Road, Upton Park, E. 13—age 17—3 mile radius.

A. Baker, 21, Cranbrook Street, Green Street, Bethnal Green—age 15—right-back—4 mile radius of Bethnal Green.

BACK NUMBERS WANTED.

By R. Mulvaney, 81, Queen Street, Hulme, Manchester.—"School and Sport."

By Peter Botha, P.O. Box 20, Oudtshoorn, Cape Province, South Africa.—MAGNET, Nos. 10-200, offers 1d. each.

Your Editor

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

THE ST. BEDE'S BEAR HUNT!

A School Story. By RICHARD REDFERN.

I.

Evan Breeze's Little Idea!

MR. TROTTER, the worry-wrinkled master of the Fourth Form at St. Bede's, was in a bad temper.

"The conduct of this class has been outrageous!" he panted, wiping an inky hand across his forehead. "In all my experience I have never had such a collection of ill-mannered boys to control. All through the morning lessons you've chattered and

"Pardon my mentioning it, sir," ventured Evan Breeze, the merry-making skipper of the Form, in a mild voice, "you've got a blob of ink on your nose."

A titter ran round the class.

"And supposing there is a small accumulation of inky fluid upon my nasal organ, is it any concern of yours, Breeze?" gasped the master, so worried that he scarcely knew what to reply.

"I shouldn't like it on mine, sir," said the boy, without a smile. "Would you like me to rub it off, sir, with a chalk-duster?" he added politely.

The fair-haired boy with the twinkling blue eyes rose from his seat.

Mr. Trotter swished his gown, and retreated towards the blackboard-easel, against which he had a habit of leaning when worried.

"Certainly not!" he shrieked. "How dare you suggest such a thing! Upon my soul, I'm at a loss to know how to deal with such a collection of young hooligans! I—"

"Look out, sir! The easel's moving!" cried the Fourth Form skipper, unable to restrain a wide grin.

The warning was too late, as, indeed, it was intended to be. Knowing the master's habits, the junior had placed some pieces of soap at the bottom of the back legs of the easel prior to the start of lessons. Consequently, as Mr. Trotter put pressure upon the easel, the back legs shot inwards like greased lightning, and the whole thing crashed to the ground, with the master falling on top of it.

Bomp! Crash!

The noise echoed through the school like the bombardment of artillery.

There was the wildest commotion in the class. Every boy sprang to his feet to watch the struggles of the master. Those in the back desks jumped on their seats.

"Ow, wow, ow! Help me out! I'm injured! F-f-fetch a doctor, s-s-somebody!"

Mr. Trotter appealed vainly for help. That he was not really hurt was apparent from his vigorous efforts to get upon his feet, a process that was rendered difficult because his gown had become fixed between the easel's legs, and so pinned him down.

"My word! Isn't he a lovely kicker?" grinned Jack Sawyer, the skipper's particular chum. "The first team ought to play him in the match against St. Anselm's!"

"You wretched boys!" wailed Mr. Trotter. "Why don't one of you come to my assistance? Help!"

The juniors only clustered still closer to watch the master's amusing antics, when the class-room door suddenly opened and in stalked Dr. Jessop.

There was a bland smile on the Head's face as forty pairs of eyes were turned sharply towards him; but the smile disappeared as if by magic, and a black frown succeeded it.

Dr. Jessop strode forward, and gazed down at the struggling master.

"Get up, sir—get up!" he thundered. "Don't you realise what a ridiculous figure you are cutting?"

He turned sharply to the class.

"What is the meaning of this extraordinary spectacle?" he demanded. "Answer me at once, Breeze!"

There was no fear in the boy's face as he

rose from his desk, his eyes still twinkling with merriment.

"Mr. Trotter leaned against the easel, and it slipped, sir," he answered. "We were going to his assistance when you came in."

"H'm!" muttered the doctor, glaring down at Mr. Trotter, who, finding that by raising an easel-leg he could withdraw his gown, began to clamber sheepishly to his feet. "I am surprised at you, Mr. Trotter! How do you account for such an amazing spectacle?"

