

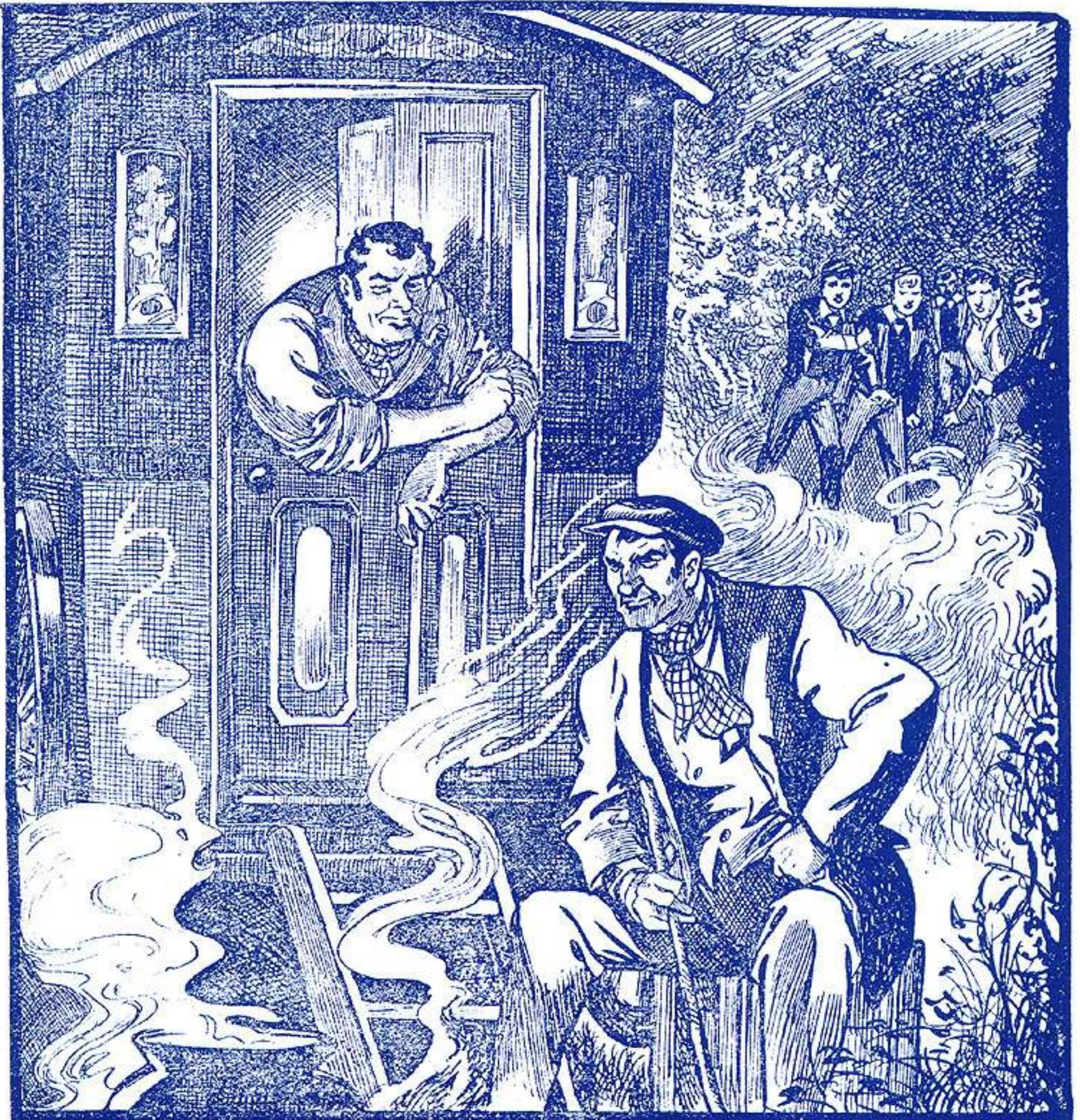
NEXT WEEK — CHRISTMAS NUMBER!



The Magnet 1st

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WINGATE'S PRISON!

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THE MISSING SKIPPER!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Not Lost, But Gone Before!

"IT'S a fact!" said Billy Bunter.

"Rats!"

"I tell you——"

"Piffle!"

"I had it direct from the horse's mouth!"

"Fiddlesticks!"

Billy Bunter's audience, which consisted of the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove, was incredulous, and not without reason. Bunter's stories, as Bob Cherry remarked, had to be taken not merely with a grain of salt, but with a whole salt-pine.

Bunter's latest story was just a shade wilder than usual, which was saying a good deal. Harry Wharton & Co. might well be excused for turning a deaf ear to it.

"I was down in the village a few minutes ago——" said Bunter, for the tenth time.

Bob Cherry indicated the door.

"Put yourself on the other side of it," he said, "or there's the window, if you prefer that way out."

But Billy Bunter was too deep in his narrative to notice the pointed threat in Bob Cherry's remark.

"I was down in the village," he repeated, "and while I was in the post-office, getting a postal-order cashed——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of Bunter getting a postal-order cashed struck the juniors as being decidedly humorous. True, Bunter was just as capable of cashing a postal-order as any other individual. The only drawback was that he never had one to cash.

"And while I was there," Bunter went on, "I rang up my old pal D'Arcy of St. Jim's."

"Your old pal D'Arcy?" said Harry Wharton scornfully. "What do you mean, porpoise? D'Arcy is not your pal, you silly idiot!"

"Oh, really, you know! We're as thick as thieves! David and Jonathan have to play second fiddle when Gussy and I get together. But, of course, you're jealous, Wharton! Jealousy's a weakness of you fellows! I won't reproach you. P'raps it's hereditary."

"What?" roared Bob Cherry, making a sudden dive for the poker. "My hat! I'll jolly well slaughter you!"

And there would probably have been a dead Bunter lying on the carpet had not Harry Wharton promptly intervened.

"Let him ramble on," he said. "When he gets absolutely past the limit we'll kick him out!"

"You fellows are beastly rude. I must say!" said Bunter. "Still, you were born like it, so I must make allowances. Well, as I was saying, I rang up my old pal D'Arcy, and he told me this staggering story——"

"Staggering just about hits it off!" said Johnny Bull. "I never heard anything more staggering in my life!"

Bunter took no notice of the interruption.

"He said that he'd just left the footer-

field, where Greyfriars First are playing St. Jim's First, and that at half-time Wingate & Co. were leading by five to nil."

"Oh, help!" gasped Nugent. "This is where Bunter reaches the limit!"

Only one part of Bunter's story was definitely known by the Famous Five to be true. That was that the senior elevens of Greyfriars and St. Jim's were engaged in a football-match on the latter's ground. But the Saints were such a hot side, and Kildare and his comrades were such sparkling players, that it would be surprising for Greyfriars to enjoy a lead at all at the end of the first half, let alone to be five clear goals ahead. When two such well-balanced teams as Greyfriars and St. Jim's met the honours were usually pretty evenly divided. A five-goal lead was something more than a lead; it was a rout. And St. Jim's were not the sort of side to be routed on their native heath.

"Gussy said our fellows were going great guns," continued Bunter. "At the time he phoned, Wingate had already done the hat-trick, and Courtney and Walker put on a goal each near the interval. Isn't it ripping? I'll bet the St. Jim's fellows are awfully put out!"

"They won't be the only ones," said Bob Cherry grimly. "You're going to be put out now! Savvy?"

"Oh, really! I——"

But the Famous Five were not disposed to put up with Bunter any longer. They were fed up with his fables, and the next moment the fat junior was seized in many hands and fairly hurled through the doorway. He landed on the linoleum outside like a Zeppelin bomb.

"Yooooop! Oh, you beasts! I'll get even with you for this! I——"

But the study door was slammed against Bunter, and the rest of his remarks were wasted on the desert air.

The Famous Five looked at each other and laughed.

"Of course, the fat idiot was romancing!" said Johnny Bull.

"Of course!"

But, somehow, the juniors had a vague sort of feeling that Bunter might have accidentally told the truth. It seemed incredible that Wingate and his merry men could be trouncing St. Jim's First in the manner described by Bunter; and yet——

"The fellows will be coming back soon," said Bob Cherry. "Why not tiddle down to the station and meet 'em?"

"Good egg!"

"We can learn the real result, anyway," said Wharton. "Come on!"

And the Famous Five put on their caps and coats and proceeded to the railway-station.

They hadn't long to wait. In the dusk of the winter evening the lights of the train loomed up, and presently a number of sturdy, muddied, but cheerful fellows emerged on to the platform.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob

Cherry, as he spotted Courtney of the Sixth. "How did it go, Courtney?"

"Topping! We won—licked 'em simply hollow!"

"Hurrah!" roared Johnny Bull, in his stentorian tones. "What was the score, Courtney, old man?"

"Eleven to nil."

"W-w-what?"

"It's a fact," chimed in Walker. "You never saw such a walk-over in your life!"

"But—but I don't understand," said Harry Wharton. "Did you play a fags' team by mistake?"

"No. It was the real goods, all right. But Kildare got crooked in the first five minutes, and the goalie had a telegram calling him away, so they were two men short. Consequently, we did pretty much as we liked."

"What was the half-time score?" asked Nugent curiously.

"Five to nil."

"Then Bunter wasn't rotting, after all!"

"Wingate bagged half a dozen goals," said Courtney. "It was great! The Saints couldn't help it, though. We'd have cracked up just the same if the positions had been reversed."

"Old Wingate's a topper!" said Bob Cherry, with enthusiasm. "We'll make him come to a feed when we get up to the school. There's stacks of grub in the cupboard."

"But he won't come——" began Johnny Bull.

"He'll have to, whether he likes it or not!" said Bob. "These things don't happen every day. Where is the bouncer?"

But there was such confusion in the darkness that Wingate wasn't visible.

"Never mind," said Nugent. "We'll waylay him up at Greyfriars, and make him come along to the study. Eleven to nil! Ye gods! Just think of it!"

"Fairly makes you giddy!" said Bob Cherry.

In a few minutes more the party reached Greyfriars, and the seniors dispersed to their studies. But there was no sign of Wingate. The hero of the hour was absent. Probably his modesty kept him from too early an appearance in public.

But as time went on, and there was still no trace of Wingate, the juniors became anxious.

What had happened to him? Courtney swore to having seen him in the train, but his movements after that were wrapt in mystery.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, after the Famous Five had ransacked the corridors and studies without result. "He's taken to himself wings!"

Bed-time came, but not Wingate. It was Courtney who saw lights out in the Remove dormitory, and the senior wore a worried frown.

"Have any of you kids seen Wingate?" he asked.

"Not even his shadow!" said Peter Todd. "What's become of him?"

That, as the immortal Hamlet said, was the question. Nobody knew what had become of Wingate. He had vanished as suddenly and completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

It was not until a very late hour that night that sleep visited the eyes of Harry Wharton & Co. But although they watched and waited, expecting to see or hear something of the popular captain of Greyfriars, nothing at all transpired.

It was certainly a calamity, and a big calamity at that. Seldom, indeed, had Greyfriars been disturbed from its serenity by such amazing news.

Wingate was missing!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Scrap of Paper!

CLANG, clang!

The shrill notes of the rising-bell penetrated into the Remove dormitory, where Harry Wharton & Co. stirred out of a troubled slumber.

The frost was thick upon the window-panes, and a biting wind swept through the dormitory; but these were not the first things the Removites thought of. Their eyes met in a mutual question.

Where was Wingate? Had he returned?

The answer was soon forthcoming. Harry Wharton sighted Loder of the Sixth descending the stairs, and called to him.

"Has Wingate turned up, Loder?"

The cad of the Sixth grinned. He seemed to be taking a malicious delight in the fact that Wingate was missing.

"No," he replied. "He hasn't turned up, and he's not likely to!"

"What do you mean?"

"What I say!"

And Loder passed on down the stairs.

"The beast!" said Bob Cherry warmly. "He hates old Wingate like poison, and he's fairly gloating over this business!"

"It's rotten!" said Vernon-Smith. "Fairly howls you over!"

"I vote we do a bit of exploring this afternoon," said Frank Nugent, "as it's a half-holiday. We may be able to find out something."

Morning lessons dragged slowly—very slowly. Mr. Quelch made no reference to the missing captain, though it was obvious that Wingate had not come back.

The Remove had a football fixture with Temple & Co. of the Fourth, but they promptly cancelled it. For once in a way there was something more pressing than footer to think about. As Bob Cherry remarked, the school would never be the same again without old Wingate, and it was up to the Removites to find him!

The Famous Five went first to the railway-station. That was where the trouble had begun. Wingate's footballing comrades had seen him in the train; it was afterwards, in the darkness and confusion, that he had become detached from the main party.

But although Harry Wharton & Co. questioned all the railway servants, and put in a good deal of detective work in the vicinity, they could glean no information.

"This is jolly mysterious, if you like!" said Bob Cherry. "We're at a dead-lock!"

Johnny Bull looked grave.

"I reckon," he said deliberately, "that there was foul play."

"Oh, rot!" said Harry Wharton. "I see what you're driving at, Johnny, but who'd be ead enough to make off with old Wingate?"

"He's not like a thing anybody could put in their waistcoat-pocket," said Nugent. "No, Johnny, old man, you're off the wicket. Still, it is jolly funny."

"Is it possible that the esteemed Wingate was taken bad queerfully, and fell in the ditchfulness?" suggested Hurree Singh.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Somebody would have seen him long before this," he said. "Besides, he was as right as rain in the railway-carriage, according to Courtney."

Bob Cherry stroked his chin in perplexity.

"The question is—where shall we search next?" he said. "We haven't a single clue to guide us."

"The only thing to do is to ransack the whole countryside by degrees," said Wharton. "Wouldn't be a bad wheeze to start at the seashore."

"But it's too much like hunting for a needle in a haystack!" protested Nugent.

"Oh, rats! Wingate's got to be found, and we sha'n't be happy till we find him. Besides, Coker & Co. will be forming a search-party, too. It would be too rotten to let 'em steal a march on us. Fancy having to admit that Coker & Co. are cleverer than our esteemed selves!"

"It doesn't bear thinking of," said Johnny Bull.

"Exactly! Come on!"

The juniors struck off along the narrow, frosty road that led to the little fishing-village of Pegg. It certainly seemed a forlorn hope, but they meant to leave no stone unturned in their efforts to track the missing captain.