The master turned scarlet. With his chalk-covered gown and inky features he looked a picture.

Mr. Trotter gave a sigh of relief, felt his limbs and body, and realised that no bones were broken.

"I—I—I've been the victim of some audacious trickery, sir!" he spluttered. "These terrible boys are driving me to desperation! I scarcely know what to do—"

"Do! You'd better get off to your room, sir!" interposed the Head severely. "As for you, boys, as morning lessons are almost over, the class is dismissed."

"Thank you, sir!" chimed in the delighted juniors with one voice.

"Don't be too hasty in offering me your gratitude!" cut in Dr. Jessop sourly. "I have an important announcement to make. You realise what to-day is?"

He pointed his finger at Tom Lee. Mr. Trotter paused by the door to hear the Head's statement.

"Yes, sir!" instantly replied Lee. "It's the day of the match between St. Bede's and St. Anselm's in the second round of the Public Schools Cup."

There was a buzz of interest all round the class. A footer match between the great rivals had been the one topic of conversation for days past. It was the reason for the Fourth's high spirits that morning. Almost every boy in the school had made up his mind to tramp the four miles to St. Anselm's playing-field to witness the great encounter.

"To-day is Wednesday," said the Head, frowning. "Since you cannot answer even this simple question correctly, Lee, I need scarcely remind you that it has always been recognised as a school half-holiday."

The Fourth-Formers drew in their breath. What ominous sign did this reference portend?

"As you boys are notoriously backward in your studies," went on the doctor, "and as you have apparently wasted a good deal of time this morning which should have been spent profitably in lessons, it will not hurt you, for once in a while, to forgo the half-holiday and to devote the two brief hours to making greater progress in your work. Mr. Trotter will take lessons as usual this afternoon. The class is dismissed."

Dr. Jessop stalked out of the room, whilst forty boys looked after him in blank amazement.

II.

Mr. Trotter Gets a Shock!

IMMEDIATELY school was over Breeze and his chums passed through the gates and headed for the little market-town of Saxbury.

For some time they strolled about the quaint old place in low spirits, unable to raise a smile among them. Saxbury was slier than ever to-day. Not even the purchase of peas and tin shooters and the appearance of the angry shopkeepers, roused by the rattle of the pellets against their window-panes, stirred the three chums out of their gloomy depression.

They strolled back through the High Street. If they failed to appear at the meal there would be further trouble for them.

As they turned the bend in the thorough-

fare and came in sight of the Jolly Waggoners, Saxbury's principal inn, they hastened their pace.

Before the inn was quite a fair-sized crowd for Saxbury. Something was going on that stirred the onlookers, mostly children and old, smocked labourers, to merriment. Above their shouts could be heard the boom, boom of a drum, the screech of pipes, and the ding-dong of the cymbals.

"What's the row?" asked Sawyer, as they broke into a trot. "It sounds like a Punch and Judy show."

"Somebody's dancing about with a red hat on," murmured Lee.

They joined the onlookers. To their surprise the crowd were gathered about a short, fat, greasy-looking Italian, who was simultaneously blowing the panpipes, banging a drum strapped to his chest, whilst he clashed the cymbals. With the other hand he jerked a big brown bear, fastened to him by a rope, to dance grotesquely about on his hind-legs.

It seemed very poor sport to the three chums, but they continued to watch for a few moments in the hope that the Italian would blow a few teeth out.

"Did you ever see such a face outside a police museum?" grinned Breeze. "I'll bet old Macaronio hasn't washed for a month! Got any peas left, Sawyer? This game's too slow!"

"What-ho!" grinned Lee. "So's the dance. I'll warrant the two images would step to a livelier tune if we wake 'em up!"

Screened by a couple of tall labourers, the three chums suddenly rained a storm of peas upon the bear and its master.

It had a magical effect. Macaronio, smitten on the back of the neck, nose, and cheeks with a stinging force, leapt high in the air, whilst a wild yell took the place of the din he was in the act of creating.

As for the bear, the peas fell harmlessly upon his shaggy coat and head. He merely sniffed when a well-aimed shot struck him on the tip of the muzzle.