For over two hours they explored the cliffs and the caves and the sandy waste of shore. They questioned stray boatmen; they inquired at cottages; they did everything possible in the hope of finding clues, but nothing came to light, and soon the shadows of the winter evening began to fall.

"Looks as if we shall have to chuck it for to-day," said Wharton.

"Half a jiffy!"

It was Bob Cherry who spoke, and his tone was sharp and excited.

"I've made a giddy discovery!"

Instantly Bob's chums hurried to the entrance of the cave at which he stood. Bob had picked up a scrap of paper, and was peering at it eagerly in the failing light.

"My hat!" he muttered. "We're properly on the trail now, and no mistake! Read that, you fellows!"

The paper bore a pencilled message, apparently in the handwriting of the captain of Greyfriars, and Harry Wharton & Co. gasped as they perused it.

"Have been collared and brought here by a couple of scoundrels. They mean to stow me away in one of the caves. Rescue, Greyfriars!—G. W."

"Good heavens!" panted Johnny Bull. "Is—is this a dream?"

"Reminds you of the old press-gang days," said Nugent. "Or a page out of a giddy romance?"

"But it's true," said Harry Wharton. "It's Wingate's own writing. You can't get away from that."

For one brief moment the Famous Five exchanged glances. Then Harry Wharton gave voice to a thought which was in the mind of each.

"We must set to work now, right away, and search the caves," he said.

"It's dark," said Nugent. "We shall have to rout out lanterns from somewhere."

An ancient fisherman, living in a cottage close by, satisfied the juniors' requirements on receipt of a tip from Wharton. Then the search began in real earnest.

Headless alike of time and tide, the Famous Five pursued their quest. They penetrated into a perfect network of caves, hunting high and low, and calling Wingate's name aloud.

But their luck was out. The hollow echo of their own voices was the only sound which came back to them from the cavernous vaults.

There were scores of caves on that part of the coast, and the juniors, in their eagerness and enthusiasm, searched them all. But they drew blank every time, until, sick with hunger and weary of the long search, they began to think of getting back to Greyfriars.

"Jove!" gasped Nugent, looking at his glow-watch. "It's nearly ten o'clock! We've been here hours and hours!"

"And there'll be the dickens to pay when we get in!" said Johnny Bull.

"Never mind," said Harry Wharton. "We've done our best, and no one can do more. Let's get back and face the music."

With heavy hearts the Famous Five turned their faces towards Greyfriars. They had set forth that afternoon with high hopes of bringing the missing captain to light; and failure stared them in the face.

They would now have to admit defeat before such champion duffers as Coker of the Fifth; and the prospect was galling. But, despite all the drawbacks and difficulties of the situation, the Famous Five meant to keep on keeping on, until a great and glorious success crowned their united efforts!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Coker's Capture!

"OF course, it's all rot!" said Coker of the Fifth.

"Of course!" agreed Potter and Greene, his right-hand men.

"Fellows aren't kidnapped or stolen away these days," Coker went on.

"That sort of thing was all very well in Dick Turpin's time, but it doesn't hold water now. It's plain as a pikestaff what's happened to Wingate."

"What?" asked Potter and Greene together.

As a rule they placed very little faith in Coker's theories; but it was just possible that on this occasion he had hit the nail on the head.

"Why, can't you guess?" said Coker impatiently. "Wingate's bunked!"

"My hat!"

"There you have it in a nutshell," continued Coker. "He's packed up his traps and cleared out."

"But why?" gasped Greene. "Why, in thunder, should he want to bunk?"

Coker gave a knowing smile.

"He saw that the game was up," he said.

"What d'you mean?"

"What I say. Wingate had had a pretty long innings as skipper of Greyfriars, and he saw that it couldn't last much longer. Day by day another fellow was gathering fresh power, and in a few weeks Wingate would have been kicked out of the captaincy, and the other fellow would have filled his place."

"You must be mad!" said Potter.

"The only other fellow who was hot and strong on becoming skipper is Loder, and he was knocked out of the running ages ago! We're not fools, Horace, old man! You can't tell us that Wingate was in danger of being done out of his job."

Coker sighed.

"Where ignorance is bliss—" he murmured. "I tell you, it's a fact! You can believe me or not, as you choose!"

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"But—but who was the dangerous rival?" asked Greene.

"Myself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loud laughter rang through Coker's study. Potter and Greene were aware that Coker had a big idea of his own importance; but that he would regard himself in the light of a dead cert for the captaincy had not entered their minds.

"Oh, help!" panted Greene, at length.

Coker flared up.

"Are you trying to be funny?" he roared. "If you think there's anything comical in my becoming captain, just say so, and I'll land you on the carpet!"

Greene subsided at once. Whatever Coker might or might not be, he certainly knew how to hit straight from the shoulder.

"Wingate's bunked," said Coker again. "But I don't want to take unfair advantage, and step into his shoes right away. Before I put up for the captaincy, we'll do our level best to find him, and bring him back."

"Not much chance of that," argued Potter. "He's been gone goodness knows how long!"

"That doesn't matter. I shouldn't be surprised if he isn't still knocking about the district. He hasn't gone home, because I happen to know that the Head wired to his people, and got a reply saying nothing had been seen of him. Are you fellows game to form a search-party? Those cheeky Remove fags have been fooling around, but, of course, they've drawn blank. It's up to us to see this thing through."

Potter and Greene nodded their heads by way of assent. It was as well to humour Coker, who got dangerous when others failed to see eye to eye with him.

"To begin at the beginning," said Coker. "Wingate was last seen in the railway-carriage. His disappearance dates from the time the train stopped."

"Don't you think it likely that he might have gone on in the train?" asked Greene.

"No. They 'phoned down the line today, to find out if a chap answering to Wingate's description got off the train at any of the stations; and the reply was in the negative."

"Well?"

"That leads me to think that Wingate bolted directly he got out at Friardale. It was dark, and everything was in his favour. I'll bet my bottom dollar that was how the game started! He's probably hiding in the woods, or somewhere, now, waiting till the hue and cry's over; then he means to get clear away."

"What d'you intend to do about it, old man?" asked Potter.

"Do? Why, go along to the station now, and see if we can discover any tracks!"

"Footprints, d'you mean?"

"Certainly!"

Potter grinned.

"Why, there'll be hundreds there by this time!" he said. "We're starting too late in the day, Horace."

"Don't you believe it! Come along with me, and if we don't make some startling discoveries before the day's out, I'm a Dutchman!"

So Potter and Greene, as in duty bound, put on their caps and coats and accompanied their leader to the station.

They were certainly not long in finding footprints. Scores of them were visible outside the station entrance.

But Coker didn't despair, as many amateur detectives might have done. His eye alighted on a pair of footmarks of abnormal size, and he gave a shout.

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"Ten to one these are Wingate's!" he exclaimed.

"Ten million to one they're not!" murmured Greene, under his breath.

"What did you say?" demanded Coker suspiciously.

"I said you were getting hot, old man," explained Greene. "Going to follow these marks up?"

"Rather!"

The Fifth-Formers found little difficulty in doing this. The footprints were quite recent, and after a time they became detached from the others, and broke away by themselves, leading along the little-used road towards Wapshot.

"Aha!" said Coker, in great glee. "There's something doing this journey."

"I—I say!" stammered Potter.

"You're not going to follow this trail all the way, are you? It'll be dark soon."

"What odds is that? I don't care if we're out till midnight, so long as we achieve our object."

But Potter and Greene cared, though they hadn't the pluck to say so. The idea of tramping the lonely country lanes for an indefinite period didn't appeal to them in the least.

After a time the footprints left the road and continued past a stile and through several fields. There was no mistaking them, on account of their size.

Coker began to get very excited. He declared that they were hot upon the scent, and that bloodhounds weren't in it. But his two chums merely snorted. They were beginning to feel tired and leg-weary, and were getting fed up almost to the verge of rebellion.

"How much farther?" groaned Potter, at length.

"It all depends," said Coker. "The footprints might end a dozen yards further on; on the other hand, they might go on for a few more miles!"

"Mercy!" groaned Greene.

"We shall keep on keeping on till we do get to the end, anyway," said Coker.

Potter and Greene peered dismally at each other through the gloom, and trudged on.

"What a sell if these aren't Wingate's footprints after all!" said Greene. "Might be some farm labourer's, for all we know."

"If that's the case, we'll wade in and slaughter Coker!" muttered Potter, in a fierce undertone.

Presently Coker gave a wild whoop of delight. The trail had stopped suddenly at the entrance to a small shepherd's hut.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Coker joyfully. "The game was well worth while. Listen! Can't you hear somebody moving about inside this shanty? It's Wingate, you can bet your life! I dare say he'll show fight; but we're three to one, so he won't give us much trouble. Are you ready?"

"Ye-e-es," said Greene, with chattering teeth.

"All serene, then. Rush in and collar him!"

At that precise moment a figure emerged from the hut. With one accord the Fifth-Formers sprang upon it like tigers.

There was a gurgling cry of surprise from the victim, followed by a heavy bump, as he alighted on the frost-covered turf with his three assailants sprawling on top of him.

"Hurrah!" roared Coker, in an ecstasy. "Captured at last! The game's up, Wingate, old man. Are you coming quietly, or must we take you back to Greyfriars by force?"

The reply was as staggering as it was unexpected.

"You—you insolent young rascals!

Release me at once! You shall be made to suffer severely for this outrage!"

Coker and his companions exchanged sickly looks in the darkness.

For the individual they had captured was Mr. Prout!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Three Candidates—And Coker!

"PROUT!" gasped Greene, in dismay.

"Carry me home to die!" moaned Potter.

The three Fifth-Formers sprang away from their Form-master as if he were red-hot.

Mr. Prout picked himself up slowly, for he had sustained a good many bruises. There was fury in his face as he spun round and confronted his recent assailants.

"Am I to understand," he exclaimed harshly, "that this is your idea of a joke? If so, it is the last joke you shall ever have of playing upon me! I shall demand your instant expulsion from Greyfriars!"

Coker hastened to explain.

"We're very sorry, sir," he blurted out. "Awfully, fearfully sorry! We thought you were Wingate, sir."

"Imbecile!" rapped out Mr. Prout.

"We're dead keen on finding Wingate, you see, sir," explained Potter, "and we followed up a trail which we thought was his."

Mr. Prout snorted.

"I have never been so grossly affronted in my life!" he thundered. "I set out for a walk to Wapshot, and pause at a hut in order to light my pipe, when three of my own pupils—my own pupils, I say—set upon me in this barbarous and bare-faced manner!"

"But we—we're pointing out to you that it was a ghastly mistake, sir!" said Greene.

"You have certainly made such an explanation," said Mr. Prout acidly. "Otherwise, things would go hard with you. Fortunately for yourselves, you have to deal with a man who can make full allowance for your lunacy. The three of you will be confined to the school premises for a week, and in addition will write me out five hundred lines! Now go, and do not dare to molest me again!"

Coker & Co. were glad to get away. They turned and bolted into the gloom before Mr. Prout had time to change his mind on the subject of their punishment. On the whole, they had got off very lightly.

When the retreating footsteps of Mr. Prout had died away, Potter and Greene suddenly stopped short, and turned upon their chief.

They were no longer in a mood to stand Coker. He had taken them on a fool's errand, which had ended in disaster; and he must suffer.

"Bump the madman!" rapped out Potter.

And Greene jumped at the command.

"Here, leggo! Wharrer you idiots up to?" panted Coker.

But Potter and Greene, unheeding, went about their task. Coker struggled and roared and kicked, but his two cronies were more than a match for him, and he descended on the hard, cold turf with a bump which shook every bone in his body.

"Yareooooop!"

"Give him another!" gasped Greene. "It'll get our circulation going. I'm half frozen!"

Again, and yet again, the great Horace rose and fell. He didn't like it, but he had to lump it. Potter and Greene were in no mood for half measures.

"Now we'll go on without him," said Potter. "Let him sort himself out as best he can. I'm fed up with the prize idiot!"

"Same here!" said Greene.

And, leaving Coker giddily hugging the ground, Potter and Greene started on the long tramp back to Greyfriars.

An hour later, just before locking-up, they staggered in at the gates, and were greeted with much merriment by Harry Wharton & Co.

"Found Wingate, you fellows?" asked Nugent.

Potter gave a glare.

"No!"

"Had any luck at all?"

"No!"

"Thought as much. What have you done with Coker?"

"Left him in little pieces somewhere near Wapshot!" growled Greene. "He let us on a wild-goose chase, confound him!"

"Rough luck!" said Harry Wharton. "I should chuck the game, if I were you. Some fellows were never meant to be miniature editions of Sexton Blake."

Potter and Greene passed on, scowling.

As for the Removites, they didn't wait for Coker to come in, not wishing to hit him when he was down. Instead, they passed into the hall, where a newly-written announcement on the notice-board greeted their gaze. Already there was a swarm of fellows trying to peruse it.

"NOTICE!"

"As no news has come to light respecting George Wingate, captain of Greyfriars, an election will be held on Wednesday next for the purpose of appointing a new captain. Candidates must submit their names to me during to-morrow.

"It is to be understood clearly that every boy in the school has a right to vote.

(Signed) H. H. LOCKE,
"Headmaster."

The announcement caused little surprise. It was obvious that, sooner or later, Greyfriars must have a captain. It could not go on without one indefinitely.

Twenty-four hours later another notice appeared, side by side with the original. It ran thus:

"The following seniors have handed in their names as candidates for the post created by Wingate's absence:

"GERALD LODER.
ARTHUR COURTNEY.
JAMES WALKER,
HORACE COKER."

The notice was signed by the Head, and created a great deal of comment.

"Coker!" almost sobbed Bob Cherry. "Coker—captain of Greyfriars!"

"Well, he's been skipper before," laughed Harry Wharton.

"And he had a short innings and a gay one," chimed in Nugent. "I should have thought his experience then would have been a lesson to him."

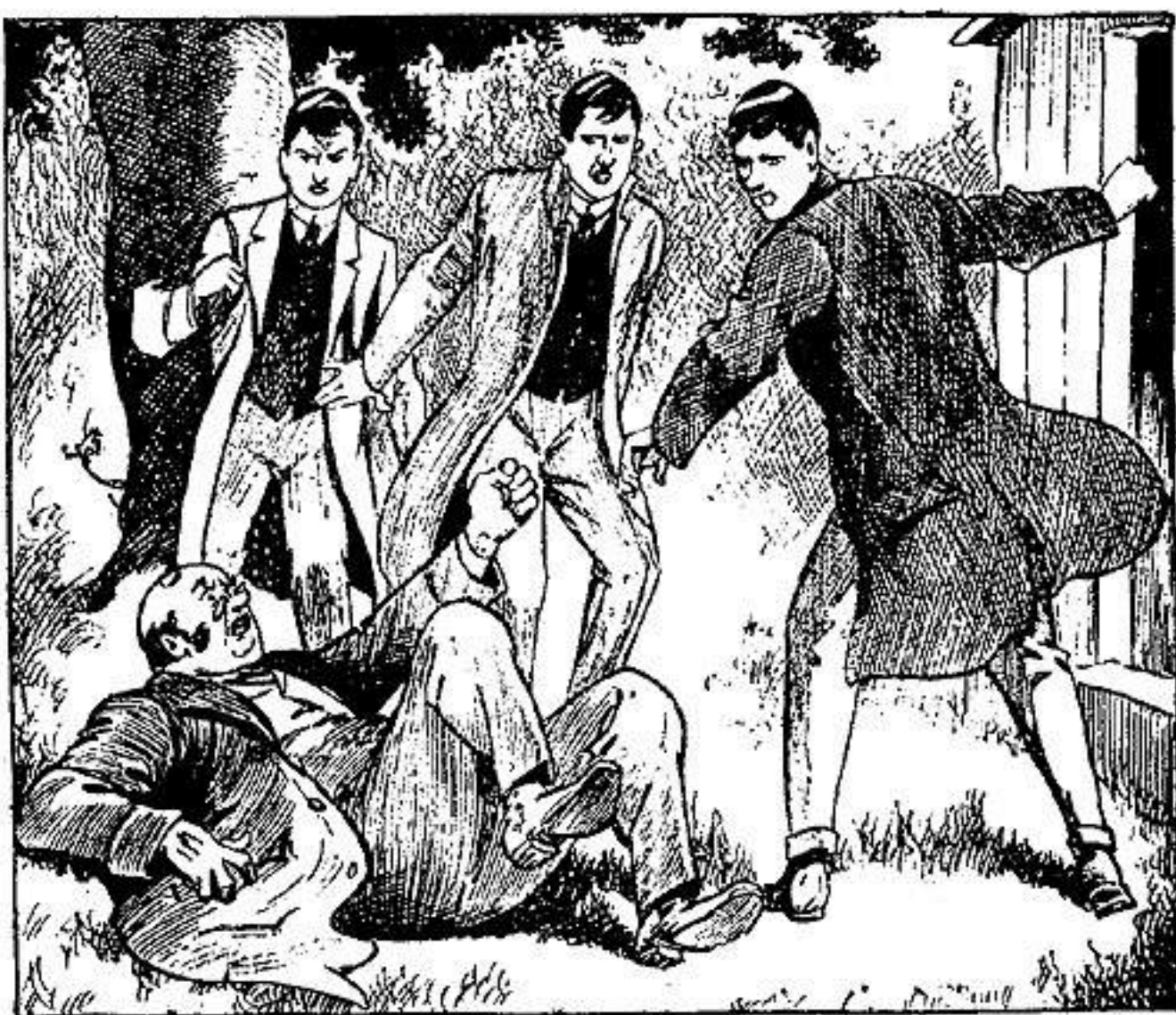
"Who's our man?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Courtney, of course!" said Johnny Bull. "I'd as soon be blown up by a bomb as vote for Loder! And Walker's hardly the sort of chap to hold the reins. Make it Courtney, kids!"

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry heartily. "We'll get him in by a thumping majority!"

On that point the Famous Five and their immediate chums were unanimously agreed.

Wingate was gone, and all efforts to trace him had failed. It was therefore



It was Mr. Prout! (See Chapter 3.)

up to them to line up for the next best man; and of the candidates whose names were up for election none could fill the breach so well as popular Arthur Courtney.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

No Luck for Loder!

GREYFRIARS was swept from end to end by a wave of wild excitement.

From the biggest fellow in the Sixth down to the tiniest fag in the First the election fever was rife.

At first sight it seemed that Courtney possessed the rosier chances of filling the vacant place. Courtney was a popular, go-ahead fellow, who, although brilliant, never put on side. It was thought by some that he would carry everything before him.

But this was very far from being the case. Loder of the Sixth lost no time in getting his wits to work, and in plotting and planning to bring about the desired end.

To begin with, he had a backing of his own. The black sheep of the Sixth would vote for him to a man if only Walker could be got out of the way.

Loder gritted his teeth with vexation. What did Walker want to barge in for at a time like this? By doing so he was only splitting the vote and jeopardising Loder's chances.

Besides, Walker had no more prospect of becoming captain of Greyfriars than the Kaiser had of attaining a place in the sun.

"But I'll soon talk him round," reflected Loder. "Once I can persuade him to stand down it'll put fresh power to my elbow. I shall fairly romp home."

And Loder lounged along to Walker's study.

The rival candidate was seated in the armchair examining a pair of football-boots. He looked up as Loder entered, and his greeting was none too pleasant.

"Well?" he said brusquely.

Loder took his stand in front of the blazing fire.

"About this captaincy affair—" he began.

"Well?" rapped out Walker again.

Loder shuffled from one foot to the other. This was not a very promising opening.

A change had come over James Walker. Loder had expected him to be pally, and even to produce a cigarette-case for the benefit of his visitor; instead of which Walker was behaving like a bear with a sore head.

"Ahem!" murmured Loder. "I came along to ask you a favour, old man. You won't refuse it, I know, because we've been such jolly good pals in the past."

Walker grunted.

"I see that you've sent in your name for election," Loder went on. "Of course, you're only joking?"

"On the contrary," said Walker grimly, "I'm in sober earnest!"

"But you haven't a dog's chance!"

"We'll see."

Loder was silent for some time. This sudden change of front on Walker's part was most discouraging.

"Don't you see," said Loder at length, "that we shall only hinder each other's chances by both taking a hand in this bizney? It'll leave Courtney a clear field!"

"That may or may not be the case" said Walker, lacing up the football-boots. "All I know is, I'm going to see this thing through. I didn't give in my name for the mere fun of the thing!"

"Oh, you're potty!" said Loder, in exasperation. "I can't make you out, Walker. Why don't you stand by the old firm?"

Walker laughed harshly.

"I might as well ask you why the dickens you don't stand down, to give me a better chance?" he said. "No, my beauty! I can see what your little game is, and it won't wash!"

"You want that prig Courtney to become skipper?" said Loder savagely.

"No; but I'd sooner see him ruling the roost than you! That's straight from the shoulder!"

It was a good deal too straight for Loder's liking. He turned fiercely upon his one-time friend.

"So you choose to cross swords with me?" he exclaimed. "Well, go ahead! But let me tell you that you've woke up the wrong passenger!"

"Threats don't hurt me!" was the reply. "They're like water on a duck's back! Run away, now, and play marbles. I'm busy!"

"You rotten hound——"

"Here, steady on!" said Walker, leaping to his feet. "There's a limit to all things, you know, and you'll step past it in a minute!"

But Loder, reckless and furious, didn't stop to mince his words.

"It's like your cheek, barging in like this!" he said. "I s'pose you'll go round bribing fellows to vote for you?"

"Oh, you suppose that, do you? Then take that one!"

Loder took it. It was a swinging blow in the chest, which sent him sprawling into the fireplace. He grovelled about among the embers for a few minutes, breathing out vindictive fury.

"You—you dare to land out at me!" he panted.

"Certainly!" said Walker. "I'm simply spoiling for a scrap, after what you said. Come on! We'll have it out here, or in the gym, whichever you prefer!"

But although Walker was spoiling for a scrap, Loder wasn't, and he didn't like the look on his rival's face at that moment.

Slowly he picked himself up, and slunk to the door.

"Funk!" said Walker scornfully. "A fine sort of skipper you'd make—I don't think! You haven't the pluck of a mouse!"

For an instant Loder paused in the doorway, clenching and unclenching his hands, and apparently trying to make up his mind whether to tackle Walker or not.

But prudence prevailed. The prospect of a candidate for election going about the school with a pair of black eyes or a swollen lip was too awful.

"I'm not going to lower myself to the level of a quarrelsome fag just to please you!" he said. "But look here, Walker! We haven't come to the end of this affair yet—not by long chalks!"

"Bow-wow!"

"I'll make you sit up for what you did just now—you see if I don't! There are other ways of fighting besides with fists!"

"Yes, in the dark!" said Walker contemptuously. "That's your way! But you can take it from me that if I happen to catch you at one of your shady games I sha'n't spare you!"

And Walker, striding to the door, slammed it in Loder's face.

Wingate's sudden and mysterious departure from Greyfriars had caused two of the firmest friends there to become two of the fiercest foes!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

At Daggers Drawn!

"**W**HITHER bound?" Potter and Greene asked that question of the great Coker, whom they encountered striding across the Close.

Coker chuckled.

"I'm going to buy up the tuckshop—lock, stock, and barrel!" he explained.

"W-w-what!"

"P'r'aps I'm exaggerating a little bit. I'm going to blue a fiver, anyway."

"Great Scott!"

"What's the little game?" asked Greene.

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"I'm standing a feed—a stunning, gilt-edged feed—to the members of my constituency," said Coker.

"Your what-er?"

"My vast and enthusiastic following," explained Coker loftily.

"Oh, my stars!" murmured Greene.

Then he nudged Potter, and grinned.

"This is where we come in!" his looks seemed to say.

"Prout's given me permission to use the Rag," Coker went on, "and we're going to do this thing in style. Coming along to give me a hand?"

"What-ho!" said Potter.

The trio proceeded to the tuckshop, and the orders which Coker gave made Mrs. Mimble gasp.

"Trot out the good things!" he said.

"Four dozen doughnuts, a dozen tins of pineapple, ditto of sardines, and as many cakes as you've got!"

Mrs. Mimble bustled about in great haste, and in a few moments the Fifth-Formers were loaded with provisions.

"That's the style!" chuckled Coker.

"Quick march!"

Coker & Co. caused a profound sensation as they staggered across the Close with their burdens.

"What's in the wind?" asked Bob Cherry.

"A feed!" said Coker.

"Hurrah!"

"But only the fellows who're going to vote for me are invited," added Coker cautiously.

"This is where we take our exit, then," said Johnny Bull. "I wouldn't vote for you, Coker, old man, if all the kingdoms of the world were thrown at my feet!"

But there were others who didn't share Johnny Bull's views.

Skinner and Bolsover, Snoop and Stott, and many more, were quick to take advantage of the situation.

Skinner & Co. had elastic consciences. They hadn't the remotest intention of voting for Coker, really, but they were by no means averse from having a stunning feed at the Fifth-Former's expense.

"You're a sport, Coker, old fellow!" said Bolsover major. "We'll come along, with pleasure."

"Good! I'll see that you have the time of your lives!"

Willing hands relieved Coker & Co. of their packages, and a general movement was made to the Rag.

Billy Bunter encountered the procession as it came along the passage. His little round eyes sparkled behind his spectacles.

"I—I say, Coker, old chum!" he said. "I hope you wipe up the ground with the rest of the candidates, you know!"

"That's very kind of you," said Coker.

"Not at all. Can I come along and give you a hand with the feed?"

"No, you jolly well can't!"

Billy Bunter pushed out his chest majestically.

"Oh, very well!" he said. "On second thoughts, after weighing the matter most carefully in my mind, I have decided to vote for Loder!"

"What!" roared Coker. "Look here, you fat fraud——"

"My mind's made up," said Bunter, moving off down the passage.

"Come back! Come back, I tell you——"

Coker got so excited that a pot of black-currant jam slipped from his grasp, looped the loop in the air, and alighted with a splintering crash on the floor of the passage.

"Well?" said Bunter, surveying Coker with a cool stare.

"You can come and make a beast of yourself, you fat cormorant!"

"Your invitation is declined," said

Bunter with dignity. "If you really want the honour of my company, you must ask me in the proper manner!"

Coker muttered something under his breath, which it was as well Bunter didn't hear.

"W-will you k-kindly favour us with the p-p-pleasure of your society?" he stammered, at length.

"I shall be-most pleased," said Bunter solemnly. And he accompanied the rest of the feasters into the Rag.

It was no common or garden spread that Coker, Potter, and Greene set about preparing. The good things increased every minute, and so did the crowd.

Within a very short space of time the Rag was packed with fellows from every Form who had elastic consciences and clamorous appetites.

Billy Bunter defied the conventions by setting to work before the feast was laid out on the snowy tablecloth.

"This is prime!" he murmured, sampling a sausage-roll and groping for a bottle of ginger-beer at the same time. "Vote for Coker!"

"Rather!"

"Here's health to Horace!"

The feed was soon in full swing, and the continuous clashing of knives and forks made merry music.

Coker himself sat at the head of the table—monarch of all he surveyed. It was a proud moment for him, as he sat and gazed at his vast army of retainers. Some would be sure to vote for him, he knew; and the rest he hoped to win over by means of a happy little speech at the conclusion of the festivities, when they were certain to be in a good humour.

"I'm going great guns!" murmured the founder of the feast to Potter, who sat at his right hand. "This captaincy affair's a pure walk-over for me. Loder and the other two haven't an earthly!"

It certainly seemed as if Coker had good grounds for his assertion. There were fifty fellows present in the Rag, if there was one; and fifty votes in a lump! It made Coker feel quite giddy.

Skinner & Co. piled in with alacrity. They were always in their element when getting something for nothing; and even Billy Bunter had a good many rivals in the eating line that afternoon.

But when the solids had been disposed of, and it was time for the blanc-mange and custard to appear, the feasters began to be suddenly restive. Coker noticed their attitude with growing alarm.

"Better make your giddy speech now, old man, and pile it on thick!" said Potter.

Coker nodded. He rose to his feet, and cleared his throat.

"Ahem! I wish to draw the attention of you fellows to the fact that on Wednesday next the election——"

The orator broke off with a gasp of dismay, as everybody suddenly leapt up from the table and formed up in a solid column in the gangway of the Rag.

"As I was saying——" blurted out Coker.

"Quick, march!"

The order came from Skinner, and was promptly obeyed. With grinning faces the feasters tramped out of the Rag.

"Here, hold on!" roared Coker, beginning to smell a rat. "Where are you all going?"

"To the senior Common-room," said Skinner sweetly.

"What for?"

"Another feed."

"Mum-mum-my hat!"

"Loder's standing a spread as well, you see," explained Bolsover major. "We don't object to two sittings."

"But—but why is Loder standing a feed?"