The animal looked with mild surprise, however, at the strange antics of his master. Macaronio was now giving the performance. Up and down he hopped and circled, whilst a fusillade of peas raked down upon him with deadly accuracy.

What he shouted was not understandable, being in his native Italian, yet it was obviously something strong by the way he capered.

The onlookers roared with amusement. The burly labourers, realising whence the attack came, sheltered the boys whenever the little Italian made a rush at them.

As a consequence, Macaronio began a chase of the three juniors around the crowd, dragging the reluctant bear after him.

The scene was too funny for words. The sight of the puffing, dancing Italian set the three chums shrieking with laughter.

"It's better than a pantomime!" gurgled Sawyer, holding his sides. "It takes some of the sting out of this afternoon's punishment, anyway."

Breeze said nothing. He was taking direct aim at Macaronio, who was having a few words with the bear in consequence of the animal objecting to following his master's erratic footsteps in chasing the schoolboys.

"Sacrisimo!" suddenly yelled the Italian, leaping higher than ever in the air. "I am killed! Vere is der p'licemans?"

A pea had struck him on the tip of the nose; others had stung him on ears and chin.

Directly his feet touched the ground he turned in the chums' direction. Like a maniac, flourishing the drumstick, he pursued the juniors, who kept tantalisingly within reach before dancing away into safety.

"Sacrisimo! I but catcha you," screamed Macaronio, aiming a terrific blow at Breeze, "I make you never forget me!"

The Fourth Form skipper—promptly ducked, and the blow went home on the nose of one of the big farm-labourers. That was the signal for a wild uproar. In an instant the labourer shot out his fist. The Italian received the blow on his chin, and crashed down on his back, jerking the bear with such suddenness that Bruin lost his balance, and sat down with all his weight upon the drum-cover.

Needless to say, the circular stretch of parchment objected to such pressure, and exploded with a noise like a punctured motor-tyre.

Finding his hind-legs fixed amidst the parchment, the bear turned himself on his head, as he had been taught to perform, and lashed out with his heels.

There was a further rending of parchment. Instead of freeing himself, the drum-case only slipped further over his fat, shaggy body, and encircled him like a belt. Then, to the amazement of his master and the delight of the crowd, the bear shambled off up the High Street as hard as he could go.

"Come on, my sons! After him!" cried Breeze. "The fun's not half over yet! He's making for St. Bede's!"

The bear, reaching the top of the High Street, branched off in the direction of the school. The three chums were within a dozen yards of the creature. Behind them, in a comic procession, racing, laughing, and gesticulating, were farm-labourers and children. In the rear was Macaronio, yelling in his native lingo, and flourishing the drumstick wildly in the air.

The stately old pile of buildings that comprised St. Bede's School stood at the angle where the main road branched. The front gates faced the main road. A dozen yards beyond there was a sharp, winding lane, which cut past the school on the left.

The three juniors, rapidly outdistancing the crowd, were amazed, on reaching the school gates, to discover that the bear had disappeared.

"He hasn't had time to slip round into Ivy Lane!" puffed Lee. "How's he been spirited away?"

"Look, look!" cried Sawyer excitedly. "There he goes—across the quad! See, he's entering the old carpenter's shed!"

"So he is!" gurgled Breeze. "Here's a go! Mind your backs, my sons! We don't want the old crowd in here!"

Whilst the others sprang aside, in amazement the Fourth Form skipper slammed the big iron gates together and shot home the bolts.

"Down into cover of the hedge!" he commanded. "If they don't see us, and find the gates locked, they'll think we've gone into Ivy Lane!"

"Right-ho!" grinned Lee.

They barely had time to press themselves out of sight amongst the laurels ere the crowd excitedly swept on.

"Come on, my sons!" grinned Breeze. "We'll slip over to the shed and fasten the door just to keep Bruin out of mischief. Don't want him to wander into Hall to dinner as an uninvited guest—eh, what?"

A glance into the carpenter's shed showed them the bear sniffing hungrily at a glue-pot. He turned his shaggy head on hearing their approach, but before he could waddle to the door it had been padlocked upon him.