"Because," said Stott coolly, "we're going to vote for him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker nearly collapsed. He gripped the edge of the table for support, and blinked in mute amazement at the disappearing members of his constituency—disappearing in more senses than one.

"Buck up, old man!" said Greene hoarsely. "Can't you see what's happened? They've had you on toast! The little beasts have stuffed themselves, and didn't intend to vote for you at all!"

For a full minute Coker stood like a statue, unable to move or speak. Then he suddenly regained the power of action, and rushed off in a towering rage to the senior Common-room.

Another feed, almost as bounteous as Coker's, had been temptingly set out on the tables; and Skinner & Co., who had indulged in light meals that day in order to save their powers for the great occasion, were already going strong.

Loder, at the head of the table sat and beamed at them, almost purring with pleasure.

Coker gazed at the festivities like a fellow in a dream. Then he strode forward like an infuriated beast of prey.

"What d'you mean by it, you young rotters?" he roared. "Come out of it at once!"

"Not this evening," said Skinner pleasantly. "Go and eat coke!"

Coker looked as if he would sooner have eaten Skinner. He danced about like a cat on hot bricks.

"Here, stow it!" said Loder. "We're reserving the waltzes till last!"

"You—you cad!" panted Coker. "Prefect or no prefect, I'll jolly well make shavings of you!"

And Coker would probably have put his words into effect had not Loder rapped out a sudden order.

"Pitch him out on his neck!" he said tersely.

A dozen juniors rose to do the prefect's bidding. They hustled the great Coker toward the exit, and he finished up on his back in the passage.

There was the sound of a key being turned in the lock, and Coker was powerless to get to grips with the fellows who had fooled him. They were well under way with their second feed, and a closed, forbidding door stood between.

And as he stared at it it dawned upon Coker that he had not shown up to advantage, so far, in his bid for the captaincy. In short, he had made a fool of himself!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Cut of the Running!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were not the sort of fellows to let the grass grow under their feet.

They were backing up Arthur Courtney with might and main, and lost no time in bringing out a Special Election Number of "The Greyfriars Herald," in which they sang freely the praises of Courtney, and gave the other candidates a good many unflattering criticisms.

The special number made its appearance two days before the election was due to take place. It was a most opportune time for the Famous Five and their followers to drive home their views.

Dick Penfold's opening poem, if not brilliant, was very effective. As Fisher T. Fish would say, it "got there."

"If you wish to do the right—

Vote for Courtney!

If for freedom you would fight—

Vote for Courtney!

He's the fellow who can stick it,

Always dead upon the wicket,

Scorning all that isn't cricket—

Vote for Courtney!"

"I never read such a lot of piffle in my life!" declared Coker, as he pored over the page with Potter and Greene. "Some fellows can't write poetry for toffee! They fall at the first hurdle. Now, if I chose to write some verses— Here! What are you fellows sniggering at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter and Greene.

They had endeavoured to stifle their laughter with their handkerchiefs, but without avail.

"Oh, it's too funny for words!" gurgled Greene.

"What is?" demanded Coker wrathfully.

"The next verse!"

And Coker, glancing down the page, was greeted with the following:

"If you wish to play the fool—

Vote for Coker!

If you wish to smash the school—

Vote for Coker!

If you'd shake our sure foundation,

Vote for him with acclamation;

Silliest ass in all creation—

Horace Coker!"

"M-m-my hat!" stuttered Coker. "This—this is libel! I'll have the law on those cheeky bounders!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the joke, you laughing hyenas?"

"The frontispiece!" gasped Coker.

"Oh, it's altogether too rich!"

The feature in question was a cartoon of Coker. The comical expression on his face and the extraordinary size of his Charlie Chaplin feet would have made a cat laugh. And underneath was written, in the amended style of spelling popularised by Coker himself:

"ORRIS COKER—KAPTIN OF GREYFRIARS!"

The mighty Horace nearly went mad. Charging Potter and Greene out of his path, he fairly flew along the passage in quest of the comic artist who had dared to take his name in vain.

A number of seniors, clad in football garb, were approaching from the opposite direction, and Coker bumped into them with a report like a Zeppelin bomb.

"Out of the way, you clumsy idiot!" growled Valence, digging Coker in the ribs with his foot as the hapless Fifth-Former sprawled upon the floor.

"Wipe your feet well!" grinned Walker. "Coker—the famous doormat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker sprang to his feet, livid with fury. He forgot all about the cartoon in "The Greyfriars Herald" in the face of this fresh grievance.

"Where are you fellows going?" he said angrily.

"To play the Royal Halberdiers on Big Side, of course," said Courtney.

"W-w-without me?" stuttered Coker.

"I should jolly well say so! Personally, I wouldn't be found dead in a team which included such a blithering idiot as you!"

Coker gave the speaker the glare of a basilisk.

"This is the limit!" he shouted. "Do you know what you're doing? You're leaving out the future captain of Greyfriars!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you—!" hooted Coker.

But the next instant he was fairly flattened against the wall of the passage. The seniors were anxious to get down to the match, and had no time to waste on hearing Coker expound his views.

The gallant men of the Halberdiers, who had come over from Wapshot, were a fine-looking set of footballers. They

looked as if they had been taught to kick goals from the cradle.

"We're one short," explained their skipper to Courtney. "Our inside-right has just been summoned away with an overseas draft."

Loder thrust his way forward.

"All serene!" he said. "We'll lend you a substitute. Walker can play on your side."

"I'm taking my orders from Courtney," said Walker grimly.

Loder clenched his hands, and looked inclined to let himself go, but he mastered himself in time, and turned to Courtney.

"That will be all right, won't it?" he said.

"Yes," said Courtney. "If Walker has no objection, that is."

"Not the slightest," answered Walker. "The only thing I object to is being ordered about by upstarts like Loder, who seems to imagine he's Lord High Everything!"

So it was arranged that Walker should join the ranks of the Halberdiers, and another fellow was brought into the Greyfriars team in his place.

Hoskins of the Shell was referee. He blew his whistle, and the game began.

Fresh from their recent rout of the St. Jim's stalwarts, Greyfriars opened strongly, despite the absence of their star player, Wingate. It was well for the military team that their defence seldom wavered, or they would have found themselves several goals in arrear before the game was twenty minutes old.

"Play up, Friars!" came in a ringing cry from the touch-line. "Put it across 'em!"

The home side responded nobly. They attacked again and again, and just before the interval their perseverance met with its reward in the shape of a ripping goal from Courtney.

The teams changed ends with the Friars leading by a goal to nothing.

"There's only one weak link in the chain," said Bob Cherry, "and that's Loder! He's putting up a putrid game."

"Deliberately, if you ask me!" growled Johnny Bull. "If I were Courtney I'd jolly well kick him off the field!"

Walker, on the other hand, had shown up splendidly. Though playing for the opposition, he had done his level best; and several members of the crowd, who hadn't given Walker a thought with regard to the forthcoming election, now began to seriously consider the advisability of voting for him. Walker played fast-and-loose pretty freely in the Sixth, but on certain occasions he proved himself thoroughly true blue, and this was one of them.

The Halberdiers started off with great dash in the second half. To be a goal to the bad didn't suit their book at all. They piled in like Trojans, and Walker, snapping up a smart pass from his centre forward, raced through and scored.

"Goal!"

"Good old Walker!"

"He's playing the game of his life!" declared Bob Cherry. "Just look at Loder. He's scowling like the very dickens!"

As a matter of fact, Loder didn't like the turn events were taking. Walker was getting the plaudits of the crowd, and for him—Loder—there was nothing but condemnation.

"We'll soon see who's top dog!" muttered the black sheep of the Sixth, as the ball was placed in the centre once more.

And then an incident occurred which placed a lasting blot upon Loder's reputation. Luckily for the rascally prefect, only a few fellows were aware of what actually took place.

Walker, flushed and delighted with his recent success, had the ball at his toes, and was speeding down the field like a deer. He feinted cleverly past Valence and Carne, and Loder loomed up to intercept him.

Walker dashed fearlessly on, but the next instant a startled gasp went up from the crowd as they saw him reel, and fall in a limp, huddled heap on the turf.

What had happened?

Only Courtney and a few of his comrades knew. Loder had been guilty of a dastardly action. He had fouled his man. More than that, he had caused him a grave injury.

Instantly the game was suspended, and some of the soldiers, skilled in Red Cross work, hastened to the scene of the calamity.

"He's badly broken up," was the verdict of one of them.

"What do you mean?" rapped out Courtney, his face very white.

"He's put his knee out—or, rather, his knee has been put out for him."

Then Courtney turned to Loder with an expression on his face which made the cad of the Sixth tremble.

"Get off the field!" said Courtney savagely. "I give you one minute! After that I sha'n't be answerable for my actions!"

Loder took the hint. He turned and slunk away; and it was indeed fortunate for him that the vast majority of the fellows were ignorant of his offence. They concluded that he had been hurt in his collision with Walker, and was retiring from the game on that account.

Walker had fainted. Tenderly his schoolfellows lifted him up, and bore him away in silence to the sanatorium.

They returned some minutes later, and got on with the game; but both sides had lost their enthusiasm, and the match fizzled out in a draw of one goal each.

Later on that evening Loder read the news that he had longed for, and which his cowardly scheming had brought about.

The following announcement appeared on the notice-board in the Hall, in the Head's handwriting:

"James Walker, having been badly hurt as the result of a football accident, is confined to the sanatorium, and will be unable to resume his place in the Sixth Form for an indefinite period.

"In these circumstances I am reluctantly compelled to delete Walker's name from the list of candidates for election to the captaincy; and the issue now rests among Arthur Courtney, Gerald Loder, and Horace Coker."

"Oh, I say! What a beastly shame!" was Harry Wharton's indignant comment.

"Can't be helped, though," said Frank Nugent. "Walker won't be fit for a long time, and Greyfriars must have a skipper pretty soon, or it'll go to rack and ruin."

"I believe Loder had more to do with this than we knew," said Johnny Bull, in his deliberate way.

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry. "We'll give the brute three groans, just to ease our feelings!"

And the groans were given with right good will. They echoed along the Sixth Form corridor; but Gerald Loder, who knew well for whom they were intended, felt too sick to stride out of his study with a cane.

Even Loder had his moments of remorse; and it was doubtful if at any time of his school career he felt such a rank outsider as he did that evening.

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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Lie Direct!

COURTNEY of the Sixth was in a temper.

It was not often that the fellow who had been Wingate's best and truest chum let the sun go down upon his wrath; but on this occasion he was fairly savage.

Courtney bore no great affection for Walker, yet he considered that the latter had been cruelly outraged.

Although the majority of the Greyfriars fellows were in blissful ignorance of what had taken place on the football-field, Courtney had seen the foul, and it was only by a mighty effort of self-control that he had refrained from hurling himself upon Loder there and then.

For the sake of avoiding a scene, Courtney had kept himself in check; but now—now that he saw that Walker was barred from the election—his fingers itched to get at Loder, whose conduct had been utterly blackguardly.

Courtney ate no tea; he didn't feel up to it.

First Wingate had left him, and there was no clue as to the former captain's whereabouts; and now there was foul play by a fellow who wished to step into Wingate's shoes.

"It's putrid!" muttered Courtney, rising to his feet and pacing up and down his study. "Loder's a cad of the first



water! I simply must go and tell him to his face what an outsider he is. I can't stand by with folded arms while shady tricks of this sort are going on!"

And Courtney, fuming and furious, marched off to Loder's study, which he entered without knocking.

Loder, who had been reclining in the armchair, a cigarette between his lips, jumped up briskly as the intruder came in. He had not forgotten the time when Walker had bearded him in his den, and had hit out straight from the shoulder.

"What d'you want?" he growled surlily.

"You!" rapped out Courtney.

"Well, here I am. Say what you've got to say, and get out! I've been disturbed quite enough this evening. Come to cry off for the captaincy?"

Courtney set his lips grimly.

"Far from it, Loder," he said. "I wouldn't leave you with a clear field for worlds! You know what this means, as well as I do. It's a fight—war to the knife, if you like—between you and me. Walker's been knocked out by a blackguardly trick, and Coker doesn't count."

"Blackguardly trick!" echoed Loder, his eyes glinting. "Be careful what you say, Courtney!"

"Careful be hanged! This isn't a time for kid gloves. While we're on the subject, I may say that I've never seen anything more caddish and cowardly in my life than the way you bowled poor old Walker over this afternoon!"

"Are you trying to pose as a champion of the injured?" sneered Loder. "It's very heroic and dramatic, and all that, but it cuts no ice with me. Just because Walker happened to come a cropper accidentally—"

"That's a lie!"

Courtney was thoroughly roused now. He strode forward with an expression on his face which made Loder see red.

"You fouled him deliberately!" he exclaimed. "In fact, it was planned out from the very beginning, when you insisted on Walker playing for the Ilalberdiers! Don't attempt to deny it, you cad!"

Loder looked daggers at his visitor.

"So this is what you've come along for?" he muttered. "To taunt me to my face, and bring rotten accusations against me?"

"My chief reason for coming along," said Courtney, his voice becoming more steady, "was to give you the licking of your life!"

"What?"

"You've been asking for a thundering good hiding for a long time, and now you're going to get one!"

So saying, Courtney took off his coat.

It was an open challenge, and Loder had no recourse but to accept it. If he declined, Courtney would carry out his intention just the same.

Slowly and reluctantly Loder divested himself of his coat also.

Then, amid a tense silence, these two who had hated each other long and bitterly, stood face to face in the study.

"Are you ready?" muttered Courtney.

Loder sailed in without replying. He shot out his right, and the blow, had not Courtney been on the alert for it, would certainly have done a good deal of damage.

As it was, Courtney warded off the fierce attack, and set to work on his own account.

Round and round the room the seniors rushed, sweeping all things out of their path. It was certainly an unusual scene for a pair of prefects to be pommeling each other unmercifully; but Greyfriars was passing through stormy times, and it was necessary to clear the air.

Bang, bang, bang!

A thunderous knocking sounded at the door, which Loder had wisely locked.

"What's going on?" boomed Bob Cherry's voice through the keyhole.

"Faith, an' Loder's bein' wiped off the earth, entirely!" said Micky Desmond.

"Go away, you kids!" roared Loder. "You don't want to bring a crowd of masters here, do you? I'm licking Courtney!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The boot's on the other foot, I'm thinking!" laughed Harry Wharton.

Heedless of the clamorous cries without, Courtney and Loder closed in once more, and the fighting grew fierce and furious. To do Loder justice, he stood his ground well. Courtney had received several nasty jabs in the ribs, and was blinking uncertainly out of his right eye.

But the game was his. Physical fitness is generally a match for anything, and so it was in Courtney's case. He came on again and again, and put plenty of ginger into his blows.

Loder reeled before a smashing left-hander, and ere he could recover Courtney hit out again, straight and true.

The blow—an uppercut—took Loder on the point of the jaw. He was lifted clean off his feet, and fell like a log. And as he fell his head cannoned against the fender, and he lay dazed with the shock.

For an instant Courtney stood looking down on his fallen adversary.

"I'm sorry!" he said bluntly. "I didn't know you'd knock yourself about like that!"

Loder staggered to his feet. An ominous red mark was beginning to form on his temple.

"You did this!" he said fiercely.

"What do you mean?"

The colour faded from Courtney's face.

"I mean this!" hissed Loder. "I shall let the fellows understand that this injury"—he raised his hand to his temple—"was your doing!"

"Oh, you rotter!"

Loder lurched to the door, unlocked it, and threw it open. The next instant a crowd of Removites swarmed into the study.

"Gee-whizz!" gasped Bob Cherry. "What have you been doing to your face, Loder?"

"It's a nasty gash, by Jove!" said Peter Todd.

Loder pointed an accusing finger at his victor.

"That's the rotter who's responsible!" he said savagely. "We were scrapping, and I happened to trip up on the carpet. While I was on the floor he kicked me in the forehead. And that's the sort of beauty some of you intend voting for as captain of Greyfriars!"

"Shame!" cried somebody. "Call that playing the game, Courtney?"

"Rats!" interposed Harry Wharton. "This is a rotten lie of Loder's! I, for one, don't believe Courtney would do a thing like that!"

"Nor I!" growled Johnny Bull. "Loder ought to be boiled in oil!"

But there were others with whom Loder's statement carried a good deal of weight. There was the gash on Loder's temple. It spoke for itself. And if Courtney didn't inflict the injury, then who did?

Courtney himself was the next to speak.

"You kids can accept Loder's version of the affair or not, as you choose," he said. "I think most of you know me well enough to realise that I don't kick fellows when they're down!"

And Courtney pushed his way through the curious throng of Removites and quitted the study.

Once again on that eventful evening Loder was in clover, despite the fact that he had got the worst of his encounter with Courtney. Quite a number of fellows, believing his story of how he came by the gash on his forehead, suddenly swerved from their championship of Courtney, and resolved to vote for Loder instead. Not many of them were fellows of very high principles; but all was grist that came to Loder's mill; and, all things considered, the black sheep of the Sixth, as he crawled between the sheets at a late hour, had every reason to feel satisfied with the prospect which lay before him.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Beginning of the End!

"IS this 'ere Greyfriars?"

Billy Bunter, to whom the question was addressed, looked curiously at the speaker. He was a hefty, broad-shouldered fellow, clad in shabby clothes, and with a scarred face. Altogether, he was quite an unusual visitor for Greyfriars.

After summing up the intruder, Billy Bunter spoke.

"This is Greyfriars," he said, with dignity. "Did you think you'd stumbled across the Home for Incurables?"

"This 'ere's my destination," said the man. "Sorry I ain't brought me Ford car along wiv me; but times is bad, an'

the cost of petrol's gorn up somethin' awful. My name's Jolly—Ned Jolly—an' I've come to see Mr. Loder."

"Loder!" gasped Bunter. "Great Scott! You're not his uncle, by any chance?"

"No sich luck!" grinned the stranger. "Can you direct me to Mr. Loder's kennel?"

"With pleasure!" said Bunter. "You'll have to hop over the gates, though. Gossy's not likely to open 'em for a—ahem!—a funny-looking cove like you!"

"Funny-looking, am I?" roared Ned Jolly. "What's wrong wiv my face?"

"Oh, is that your face?" said Bunter, in surprise. "You astonish me! I thought you were wearing a mask."

"'Ere, none o' yer cheek!" exclaimed Ned, "or I'll flatten yer into a jelly!"

He took a short run, and in another instant had vaulted the high gates. It was an amazing acrobatic performance, and Billy Bunter looked on open-mouthed.

Bunter, and entered. He closed the door, but Bunter lingered outside. The Peeping Tom of Greyfriars didn't mean to miss any scraps of what was bound to be an interesting conversation.

Loder's visitor wasn't long in getting to the point, nor did he trouble to lower his voice.

"Nah, then, you lanky son of a gun, what abaht it?" Bunter heard him demand. "Five quid you owes me—me an' the others what got that mate o' yours outer the way!"

"Shush, you fool!" exclaimed Loder, in alarm. "You don't want all the school to hear you, do you?"

"I don't care who 'ears me! I wants my money!"

"And you shall have it. But don't think you can get it by blustering in here as if you own the earth!"

Ned Jolly calmed down somewhat.

"Keep yer 'air on, Mr. Loder!" he said. "Still, I do think it's a shame to keep us waitin' like this 'ere, arter all



Walker hits out! (See Chapter 5.)

"Nah, then!" said Mr. Jolly grimly. "No more foolin' abaht! Conduck me to Mr. Loder!"

Billy Bunter was only too pleased to obey. His curiosity was fully aroused, and he felt he would not be able to rest until he had divined the stranger's intentions. Men in shabby suits, who spoke the lingo of Limehouse with wonderful fluency, and vaulted hugo gates as coolly as if they were eating their breakfasts, were people to see and wonder at. And Billy Bunter meant to follow the trail to a finish.

"Where are you carting that prize pugilist, Bunt?" called Bob Cherry along the passage.

"Mind your own bizney!"

"Better not let Quelchy or the Head see you with such a swagger Society man, that's all!" warned Bob.

Bunter passed on, unheeding. Outside Loder's study he paused, and rapped on the door.

"Come in!" It was Loder's voice, harsh and imperative.

Ned Jolly winked solemnly at Billy

the fuss an' trouble we 'ad of gettin' that feller outer the way."

"Where is he?" asked Loder eagerly. And, just as eagerly, Billy Bunter strained his ears for the answer.

"E's in a blinkin' caravan at present," grinned Ned Jolly. "Livin' like a lord, 'e is, out on 'Ighdown 'Eath."

"Heavens! That's twenty miles away."

"Well, what's wrong wiv that? You don't think we'd 'ide 'im outside the gate-porter's lodge, do yer?"

"You're a deep bounder, Jolly," said Loder; and, by the crisp rustling of paper which followed, Billy Bunter knew he was counting out currency notes. "They've sent out search-parties all over the place, and drawn blank every time. That fake note which was dropped at the entrance to the caves gave 'em something to think about. They hugged the seashore nearly all the time, and it didn't seem to occur to 'em to go farther afield."

Perhaps Loder would not have been so joyful if he could have seen the Owl of the Remove stooping outside the door, drinking in every word that was said.

Bunter heard all he wanted to hear; then he rolled away down the passage, chuckling as he went.

"What a game!" he murmured. "So it was Loder who arranged for Wingate to be got out of the way! And he succeeded, too! Jolly and some more of the beasts must have been waiting outside Friardale Station that night, and collared old Wingate in the dark. And nobody knows—nobody, except Loder and me!"

Glorious visions uprose in the mind of Bill Bunter—visions of fine feeds in the tuckshop at Loder's expense. For, with the knowledge he had gained, Bunter told himself he would be able to blackmail the cad of the Sixth until further orders.

Gerald Loder saw his unwelcome guest off the premises with a sigh of relief. Then he strode back through the dusky Close, his eyes gleaming in anticipation of a great triumph.

For the election was close at hand now, and everything was in his favour.

Walker was in the sanatorium, Coker's backers could be reckoned up on the fingers of one hand, and Courtney had gone down in the estimation of a good many who would otherwise have gladly given him their vote.

No wonder Loder turned in that night with a happy smile, and with the feeling that he was nearing the goal of his selfish ambition.

But his day of reckoning was yet to dawn!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

An Adventure for Five!

ELECTION night at last!

All Greyfriars was stirred to a pitch of the wildest excitement.

The canvassers had exerted themselves to the utmost, and the only question now on the lips of everybody was, "Who would win?"

Although it was rather difficult to say who would, it was easy to conjecture that Coker wouldn't. Coker would have made an ideal captain—to his own way of thinking. Unfortunately, the majority of the fellows failed to see eye to eye with him in the matter. So Coker didn't count. His chances weren't worth a straw.

With Walker still in the sanatorium, the affair had resolved itself into a contest between Loder and Courtney; and the school seemed pretty evenly divided in its support of one or other of the two Sixth-Formers.

A couple of hours before the election was due to take place Billy Bunter ambled coolly into Loder's study. He possessed the feeling—not unknown to him—that he could go great guns in the gorging line, and deemed it a golden opportunity to squeeze some cash out of Loder, concerning whom he had heard such a sinister story.

"Get out, you fat toad!" barked Loder.

But Bunter stood his ground. He blinked reproachfully at the owner of the study.

"Oh, really, Loder! I know you've had a pretty rotten upbringing, but civility costs nothing, you know."

"W-w-what?"

Loder could scarcely believe his ears. He looked as if, but for Bunter's abnormal size, he would have eaten him.

As it was, he made a dive for his cane; but a fat hand was clapped upon

his arm, and he heard a chuckle behind him.

"Hang you!" roared Loder, spinning round. "What in thunder d'you mean by it?"

"I mean this," smirked Bunter. "If you dare to assault me in any way, I'll go straight to the Head and tell him —"

Loder caught his breath.

"Tell him what?"

"How nicely you planned and plotted for Wingate to be got out of the way, so that you could step into his shoes!"

For a moment Loder stood flabbergasted, unable to move or speak. Then he recalled the recent visit of Ned Jolly, and it dawned upon him that Bunter must have been eavesdropping.

Loder glared at the fat junior. His face was almost ghastly.

"How much do you know?" he rapped out. "Quick!"

Billy Bunter smiled serenely.

"I know everything," he said. "It's in my power to get you kicked out of Greyfriars this very minute. I guess the Head wouldn't stand on ceremony."

Loder clenched his hands hard. Dearly would he have loved to batter the fat junior's face as if it were a punching-ball.

But prudence prevailed. He must be decent to Bunter, or the latter's tongue would start wagging, and Loder would be swept to disaster.

"I suppose," he said, trying to keep his voice steady, "that you've come along in order to extort hush-money from me?"

"Oh, really, you know! Don't you think that's rather a brutal way of putting it?"

"It's true, anyway," said Loder.

"How much do you want?"

Billy Bunter seemed to weigh the question in his mind.

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "a couple of quid wouldn't be bad for a start."

"I don't suppose it would," said Loder grimly. "But you won't get it, all the same. Here's ten bob. Take it or leave it!"

Bunter took it. Ten shillings would help him to make a big inroad into the serried ranks of currant-buns which stood in tempting array on Mrs. Mimble's counter.

"See you again when I want more," he said. "So-long!"

"Here, steady on!" exclaimed Loder. "Let's understand each other. You've got to keep that rat-trap of yours closed, mind!"

"Of course!" said Bunter. "I sha'n't breathe a word to anybody!"

"If you do," said Loder darkly, "I'll jolly well brain you!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the study, and made tracks for the school tuckshop. The Famous Five were there, and Bunter grinned. Here was an opportunity of making himself look big.

"Trot out some buns, Mrs. Mimble!" he said loftily. "Some doughnuts, too—and as many jam-tarts as you like!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, swinging round at the sound of Bunter's voice. "Wherefore this sudden wealth, Bunter?"

The Owl of the Remove laid a currency note for ten shillings on the counter, with an air of vast importance.

"One of your titled relations turned up trumps?" asked Nugent.

"Rats!" growled Johnny Bull. "Bunter's up to his old game—been blackmailing somebody, I expect."

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"How did you come by that money, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton sternly.

"Aha!" chuckled Bunter. "Wouldn't you like to know!"

Harree Singh strode forward, and took one of Bunter's ears between his thumb and forefinger.

"Yow-ow-ow!" squealed Bunter, in alarm. "Leggo, you beastly nigger! I'll go and tell Loder!"

"So it was Loder?" said Bob Cherry. "I'm not surprised. He's given Bunter ten bob to keep his mouth shut about something—something shady, that won't bear the light!"

"Nothing of the sort!" howled Bunter.

"Rats! We all know what a born fibber you are. Just hand over your revolver, Johnny, will you?"

Johnny Bull fumbled with something in his inner pocket, and brought to light a weapon the sight of which made Billy Bunter shudder. It was a shining revolver, and Bob Cherry, taking instant possession, levelled it at Bunter's head.

"Mercy!" roared the Owl of the Remove, under the impression that his last hour was come. "Don't Cherry! Dud-dud-don't shoot! Yow-ow! It'll go right through my brain!"

"Not much fear of that," said Nugent. "Your brain was reported missing ages ago."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"See here!" said Bob Cherry, looking very grim. "We're going to get to the bottom of this right now, or the doorway will be blocked up by a dead Bunter! Answer my question straight away, and mind it's the truth, or I shall fire without hesitation!"

"Grooh!"

"Now, then. Why did Loder give you that ten bob?"

"To—to keep my mouth shut."

"Thought so. What are you supposed to be keeping mum about?"

"Wingate's whereabouts," groaned Billy Bunter.

"What!"

The Famous Five became suddenly electrified. The same thought flashed through the mind of each of them. A clue at last!

"Go on," said Bob Cherry, still levelling the revolver. "Tell us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!"

Quaking with terror, Billy Bunter made his confession. He admitted taking Ned Jolly to Loder's study, and hearing their conversation. He admitted, also, going to Loder afterwards with the object of blackmailing him.

Harry Wharton & Co. listened spell-bound.

"And where do you say Wingate is?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"In a caravan, on—on Highdown Heath," faltered Bunter.

"Ye gods! No wonder he hasn't been found! That's miles and miles away!"

"What a deep dodge of Loder's!" said Nugent. "You wouldn't think even a rotter like that would sink so low. What shall we do about it?"

"The election comes off at eight," said Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton turned to his comrades.

"There's only one thing for it," he said. "We must get on the track at once! There's more at stake than we dare to think of."

"All serene," said Bob Cherry. "Shall I shoot Bunter first?"

"Might as well."

"Help! Murder! Fire!" yelled the terrified Owl of the Remove.