Three minutes later the chums were sitting at the long dining-tables amongst their Form companions, whose gloomy faces were in strange contrast with their own exuberant, merry-eyed ones.

III.

How the Fourth Went to St. Anselm's After All!

"CHEER up, Fourth! Go along to your class-room like good little boys! We'll tell you all about the footer match when we come back!"

The Fifth Form fellows had chartered a couple of brakes to carry them to St. Anselm's ground. The juniors were congregated in the quad, watching them depart. The Sixth Form and their team were already on the way; and so, too, were most of the St. Bede's fellows.

"Don't make too sure of it!" shouted Breeze, in reply.

There was a sudden stir amongst the boys, and an uproar of laughter. Across the quad came a short, podgy figure. It was Macaronio. If anything, his appearance was muddier than ever, for he had been roaming over ploughed fields in search of his pet bear. He still retained the drumstick. The

pumpkins, as before, were fastened immediately below his chin.

"What does the old rag-and-bone merchant want in here?" rose a shout.

"Steady!" shouted Breeze. "Keep back, my sons! I want a word with old Ice-cream!"

He darted forward to meet the owner of the performing bear.

"Sacristissimo! You young scoundrill!" hissed the Italian. "You hava my bear stolen! I will the schoola pulla down, and—"

"Here, go easy, Sandow!" grinned the junior. "You shall have your smelly old bear! We only want to borrow him for a bit. If you come here in half an hour's time, and walk straight into the school and up the staircase to the Fourth Form class-room on the first floor, you shall have Bruin, and five silver boblets besides."

"Five silver shilling!" grinned the Italian. "Oh, signor, it is generosissimo! I villa come, never fear."

"Right-ho!" grinned Breeze. "Now clear out quickissimo!"

Breeze sprinted across the quad, and forced his way through the press of boys. As he reached the corridor there came a shout from the junior who was tugging at the door.

"It's no use pulling the door down!" cried Breeze. "The door's locked, and I've got the key! Don't get excited at what you see inside; he's quite harmless!"

"Who's harmless?" asked somebody. "Old Trotter?"

"Wait and see!" responded the young skipper, flinging open the door, and leading a stream of boys into the class-room.

Before three minutes had elapsed Mr. Trotter, as disappointed as the boys at being deprived of a half-holiday, wondered at the unusual stillness which prevailed in his class-room.

Softly Mr. Trotter crept to the room. A smile flitted over his thin features as he opened the door and peered in. To his delighted surprise the class had opened their grammar-books, and had already begun the lesson on parsing on their own account.

"Well done, boys!" he smirked, advancing briskly towards his desk. "This is a most welcome—"

His voice suddenly died away in a gasp. His books fell from his arms to the floor. His face became deathly white. His mouth was stretched to its utmost capacity in an expression of horror.

Seated on the dais before his desk was what appeared to be a new master. It was a huge, towering figure, and the black silk gown enveloping it seemed likely to split into shreds at any moment, so tightly did it fit. As for the mortar-board—his own, for he recognised it by the tassel—it was a mere pimple upon the new master's cranium.

But the cause of Mr. Trotter's terror was a sight of this new master's face. It was hairy and fierce, and possessed a great muzzle, which yawned at the sight of him, and showed a great red tongue and rows of sharp, yellow teeth.

"Merciful heavens! It—it's a bear!"

Mr. Trotter found his voice at last. He turned appealingly to his class. The boys were busy with their parsing. They seemed neither to have noticed his entrance nor the great, shaggy, dangerous creature who was sitting at the master's desk.

"Surely they can't have mum-mistaken this awful shag-shaggy c-c-creature for m-m-me!" stammered the master.

Next moment he gave a yell which made every boy's hair stand on end. The "awful, shaggy creature" had taken it into his head to have a closer peep at the person wearing a cap and gown like itself. As Mr. Trotter had turned he found Bruin's nose thrust into his face. The animal, standing on his hind-legs, put a fore-paw on his shoulder. Mr. Trotter started to yell like a hysterical girl.

The master's distress was alarming. At first the boys had only contempt for his cowardice. Now they felt that if the trick were persisted in the results might be serious.

"Look here, sir," cried Breeze, "this bear's escaped from his master, who is down at Saxbury! It's a twelve-foot drop from the window to the quad, but I could do it by clinging to the ivy. I'll bring his owner back!"

"Do, do, my brave boy!" wailed the master. "I'm afraid we shall all be killed unless some heroic action is performed."

"But you forget, sir," said Breeze. "The doctor said we were not to leave the class-room before the usual hour."

"Go, my brave lad, and rescue your companions!" cried Mr. Trotter appealingly. "Far better to incur Dr. Jessop's wrath than to be attacked by that savage creature! Go, I implore you! Rescue us, and the class shall be free to do as it pleases! I will take the whole responsibility upon my shoulders!"

Many a time had Breeze lowered himself by the stoutly-clinging ivy below the class-room window to the ground. Quickly he disappeared over the sill.

The young skipper raced across the quad. At the gates he found the man he wanted. Macaronio was patiently waiting with an eye on the school clock for the half-hour to be up.

Before three minutes had passed the door of the class-room had been unlocked, and master and bear were clasped in one another's arms in a warm embrace. By that time Mr. Trotter had bolted.

Breeze only waited for the Italian and the animal to shamble out of the class-room ere he gave the signal to the juniors to follow him.

"Come on, my sons!" he cried. "If we double down to Saxbury we'll be able to catch the two-forty-five to Bilham Station! Another five minutes'll take us to St. Anselm's!"

To the surprise of the St. Bede's boys the Fourth-Formers streamed on to the St. Anselm's ground twenty minutes after the start of the match. They were thus able to see the visitors beat the home team by three goals to two, and to join in the cheers of triumph.

Strange to say, nothing more was said about that afternoon's holiday. If Dr. Jessop and Mr. Trotter suspected that a trick had been played upon them, they were discreet enough to keep their beliefs to themselves.

THE END.

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BAGGING BURGLARS!

By MARK LINLEY.

"YOUR turn now, Squiff," said Bob Cherry, as he munched an apple. "And, for goodness' sake, tell us something exciting!"

The Famous Five, Vernon-Smith, Peter Todd, Squiff, Tom Brown, and Delarey and myself, were all seated somewhere or other in Study No. 1. It was rather a crowd. But crowds are not uncommon in Remove studies. We had had our tea, and, as the ground was damp, and the air rather chilly, had been passing the time away by spinning yarns; true and otherwise—mostly the latter. It was now Squiff's turn. The previous yarns had been rather dull, with the result that they were becoming monotonous; hence Bob's appeal.

Squiff grinned.

"What I'm going to tell you," he said, "really concerns myself, and happened 'down under.'"

"Well, it happened like this:

"On the night I'm going to tell you about I had gone to bed rather early, having felt rotten nearly all day, and was soon asleep. I suddenly awoke, to hear the sound of voices, which came from beneath the window. I hopped out of bed, and looked out. We always keep the windows open down there, you know. I could see two men, though I could not recognise either of them.

"Now's the time," I heard one of them say. 'The kid'll be asleep, and so will the old man.'

"Who they meant by 'the kid' and 'the old man,' I did not know. I was soon to find out, however.

"Well, come on, then," said the other man. 'I'll be jolly glad when it's done.'

"They moved away after this; where, I could not see.

"I got back into bed, and was just settling down to sleep again, when I heard the door open. I pretended to be asleep.

"He's all right; now to get to work," I heard someone say. A moment later I heard the door close. I got out of bed, and slipped on my trousers. Then I quietly opened the door, and stepped out on to the landing. After listening for a few minutes, I detected a clinking sound, which came from somewhere underneath. I crept downstairs, and halted outside the drawing-room door. It was from inside here that the sounds came. I hesitated a moment, then threw open the door, and walked in.

"I was so excited that I hardly knew what I was doing just then. Inside the room were

(Continued on page 16.)

BAGGING BURGLARS!