Bob Cherry pressed a trigger. The next instant there was an empty click, and a roar of laughter from the rest of the Famous Five. The revolver—which Johnny Bull had purchased as a present for his Australian uncle—was unloaded!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter's face was a picture. In

his fright and confusion he had betrayed everything; and now, when he saw that there had been no danger, he nearly collapsed.

"Let us impart the bumpfulness to the fat beast," suggested Hurree Singh.

"No time!" replied Wharton briskly. "We must get off the mark at once. Better go on our bikes, I think, or we shall never do it!"

"What about a pass out of gates?" said Nugent.

"Blow the passes! This isn't a time when we can afford to stop and study rules and regulations. Buck up!"

So the Famous Five, their hearts beating fast with excitement, hurried round to the bicycle-shed.

Storm-clouds had gathered on the horizon, and the booming of the breakers on the shore came distinctly to the juniors' ears as they pushed their machines down to the school wall.

"We're booked for a fearful night," said Bob Cherry, scanning the heavens. "But if we have to fight our way through a howling blizzard we'll see this thing through!"

And Bob's determination found an answering echo in the hearts of the others. A long and tedious trail stretched before them; but before another day dawned they meant to see George Wingate back in his old place of honour as captain of Greyfriars.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Through Storm and Tempest!

"GEE! What a night!" panted Frank Nugent.

As the cyclists whizzed through the old-fashioned High Street of Friardale a deluge of rain suddenly descended from the heavens; and the wind, which had been growling ominously for some time, grew fiercer than ever.

It was a wild night, and the bicycles frequently skidded on their treacherous route.

"My rear-light's gone out!" gasped Harry Wharton, at length.

"And my ludicrous tyres are getting as flat as an esteemed pancake!" murmured Hurree Singh.

But Bob Cherry, who thundered "The Long, Long Trail" in a voice which rose above the roar of the wind, kept his comrades' spirits up; and although the rain lashed relentlessly into their faces, and it was anything but a joy-ride, they kept on keeping on, with the knowledge that success was practically certain to crown their efforts.

"Ride, you beggars, ride!" shouted Johnny Bull. "This is a race against time, and no mistake! They'll be counting up the votes in Big Hall presently. We want old Wingate to be in at the death."

"Yes, rather!"

Breathless and drenched, but resolute, the Famous Five swept on.

They had covered about eight miles of the hazardous journey when misfortune overcame Hurree Singh.

"My backful tyre is too badly punctured for me to continue ridefully," he said, with a rueful smile.

"Rotten!"

"Hard cheese, Inky!"

"We can't afford to waste time attempting to mend hopeless punctures," said Harry Wharton. "Inky'll have to push his jigger all the way back to Greyfriars. There's no help for it. It's beastly bad luck, because we shall be a man short if it comes to a scrap."

"I can ride on your esteemed step behindfully," said the nabob hopefully.

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"So you can, old scout. I didn't think of that. Leave your jigger in the next village, and we'll jog along somehow."

How the Famous Five managed that memorable ride they never knew. Time and again the fierce gusts of wind nearly sent machines and riders into the ditch; and once their progress was checked by a huge tree which had blown down right across the roadway, and which Johnny Bull, who led the way, only just noticed in time.

Then, dimly in the distance, the bleak summit of Highdown Heath towered against the sky. It was an ideal spot for a summer-time picnic, but it was anything but ideal now. The summit was a wind-swept waste, both desolate and uninviting.

"This is where we chuck in our mit," said Bob Cherry, at length, when they came to the foot of the hill. "We shall have to climb now as if our giddy lives depended upon it! Let's leave our bikes in this shed. Anybody know the time?"

Nugent, who possessed a glow-watch, gave a ready answer.

"Just gone seven."

"Then we shall be too late for the election, even if we find old Wingate!"

"Never say die!" said Harry Wharton, dismounting from his machine.

The juniors placed their bicycles in a disused shed near by, and then commenced the ascent.

The way was dark and treacherous, and it required no small measure of pluck and endurance to scale that height.

But, drenched and weary though they were, no one gave a hint of throwing up the sponge. Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull were quiet but resolute; Hurree Singh murmured an Indian serenade as he leapt up the slope; and Frank Nugent and Bob Cherry were positively cheerful. They chafed each other as merrily as nigger-minstrels, and even when Bob Cherry nearly lost his footing and pitched into a six-foot hole he remained cheerful.

"At last!" panted Harry Wharton.

He stood upon the crest of the great hill, shaking himself like a drenched terrier.

"I fail to observefully see the esteemed caravan," said Hurree Singh.

"It's not here," said Nugent, peering into the darkness. "Supposing Bunter was rotting?"

"Not he!" said Bob Cherry. "He was frightened out of his skin when I covered him with that revolver, and told the honest truth for once. But—but there's no caravan here, all the same."

The juniors glanced at each other dolefully, their spirits damped by this discovery. After a Spartan ride of twenty miles, and a strenuous fight with the conflicting elements, they seemed no nearer their goal than when they had begun.

"Shall we chuck it?" said Nugent.

Harry Wharton turned upon the speaker almost fiercely.

"Yes, we'll chuck it all right," he said, "when we've found Wingate!"

"But he's not here!"

"Oh, don't start raising difficulties!" said Harry. "It's pretty obvious what's happened. They've shifted the blessed caravan down into the valley for shelter. We'll find it, if we have to hunt till Doomsday!"

After that there was nothing more to be said. The searchers threw themselves heart and soul into the task of tracking the caravan, and their efforts were presently rewarded.

There, nestling in the valley, was the thing they sought. It was a gipsy caravan of the usual type—stationary by the hillside.

At a whispered word from Wharton, the juniors crept up to the caravan on all-fours, like Red Indians. They could

see a faint light at the entrance, which proved to be the glow of Ned Jolly's pipe. Ned was leaning against the door of his little grey home, smoking and chatting with another scoundrel, who looked formidable enough, even though his features could not be defined in the darkness.

"Are there only two?" whispered Bob Cherry.

"Hope so," murmured Harry Wharton. "If there are more, we shall have to face the music, that's all. Are you fellows ready?"

"The readyfulness is terrific!"

"All serene, then! On the ball!"

And then, in the teeth of the storm, the Famous Five rushed to the attack, and soon a storm of a vastly different character was raging.

Taken completely by surprise, Ned Jolly and his confederate put up a poor show. Given the advantages of broad daylight and a timely warning they would have proved more than a match even for five sturdy juniors. But in the circumstances they were beaten at the first hurdle.

Ned Jolly received the full benefit of a smashing straight left from Bob Cherry, and muttered a word not to be found in any dictionary. The next instant he rolled over in the rain-soaked grass, and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull promptly sat upon him. Ned's part in the fight was over.

Harry Wharton, loyally backed up by Nugent and Hurree Singh, soon dealt with the other ruffian, who lashed out wildly in the darkness, and missed the target every time. When, after a few moments of futile fighting, he shared the fate of Ned Jolly, the Famous Five became aware for the first time of the presence of a third person.

"Bravo, kids!"

It was Wingate's voice, and the welcome sound caused a ringing cheer to be sent up by the rescuers.

"Good old Wingate!" roared Bob Cherry. "Are you all right, old man?"

"Quite all right, thanks! I'm strung up in here, though, and one of you will have to let me loose."

"That's your job, Inky," said Harry Wharton. "Franky and I will look after this beauty. Untie old Wingate, and bring along plenty of rope, so that we can settle the hash of this precious pair!"

Hurree Singh leapt up into the caravan, and in a moment more George Wingate was restored to freedom.

Then Ned Jolly and his accomplice were bound hand and foot in such a manner that escape was impossible.

"What shall we do with 'em, Wingate?" asked Harry Wharton.

"The police-station's the best place for them!" replied Wingate. "They've given me a pretty thin time of it, and I haven't much sympathy to waste on 'em!"

"Don't say that, mister!" groaned Ned Jolly. "It wasn't us wot done it! Master Loder, up at the school, ran the show. We was only odd-job men, so to speak."

"So it was Loder," said Wingate thoughtfully. "My hat! This is pretty steep, even for him. What was his motive?"

"To bag the captaincy, of course," said Nugent. "And he's going great guns, too. It's a toss-up between Loder and Courtney, and the election's taking place this very night. With five of us absent Loder's pretty sure to romp home, but his triumph will be jolly short-lived, I'm thinking!"

"Hear, hear!" said Johnny Bull. "Now, the question is—how can we haul these prize-fighting ratters along?"

"On second thoughts, we'd better

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leave them where they are," said Wingate. "They must take their chance of getting collared."

"Untie us, then, gov'nor!" moaned Ned Jolly's companion.

"No jolly fear! Just you stay where you are, and brood on your past! We'll leave you to repent at leisure."

And the Greyfriars party struck off down the hillside.

The storm had abated a good deal, but the juniors were already fagged out, and the prospect of biking back was scarcely enticing.

"We'd better make tracks for the nearest village, and see if we can rake up a car," said Harry Wharton. "We can come along and rescue our bikes to-morrow."

"All serene!"

The proprietor of the nearest motor-garage was very chary at first about hiring out his solitary car, but Wingate talked him round, and after a brief delay the captain of Greyfriars and his rescuers were speeding along the country lanes.

None of the occupants of the car spoke for some time. They were recounting in their minds the thrilling events of the evening—events which had not yet reached their climax.

Then Wingate broke the silence.

"Look here, you kids," he said. "I ought not to be asking favours of you. The boot should be on the other foot. But the fact is, I want to swear you to secrecy about something."

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "We'll be as mum as mice!"

"Well, it's just this," said Wingate. "I want you to promise to say nothing whatever about Loder's connection with this affair."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Harry Wharton in amazement. "Surely, you're going to have the cad shown up, Wingate?"

Wingate shook his head.

"I'll deal with him myself," he said quietly. "Now, will you promise?"

"Yes," said the Famous Five, with one voice.

"You can tell the Head," said Wingate—"or, rather, I shall tell him myself—what a ripping show you put up to-night, in the face of a beastly storm. But if he should ask you who engineered the kidnapping business, you must lie low and say nothing. Twig?"

"Rather!"

And the car bounded on through the wind-swept lanes, bearing George Wingate from captivity to freedom, and from darkness into light!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

As It Was In the Beginning!

BIG HALL was packed. Seniors and juniors alike were caught up in a wave of intense excitement. For it was election night—a night on which the whole future of Greyfriars seemed to hinge.

In the ranks of the Sixth Gerald Loder and Arthur Courtney sat side by side. The former was smiling, as if in anticipation of coming triumph. As for Courtney, he was looking pale and harassed, and trying to drive from his mind the horrible nightmare of Greyfriars under the rule of Loder.

Coker of the Fifth looked radiantly happy. He was too obtuse to see how feeble his chances were.

Deep down in Coker's heart was a feeling that the majority of the fellows would

rally round at the last moment, and give him their votes, despite their recent ridicule. And so Coker waxed exceedingly joyful.

In the Remove all was chaos and consternation. With the Famous Five absent the bottom seemed to be knocked out of the whole thing.

It was certainly a glorious moment for such fellows as Skinner and Bolsover; but the staunch band of supporters who intended voting for Courtney felt the situation acutely.

With the Famous Five present the election would be a near thing. But in their absence it looked a dead cert for Loder. Those five votes were likely to make all the difference between victory and a defeat.

"It's rotten!" growled Vernon-Smith. "Where can the silly asses have got to? Has there been foul play, I wonder?"

"Give it up," said Dick Penfold. "Looks as if our side's booked for a licking. I agree with you, Smithy. It's putrid!"

When Dr. Locke rustled in the excitement grew, and the Head let it continue unchecked. Election nights at Greyfriars were very few and far between, and it would be as well to let the fellows derive as much enjoyment from the occasion as possible.

A couple of prefects distributed the ballot-papers, and called the names of the three candidates, to make sure they were present.

Suddenly Peter Todd stood up in his place in the Remove.

"Well, Todd?" said the Head kindly.

"Excuse me, sir, but I think the election ought to be postponed."

"Sit down, you cheeky young sweep!" exclaimed Loder. "I'll jolly well—"

"Silence, Loder!" rapped out the Head. "Now, Todd, pray explain yourself."

"Five fellows are absent, sir—Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, Bull, and Singh."

Dr. Locke shrugged his shoulders.

"Then they are absent entirely on their own responsibility," he said. "I cannot hold up the election because they do not choose to get here in time."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Skinner. "That's the stuff to give 'em!"

Peter Todd's appeal had failed; and the election was to proceed. The triumphant smile returned to Loder's lips.

Half an hour was allowed for the ballot-papers to be filled in; but most of them were finished long before that time had elapsed, the fellows having made up their minds beforehand.

When the papers had been handed in, Mr. Quelch assisted the Head in the scrutiny.

The moments that followed were moments of the highest tension. One question alone was on the lips of everybody:

Who had won?

Presently Mr. Quelch stepped down from the dais, and the Head looked up, his eyes commanding silence.

"The votes have been duly scrutinised," he announced, "and it is now my pleasure to make the result of the election known."

There was a breathless hush.

"Walker's claims to the captaincy, as you all know, are void. As for the candidates who still remain, Horace Coker of the Fifth Form has gained five votes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Roars of laughter arose from all sides. Coker had pictured himself as cock of the walk, ruling Greyfriars with a rod of iron. And this was the end of his ambition!

Coker's face was a study. Potter, Greene, and three more of his imme-

diolate cronies, were the only people in the school who deemed it worth while to vote for him.

But the laughter, though loud, was not prolonged. The fellows were burning to know whether the premier honours had gone to Loder or Courtney.

"Arthur Courtney of the Sixth Form," the Head went on, "has received one hundred and fifteen votes."

"Bravo!"

"Good old Courtney!"

"And Gerald Loder, of the same Form, has gained one hundred and twenty votes—"

"Oh!"

"And is the winner of the election. I have great pleasure, therefore, in announcing that the captain of Greyfriars is—"

"George Wingate!"

The words ran out clear and distinct from the back of the hall.

For a moment the school sat stunned. Then, turning in their places, the fellows began vaguely to realise what had happened.

Wingate was in the doorway, and he himself had finished the Head's sentence for him. Behind him were the Famous Five, with faces beaming like full moons.

"Three cheers for Wingate!" shouted Vernon-Smith, in an ecstasy. "He's found! My hat! Isn't it stunning?"

And the cheering which went up from the assembled throng was, as Hurreo Singh described it afterwards, "truly terrific!"

As for Gerald Loder, he was in a state of the wildest fear and frenzy. A cold perspiration broke out on his brow.

Had his dastardly scheme been discovered? And, if so, would Wingate give him away?

The thought was terrible. Just when all his vainglorious hopes were on the eve of realisation Wingate had turned up! Small wonder that Loder gritted his teeth in helpless rage.

"Wingate!" gasped the Head faintly. "Can—can this be possible?"

Wingate advanced down the centre of the hall, and came to a halt before the Head.

"I will explain what happened, sir, as briefly as possible," he said. "On my return from the recent football-match with St. Jim's, I was set upon outside Friardale Station, and forcibly taken off by a couple of roughs."

Loder caught his breath. It looked as if the dreaded climax was coming!

"Until this evening, sir," the captain of Greyfriars went on, "I was kept a prisoner, many miles from here, in a gipsy caravan. How long I should have remained there I don't know, had not these juniors"—he indicated Harry Wharton & Co.—"discovered my whereabouts and rescued me."

"Oh, well played!" burst out Mark Linley delightedly.

"Trust the Famous Five to be on the spot!" grinned Vernon-Smith.

"This is indeed remarkable, Wingate," said Dr. Locke. "It seems to belong to fiction rather than fact. You are to be heartily commended, Wharton, for pursuing your quest to a successful end. How did you get on the track?"

"Oh, we put in some detective work, sir!" said Bob Cherry modestly. "It was nothing much."

"Nothing? Why, my dear boys, you have achieved a most singular triumph! In the circumstances, of course, the recent election will be declared void, and George Wingate will resume his old position in the school!"

"Hurrah!"

Deafening cheers went up on Wingate's behalf, and the old rafters rang again and again.

Courtney, dashing up from his place, gripped his old chum's hand warmly; but as for Loder, he was feeling sick and stunned. The whole world seemed to be spinning round him.

But there was one thing he failed to understand. Why had not Wingate or one of the juniors given him away? It was amazing!

Like one in a dream Loder passed out of Big Hall, leaving Wingate in the centre of a vast throng of fellows, who were mistaking his hands for pump-handles.

For upwards of an hour the end of the Sixth, with all his dreams tumbling about his ears, sat in his study. He was too dispirited even to light a cigarette.

What troubled him was the suspense. Wingate must know that Loder had been the prime mover in the kidnapping affair; yet he had said nothing to the Head.

And why?

Loder was soon to learn. There came a rap at the door, and Wingate himself entered.

"Well?" said Loder, rather hoarsely.

The captain of Greyfriars stood with

his back to the mantelpiece, and fixed his eye upon the fellow whom he could have expelled with a word.

"Look here, Loder," he said quietly, "I've had full details of the part you played in this business, and it stamps you a bigger blackguard than I ever imagined you to be! You're a thundering cad, Loder!"

"I admit it," said Loder, with dry lips. "And now, I s'pose, you're going to turn and crush me? Why couldn't you have done it at once, in Hall, without keeping me in this rotten suspense?"

"I'm not going to crush you, Loder."

"What! You don't—you can't mean that!" exclaimed Loder incoherently.

"I do mean it. And I'll tell you why. Some time ago you proved that you weren't all bad, by performing an action for which I shall ever be grateful to you. You fished my young brother out of the river. But for you he'd have been a goner. And it's because of this debt I owe you in connection with that affair that I can't bring myself to report you now. But, mark my words, if ever I catch you out in a shady scheme of this sort again, I sha'n't hold my hand!

You'll have to pay the piper! I hope you understand that?"

"Fully," said Loder.

And then, moving towards Wingate, he held out his hand.

"You're a brick!" he faltered. "This is awfully good of you, Wingate! I don't know that you'd care to shake hands with me, after what's happened, but—"

"Put it there!" said Wingate promptly. "It's not my way to bear malice."

The revelry and rejoicing were kept up till a very late hour; and in Study No. 1 five brimming glasses of ginger-pop were lifted with one accord, Bob Cherry voicing the views of his comrades when he said:

"Here's to old Wingate, and long may he reign! Drink up, you merry bounders! The best man wins!"

(Don't miss "THE GREYFRIARS CHRISTMAS - PARTY!"—next Monday's grand double-length story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

No. 48.—Miss CLARA TREVLYN:

MARJORIE HAZELDENE is always "Marjorie" to her close friends at Greyfriars, and Phyllis Howell is usually "Phyllis"; but Clara Trevlyn is almost always "Miss Clara."

Why? Well, it is not an easy thing to explain. It may be that they have never felt Clara to be quite such a chum as the other two. Phyllis Howell, though they have not known her as long, has more of the boy in her. Marjorie is as distinctly feminine as Clara, but in a different way. She has much more sympathy, a much greater leaning to the side of mercy. Miss Clara is capable of being vindictive where Marjorie would certainly forgive. One can imagine circumstances in which Clara might be rather cattish. Marjorie could never be that.

But Miss Clara is a good sort—one of the best! She does not really despise boys in general, you know, though she may pretend to do so. If Cliff House saw nothing of the Remove for a whole term, one fancies Miss Clara would find it even duller than Marjorie and Phyllis would.

She does not like Peter Hazeldene, for she is very fond of Marjorie, and Marjorie's brother offends her by his instability and the manner in which he treats his sister. There is no doubt about Hazel's being fond of Marjorie. But it is the kind of selfish fondness which does not much consider the feelings of its object. He leans too much on Marjorie, and that does not meet with Clara's approval.

One doubts whether the young lady quite appreciates Harry Wharton at his real value. But Squiff suits her, and so does Johnny Bull, and so, in his good days, does the Bounder. For Miss Clara prefers her male friends to be quite without any feminine weakness. She wants them to look at things from a standpoint other than her own, though she may turn up her pretty little nose—which has already a slight tendency to aspire skyward—when they state their views.

Miss Clara affects a slangy form of speech. She does not always get her expressions right; but she can generally manage to shock Marjorie, who is not quite as modern a girl as she is. "Buck up!"—"Buzz off!"—"dog's age"—and the like are never on Marjorie's lips, but often on Clara's.

On the whole, one would say that Miss Clara was rather more inclined to be flirtatious than any of her friends. She does not want fellows to be spooney; sitting and holding hands, kissing, waist-clasping, and all that sort of thing are not in her line. But the harmless chaff that has a tendency to the flirtatious is not objectionable to her. When she is a few years older she will

probably dangle many scalps at her girdle before coming across "Mr. Right," whereas Marjorie is one of those for whom there is only one man in the world who matters in that way—no other who can ever be more than a friend.

When Cliff House met the Remove at cricket Miss Clara was the best bowler on her side. One fears that it was no more than being the best of a poor lot, for really there are lots of things about the summer game that Clara Trevlyn does not know. When she talks about kicking goals in the



cricket-field, and keeping wicket at footer, she is only stringing her auditors; but "l.b.w." is a sealed mystery to her, and she certainly could not give a lucid explanation of what "offside" means. It does not matter much; she will have no need to know these things. At hockey, though no duffer, she falls below the high standard set by Marjorie and Phyllis and their new friend, Philippa Derwent. One can get shrewd raps at hockey; and gentle Marjorie has far less fear of pain than Clara.

Clara has a turn for sarcasm. You may remember what she said about poor Alonzo, who was really too much for her limited patience. She was of opinion that if Lozy did not upset somebody he would feel that

he had wasted a day. It was not quite fair, for who could be more chagrined and utterly repentant than Alonzo always is when his efforts to be helpful and obliging have ended in disaster? When Miss Wilhelmina Limburger, the stout German girl, whom Cliff House knows no more, still ate on—one must not say gorged in the case of a young lady, though there really was more than a touch of the Bunter about Wilhelmina—at the tea-shop at the Point when all the rest had finished, Clara said, "Go it—we'll time you!" On that occasion Harry Wharton, under strong pressure of circumstances, had departed from his principles, and had ordered what he had not the money to pay for. Every mouthful Wilhelmina swallowed was running Harry deeper into debt! Fortunately he found a friend in need, and the waiter, who had grown suspicious, got the amount of the bill after all.

And Clara is outspoken. Not often does she let herself go about Hazel, for she knows that any criticism of him hurts Marjorie. But when she does there is no half-heartedness in her methods. In one of his petty tempers against Wharton, Hazel had managed to make it an absolute impossibility to play him in the Form team in a match which the girls had arranged to come and see; and he wanted them to stay away because he was not playing. "If he were my brother," said Miss Clara, "I should box his ears!" And it might have done him good, too, though one would not be too sure of that. Hazel is a difficult fellow to size up.

Miss Clara asserted herself with effect when the Cliff House girls put in a short spell at Greyfriars. She was quite, quite sure that second fiddle was the instrument suited to mere boys when girls were about. She surprised Mr. Quelch—it was Clara, if one remembers aright, who characterised that grave and reverend seigneur as "an old dear"! It was complimentary, and yet one does not wonder that Mr. Quelch found it embarrassing.

Clara was a leading actor in the great packing-case wheeze, of course. Later she was in the plot to get Trumper & Co. to hold the snow fort for Cliff House against Greyfriars. Marjorie assented to that scheme with some doubt; it was Cliff House who had challenged the Remove, not Court-field. But Clara had no doubt at all.

Do you remember when she gave Billy Bunter a taste of the dog-whip? It served him well right, and Clara could never stand Bunter. Has he ever claimed that she is gone on him? It would be humorous to witness Clara's wrath if any such claim came to her ears.

She cannot bear Skinner and Snoop and Stott, either. She has no use at all for rotters. That is healthy enough; but perhaps she may sometimes confound weakness and waywardness with sheer wickedness, and there is a chance that she thinks Hazel worse than he is. For Marjorie's sake, let us hope so!

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

RATTY'S LITTLE MISTAKE!

By SIDNEY CLIVE.

I
SKIMPOLE of the Shell blinked into Tom Merry's study.

"Can you lend me a hammer, my dear Merry?" he asked.

"A which?" asked Tom Merry.

"A hammer. I think you have a hammer in your tool-chest," said Skimpole. "I require a hammer—a heavy one, if possible."

"Amateur carpentry?" asked Tom Merry, getting up to sort the hammer out of his tool-chest.

"No, my dear Merry. I simply require a hammer to smash a bottle."

"Wha-a-at?"

Tom Merry spun round to stare at Skimpole. Manners and Lowther left off their tea and stared, too.

Skimpole of the Shell was rather a queer fish. He was not very bright at lessons, but he understood everything that ended with "ism" or "ology." He believed in Socialism, Determinism, Evolution, and other queer things like that, and would talk about them by the yard. Skimpole was so scientific that nobody expected him to have any sense. Fellows were never very surprised at anything he said or did. But the Terrible Three were rather surprised this time.

"You want to borrow my hammer to smash a bottle?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yes, my dear Merry. A hammer would, in my opinion, be the most convenient implement to employ for that purpose. The amount of resistance in the glass of a gin-bottle is not sufficient to withstand the sudden impact of a hammer forcibly applied."

Skimpole always talks like that!

"A—a—a gin-bottle?" said Manners.

"Yes, my dear Manners."

"Skimmy," said Monty Lowther affectionately, "when your relations club together to buy you a strait-jacket, tell 'em I'll subscribe twopenny, will you?"

Skimpole turned his spectacles on Lowther, in surprise. His scientific brain was never known to grasp a joke.

"So far as my knowledge extends, Lowther, my relatives at present entertain no such intention," he replied. "Neither do I perceive any necessity for them to devote their financial resources to such an object."

"Fan me!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Look here, Skimmy," said Tom Merry. "I'd like to know what you're going to do with that hammer before I lend it to you. Whose gin-bottle are you going to smash?"

"Taggles'."

"Has Taggles asked you?"

"Not at all, my dear Merry! Taggles is at present wholly unconscious of my intention!"

"You're going to smash an empty bottle belonging to Taggles!" murmured Tom Merry, wondering whether Skimmy was quite right in the head.

"Not an empty bottle, my dear Merry. The bottle is at present full of gin."

Tom Merry jumped.

"Skimmy, you howling ass—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Manners and Lowther.

Skimpole blinked at them in surprise.

"You're going to play a trick on our merry porter?" shouted Lowther.

"You misapprehend me, Lowther. It is not a trick!" said Skimpole reprovingly. "I have neither the time nor the inclination for the perpetration of absurd jokes. I am going to do a patriotic deed. You are probably in possession of knowledge of the circumstance that this country is in a state of warfare with Germany—"

"I believe I've heard so," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Now, where did I hear that mentioned?"

"My dear fellow, it is common knowledge; you could see references to it in any newspaper," said Skimpole. "It is generally considered a matter of public interest, though I

have not had the time to give it much attention myself. However, we are now threatened with famine, owing to circumstances over which our politicians have no control, and while we are running short of necessary provender a considerable quantity of foodstuffs is being used in the manufacture of intoxicating liquor. I disapprove of this. I am therefore going to deprive Taggles of his gin, as a warning to him to pursue a more patriotic line of conduct. I regard it as a duty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing to laugh at, my dear fellows, I assure you. The existence of intoxicating liquor is a danger to the country at the present moment. As a patriot, I have no choice but to act as I have outlined. Have you found your hammer, Merry?"

Tom Merry chuckled.

"No, ass, and I'm not going to find it!" he said. "I'd advise you to leave Taggles' gin bottle alone!"

Skimpole shook his head.

"Impossible, my dear Merry. I regard it as a duty to procure the destruction of that dangerous poison. Taggles will be all the better for being deprived of it."

"Very likely! But—"

"There are no buts, when duty calls, my dear Merry! If you decline to lend me the hammer, I dare say Gore's cricket-bat will answer the purpose."

"Skimmy!" yelled Tom, as the genius of the Shell left the study. But Skimpole did not even look back. He was going to do his duty!

The Terrible Three grinned at one another. No doubt Skimmy was right in his theory that Taggles, the porter, would be better off without his gin. But what Taggles would say if Skimmy smashed his gin-bottle, with the gin in it, was a very interesting question. It was certain to be something blood-curdling.

II.

"THE silly ass ought to be stopped," said Manners, at last. "Taggles will complain to the Head."

"Let's get after him!" said Monty Lowther.

The Terrible Three left their tea unfinished, and went out after Skimmy. They were just in time to see him scuttle down the passage with Gore's cricket-bat under his arm.

"Skimmy!" shouted Tom Merry. "Stop!"

"Collar him!" shouted Lowther.

The Terrible Three rushed in pursuit.

Skimpole broke into a run. He couldn't understand why the junior wanted to stop him from doing his patriotic duty; but he was resolved that he wasn't going to be stopped.