(Continued from page 15.)

two men, who were piling the silver from the sideboard into a sack as quickly as they could. They both wheeled round as I entered, and levelled their revolvers at me. One of them then advanced, and proceeded to gag me and tie my hands. I was so surprised and flabbergasted that I let him gag me without any resistance whatever. But as he was about to tie my hands I let fly with my foot, and caught him squarely beneath the chin. He fell with a crash, which must have awakened the whole household—to say nothing of the celebrated Seven Sleepers—and in falling must have knocked his head against something hard, for he lay quite still, like one stunned.

"The other man, recovering from his momentary surprise, suddenly let fly with his revolver, together with such a stream of oaths and curses as to make me almost turn green. Fortunately, he must have had too much to drink, or something, for all his shots went wide. Having used his ammunition, he hurled his revolver at me, and missed my head by about four inches; and followed this up by sending a glass dish straight at my

face. I dodged it, and, having removed the gag, thought I would take a hand.

"I began by throwing a small chair at the chap's head, which it missed by about half an inch; and he replied by sending a cushion, which caught my uncle, who had been awakened by the noise, full on the chest as he came through the doorway.

"My uncle collapsed with a bump, but was up again immediately, and rushed at the man. They struggled, but my uncle, who is a big, brawny chap, soon got the upper hand.

"Fetch some rope," he said, as I looked admiringly at the quick way he handled his man. I soon got it, and in a few minutes the men were securely trussed up. The one had recovered from the kick I gave him—or the blow he received in falling, whichever you like—and he looked simply Hunnish when he found he was a prisoner.

"How on earth did you manage to down the fellow?" asked my uncle, a little later; whereat I related my adventure from beginning to end.

"By James, that was plucky!" said my uncle, when I had finished. "Here, take this!" And he held out—his hand!

"What! I thought you were going to say

a five-pound note, or something like that," said Johnny Bull, in disappointed tones.

"Well, I was," replied Squiff. "But I'd come to the end of my paper, the very end. I could only squeeze in 'his hand.' And I thought that the Editor might reckon that one fiver was enough for me."

"Editor?" said Harry Wharton, in puzzled tones.

"Paper?" queried Frank Nugent.

"Off your rocker?" asked Tom Brown, politely.

"It's spoof," said Delarey.

"Not exactly spoof," replied Squiff.

"It didn't really happen, though, did it?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Well, not exactly," said Squiff. "But there was a prize of five pounds offered by one of the Melbourne papers for the best burglar yarn, and I thought I might have a shot at it."

"And this rotten yarn is the rotten yarn you—"

Squiff had edged gradually nearer the door. Now he opened it.

"Right on the wicket, Wharton!" he said, and departed—hastily.

We rushed—but it was too late!

THE END.

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 43.—MONSIEUR CHARPENTIER.

WHY is the French master in a school looked upon as a natural butt by the boys?

Partly, one thinks, because of a certain British tendency to despise all foreigners as inferiors—a tendency which should be on the wane now, when we read day by day of the heroism and generosity of Frenchmen, Serbs, Rumanians, Italians, Greeks, and men of other races with which we are allied in the greatest war the world has ever known; when China, Siam, Bolivia, Brazil, Liberia, Cuba, and other countries are with us in the cause of right, having severed friendly relations with Germany or actually declared war on her.

There is most assuredly nothing at all despicable in being a Frenchman. It is a matter for proper pride. And one need not bring in Verdun to prove this, though one may mention it. Verdun was only what might have been expected of France—a nation of the finest courage and the highest pride. We are apt to think of Great Britain as the foremost nation in the world. But if a universal vote were taken, it would probably be found that the voice of most nations, giving first place in each case to themselves, would give the second place, not to us, but to France.

'La belle France' has been ever in the van of progress; she has produced men as great as ours, and as many of them; she has taught the world much, and will yet teach it more. And if she has her faults, so have we—and plenty of them! One of the worst is that absurd attitude towards the man of another race which is so well indicated in the story of the Frenchman asking his way in London, and one Cockney saying to the other:

"E's a bloomin' furriner, Bill! 'Eave 'arf a brick at 'is 'ead!"

Monsieur Charpentier is a good, kindly, gallant little man. Yet the baser spirits of the Remove look upon him as inferior to themselves because he is French and they are English. Why, there are Hottentots better than Skinner, Chinese superior to Bolsover, and Australian aborigines—you cannot go much lower than that—who would compare favourably with Snoop!

You have never read of M. Charpentier doing a mean or an ungenerous thing. You may have read of weakness on his part in dealing with his pupils; but for that there is good excuse. It is difficult for him to understand them, you see.

Harry Wharton & Co. have always recognised Mossoo as a good sort and stood up for him. It was they who saved him from Gaston Duprez, the scoundrel who was blackmailing him; and it was by their advice that he went to the Head and told him the whole matter. He should not have needed the advice of mere boys, perhaps; but the foreigner has a difficulty in forecasting how



Henri Charpentier

an Englishman will view things, and this tends to nervousness.

The Famous Five discovered Mossoo singing on the sands at Blackpool in the dress of a Pierrot. They were broad-minded enough to look at it in the right light. The French master had people in his own country to help, and his salary was not enough. There was no shame in what he did. But the Bouncer—then at his worst—discovered, too, and they were very much afraid that the Bouncer would tell the tale at Greyfriars, and the cads would chortle. That danger was averted by a timely loan to Vernon-Smith when he had gone broke, however.

Then there was the time when Mossoo fell in love with the French governess at Hardinge House, and Fish suspected him of practising burglary, and went out with handcuffs to capture him, and got the darbies on himself by accident, and could not get them off. There, again, Wharton and Bob Cherry and Nugent had faith in Mossoo, and saw him through, and Fish got the thrashing he deserved.

For, lenient as Mossoo usually is—too lenient at times—he can screw himself up to the flogging-pitch on occasion. He used his walking-stick on Bulstrode and Skinner when

he caught them out in a plot to snowball him in the dark Close. And one recalls his caning Bunter for being too ventriloquial, and not owning up when Skinner and Snoop were taken off to be reported and punished for his guilt. But even here the quality of mercy was evident. After the operation Bunter found that sitting pained him, and Mossoo very kindly allowed him to stand.

The little Frenchman forgave Alonzo when that bright youth took him for a burglar and threw a pail of some awful mixture over him. He knew that the ingenuous Todd meant well; but that would hardly have comforted Mr. Hacker or Mr. Capper. A little later on Lonzy was taken for a burglar by Mossoo. That was when the Duffer had been deluded into going to wake the masters in the early hours—the very early hours—out of sheer obligingness!

There is no lack of spirit in M. Charpentier. He dealt with Loder promptly enough when that pearl among prefects, in a moment of exasperation, so far forgot himself as to call the French master "a silly ass."

It was Mossoo who captured a burglar with Mr. Prout's rifle—unloaded! He did not know how to load it; but he had the courage to tackle the marauder without bothering about a little thing like that!

But he is far too real a gentleman not to own himself in the wrong when he knows it. One has known men who boasted that they never apologised to anyone. None but an arrogant cad would say this. It is an assumption of superiority that no man on earth has a right to make. A gentleman naturally apologises when he feels that he is in the wrong, and does not lower himself by doing so. Through Bunter's ventriloquial tricks Mossoo was made to quarrel with the Todds' Uncle Benjamin; but he apologised handsomely when he knew the truth.

It cannot be said that the pulling of Mossoo's leg is a difficult or dangerous process. It is often pulled, and he usually takes it smiling. But an insult to his beloved country, a slur upon his own good name, incurs his instant anger. He can be taken in by methods that would be of little use against most masters. It was he who accepted Skinner in detention as being Wharton—from a distance, of course. The Remove felt sure he would when they made Skinner take the Form captain's place; but they would not have attempted that trick with Mr. Quelch.

Not altogether a judicious little man, our good M. Charpentier! It was foolish of him to get mixed up with Mr. Banks, the book-maker, badly as he needed money for a good purpose. But the Famous Five and Wibley got him out of that scrape; and Bolsover major was made to feel most thoroughly ashamed of himself for sharing in Skinner's plot—which did Bolsover major no harm!