He fairly flew down the stairs and out of the School House.

"After him!" gasped Manners.

The Terrible Three dashed out into the quad. Skimpole was scudding across the quad, and as it happened, by ill luck, Mr. Ratcliff was coming across from the New House.

Skimpole was too short-sighted to see him coming.

He rushed right into Mr. Ratcliff.

The New House master stopped dead, with a gasp, as Skimmy cannoned into him, and he gave an awful yell as Gore's bat dropped fairly on his foot.

"Yab! Oh!"

"Groogh!" gasped Skimpole, staggering back.

Mr. Ratcliff hopped on one leg, with pain and rage. The end of the bat had clumped on his favourite corn.

Skimmy hadn't much sense; but he had enough not to stay near Mr. Ratcliff just

then. He rushed on, leaving Gore's bat where it had fallen.

"Yow-ow-ow!" howled Mr. Ratcliff. "Boy!"

But Skimpole was gone.

The Terrible Three halted, trying not to smile.

"Merry! Manners! Lowther!" Mr. Ratcliff stuttered. "You—you are the cause of this! You—you were chasing that stupid boy! I shall report this to your House-master! Yow-ow!"

And Mr. Ratcliff, with a deadly look, hopped on towards the School House.

"Oh, my hat!" said Lowther.

"Where's that idiot Skimpole?" growled Tom Merry.

"He's gone into the lodge!"

"Oh, the ass!"

The chums of the Shell hurried on to Taggles' lodge. The door was open, and they saw Skimpole inside. They saw Taggles come out of the back room, too, and glare at Skimpole, who had taken the gin-bottle from the sideboard.

"Wotcher doin' with that there?" Taggles roared.

Skimpole blinked at him.

"My dear Taggles, your indulgence in intoxicating liquor during the continuance of hostilities is an action of an exceedingly unpatriotic character," he explained. "I purpose to destroy this dangerous liquid—Yaroooh!"

Skimpole dodged out as Taggles made a clutch at him.

He fairly flew out of the lodge, bottle in hand, with the enraged porter after him.

"My heye!" gasped Taggles. "I'll report yer! I'll skin yer—"

"Oh, dear!" gasped Skimpole, as he heard the porter close behind.

He dodged Taggles, and stumbled, and went over with a bump. The bottle crashed on the ground, and smashed into a dozen pieces, and Skimpole rolled in them, and fairly wallowed in gin.

"Oh, dear! Oh, crumbs! Oh!" splattered Skimpole.

Taggles was upon him in a second. If Tom Merry & Co. had not rushed in there would certainly have been some damage done. Tom held Taggles back, while his chums caught up Skimpole and rushed him away.

"Lemme gerrat him!" shrieked Taggles.

"Shush!" murmured Tom Merry. "He's only dotty, Taggy—"

"I'll report him—"

"Take it easy, old scout—we'll pay for the bottle," said Tom Merry soothingly. "We'll make it all right, Taggy!"

"He oughter be in a hasylum!" snorted Taggles; but he allowed himself to be placated, and went back, grumbling, into his lodge.

Tom Merry hurried after his chums and Skimpole. Skimpole was looking dazed. He had cut himself in two or three places on the broken bottle, and he was simply soaked in gin. The fumes of the horrible stuff made him quite sick and faint, and were making his head swim. He blinked dazedly at the three.

"You howling ass!" said Tom Merry. "You'd be reported to the Head, only I've undertaken to pay for the gin."

"Groogh!"

"What's the matter with you now?"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

Skimpole staggered against a tree.

"Dear me! I experience the most extraordinary sensation in the interior of my cranium!" he murmured. "Apparently the fumes of that vile, spirituous liquor have somewhat affected me! Groogh!"

"Come on, you silly ass!" growled Lowther. And they led Skimpole away to the School House. He was simply reeking with gin, and needed a change badly.

III.

"BOYS!"

Mr. Ratcliff was in the doorway of the School House. He had stopped there to nurse his corn again. As Skimpole came up the steps Ratty had a whiff of the gin, and it made him jump.

"Stop!" he thundered.

"Groogh!"

Ratty's eyes gleamed like steel as they were fixed on the juniors.

"Is it possible?" he gasped. "So that is why that wretched boy stumbled blindly into me in the quadrangle! Good heavens! Have I lived to see a junior of this school in a state of disgusting intoxication?"

"Oh, my hat!" stuttered Lowther.

Ratty's mistake was natural enough—for a suspicious man like Ratty. Skimpole looked very queer, and he smelt of gin in a way that was positively atrocious.

"If—if you please, sir—" began Tom Merry meekly.

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "Skimpole!"

"Groogh!"

"Answer me, boy!"

"Gug-gug!"

"Hopelessly intoxicated!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff. "This is no laughing matter, Lowther! How dare you laugh? This boy has been drinking—actually drinking! It is shocking—scandalous—disgraceful! And you were helping him into the House with the intention of concealing his disgusting state from discovery, I have not the slightest doubt. You are parties to his disgraceful conduct—accomplices!"

"But—"

"Silence! You may say anything you have to say before Dr. Holmes! Follow me! I will assist this boy, since he is incapable of walking."

Mr. Ratcliff grasped Skimpole by the shoulder, and marched him away to the Head's study. Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Tom.

They had to follow Mr. Ratcliff. That gentleman tapped at the Head's door, and marched Skimpole in, followed by the Terrible Three. Mr. Railton, the School House master, was in the study with the Head. Both of them stared when Ratty marched Skimpole in.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Dr. Holmes.

"What—what—"

"Dr. Holmes, I have to report this boy—a School House boy." Here Mr. Ratcliff gave the School House master a look. "I have to report him for being in a state of hopeless, helpless intoxication!"

"Mr. Ratcliff!"

"I am not surprised that you are shocked, sir. I have no doubt that Mr. Railton did not suspect that such things occurred among the boys under his charge!" said the New House master spitefully.

"Certainly I did not, and I do not attach the slightest importance to such a charge against one of my boys!" exclaimed Mr. Railton hotly.

"Look at the boy!" Mr. Ratcliff pointed a bony forefinger at Skimpole, who stood, swaying and blinking, in the middle of the room. "Can you say that you do not smell the disgusting liquor he has been imbibing? Sir, he simply reeks with it; it is even spilt over his clothes!"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head, aghast.

"Groogh!" said Skimpole.

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes were glittering like a cat's. This was a score such as he had never dreamed of over the School House master. A School House chap found tipsy in the quad. He felt that Mr. Railton would never get over that! In fact, Ratty was so pleased to score over Mr. Railton that he hadn't taken the trouble to make sure of his ground.

"Look at him!" he repeated. "These three boys were witnesses of his state. They were helping him into the House, to hide the result of his disgusting orgies!"

The Terrible Three grinned—they couldn't help it—at the idea of poor old Skimpole going in for orgies.

"And they regard it as a laughing matter!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "They are as depraved as Skimpole himself!"

The Head made a gesture.

"Skimpole!"

"Groogh! Gug-gug!"

"Bless my soul!" The Head sniffed. "The boy certainly smells of gin, and he does not seem able to speak clearly! This is terrible!"

"And Merry, Manners, and Lowther are parties to it," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I have not the slightest doubt that they are as guilty as Skimpole."

"Quite, sir," said Monty Lowther meekly.

"What? You admit it, Lowther?"

"Certainly, sir! We've drunk as much gin as Skimpole," said Lowther, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"You hear them, Dr. Holmes?"

"One moment!" said Mr. Railton, who was much keener than the New House master. "Are you confessing, Lowther, that you have been drinking intoxicants?"

"Oh, not at all, sir!" said Lowther calmly. "I mean that Skimpole hasn't been drinking any, sir."

"I thought so," said Mr. Railton, with a smile.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Ratcliff. "Sir, you see the state the boy is in. He cannot

even speak excepting in indistinct mutterings—"

"Groogh!"

"You hear him?"

"I—I feel s-s-sick!" gasped Skimpole, at last. "I—I groogh—gug-gug!"

"I should imagine so!" snapped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Merry, kindly explain to the Head what has happened," said Mr. Railton quietly.

"Certainly, sir!" said Tom Merry cheerfully. "Skimpole got an idea into his silly noddle—"

"What?"

"I—I mean his head, sir, that it was his duty as a patriot to stop intoxicating liquor being used in the school. So he collared Taggles' gin-bottle and smashed it. It got spilt over him. That's all, sir."

"Extraordinary!" murmured the Head, and Mr. Railton smiled.

Mr. Ratcliff's face was a study as he heard that simple explanation of his awful case against Skimpole.

Even the Head smiled now.

"I—I do not believe it!" stuttered Mr. Ratcliff. "This—this is mere subterfuge to— to save this wretched boy from expulsion—"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Mr. Railton sharply.

"Taggles will bear witness, if necessary, sir," said Tom Merry meekly.

"It is not necessary," said the Head. "Skimpole, you have acted in a foolish and unjustifiable manner, and I shall cane you. Hold out your hand!"

"Groogh!" said Skimpole.

Swish, swish!

"You will pay for the damage you have done," said the Head. "You may go!"

"Groogh! Under the circumstances, sir, I regard it as—groogh!—my duty to point out that—groogh—hoo—" Tom Merry & Co. dragged Skimpole out of the study before he could say any more.

Mr. Ratcliff followed them out without another word. If ever a man looked a complete and thorough idiot Ratty did at that moment. He had made a mountain out of a molehill, and his terrific accusation had melted away into nothing, and he knew that the Head and Mr. Railton were smiling as he closed the door. Ratty went back to the New House with a face like a Hun.

As for Skimpole, he went to the Shell dormitory, where he was somewhat unwell for an hour or two. The Terrible Three settled with Taggles. They felt that it had been worth it to see Mr. Ratcliff's face as he sneaked away after putting his foot in it so thoroughly!

THE END.

THE SAUCY SALLY.

By PETER TODD.

ALONZO wanted to tell this yarn, but I dislike trusting that unsophisticated youth with things of weighty moment.

Uncle Benjamin is a creature as full of ideas as some big eggs are of double yolks. Some foreign eggs have these. We know all we want about foreign yolks.

Uncle Benjamin said he hated caravanning. You got mixed up with your own shaving-water, and never had any comfort. I don't mix with shaving-water, I may say. So he wrote to me and Alonzo towards the end of the holidays, and said he liked to show the Young Idea (caps, please!) what life was like. What, he asked, did they know of Peckham who only Peckham knew? There would be a joke here about "Comin' thro' the Ryé," for anyone who was silly enough to make it. But I'm not. Uncle Benjamin had been a traveller in his own time, not being able to use other people's. He was fond of running across to Dieppe, and seeing the jumped-up waiter pouring out the hot coffee at the Gare Maritime in the pinky dawn after a storm-tossed night on the mighty deep.

But in these days of war Uncle Benjamin was not able to go careering off to Rome to see how the Romans lit their candles, and slipped into their trousers and togas, or to run over to Berlin to gather wool and see what a Spree was like. You can't do these things with a nasty-minded Kaiser on the ramp through Europe.

"I will give you two lads a tour through the Old Country." That was what Uncle Benjamin wrote.

I thought he meant in a motor-car, and wondered how he was going to manage about the stormy petrol.

I was wrong, as I found when Lonzy and I reached the house where Uncle Benjamin was hanging out. Uncle Benjamin, like Bob Cherry, is an inventor, and after supper he told us what he had been busy about.

"It's not exactly a Tank, my dear lads," he said, when he led us out into the yard after supper. "In many ways it is better than a Tank. Look at it!"

The yard was full of a big black thing, which looked rather like a tortoise which had had some of Mr. H. G. Wells' special boom-food.

"Peace hath her victories not less renowned than war," cooed Uncle Benjamin as Lonzy and I stared at the object.

"Oh!" was all Alonzo said.

"It's a Peace Tank," said Uncle Benjamin. "I have been busy at it all the summer. We are going travelling in it. We shall see Brighton, and Caledonia stern and wild, fit home for a poetic child, likewise the bogs and lakes of dear old Ireland. For it swims, and, safe inside, there is naught to fear from the giddy submarine."

"I do not quite appreciate the idea, I must admit, my dear Peter," murmured Lonzy, under his breath.

"I have no notion of swelling the profits of the avaricious railway companies," Uncle Benjamin pursued. "This fifty per cent. increase has cut me to the marrow. I would sooner buy a sixpenny scooter, and take the

lone trail with its aid, than pander to the greed of the carrying monopolies!"

Alonzo said he would be more than charmed to see the stern Caledonian Road, as Uncle Benjamin had mooted. If he was charmed he would be the first—except perhaps the merry old Kaiser, who used to keep his spies there on board wages. The Caledonian Road is lots of things, but it is not charming.

Uncle Benjamin said he should be starting in the morning. All the village had a start, too, when it saw us moving down the lane in our curious arrangement of wheels and sheet-iron. It was something between a pan-tchnicon and a heap of old scrap out of the Nine Elms Yards, where the train pulls up to show passengers the Battersea scenery.

Uncle Benjamin had taken Simpkins, the chap he called his body-servant. Simpkins had a wail eye, also a sad heart, due to being crossed in love. Some folks never know their luck!

We steered north, and Uncle Benjamin was full of pride. I wanted to warn him of it, but felt he mightn't like it if I did. He said this was a great day for England, and that in a short time most Englishmen would adopt the house on wheels rather than live in the same place with the same monotonous old cabbage-garden and back yard to look at.

We went snorting through the scenery. Simpkins cooked, attended to the engine, and dusted the drawing-room. We had several rooms, and a nice observatory at the end.

"There will be no more house-rent, Peter!" said Uncle Benjamin gleefully, as we took
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THE SAUCY SALLY!

(Continued from page 15.)

to the fields, and went tramping through a lot of corn and hop-gardens.

I cannot explain the mechanism, but Uncle Benjamin said he had patented the notion, and there was money in it.

He said a lot of things.

So did a farmer, who came running alongside. The farmer did not seem to like his land being walked over, but he had not a leg to stand on after we had passed over him.

"It's his own fault for daring to interfere with the scientific development of the country," said Uncle Benjamin, as we saw the nettled agriculturist picking himself out of the ooze of a ditch.

Well, we went on like that old chap Excelsior, or Excalibur, or something, and I could see that Uncle Benjamin was good for any adventures. He never had been a coward—not like that mean wretch Saulputty in the cheery poem, the chap who basely deserted the Boy on the Burning Deck. Casabianca stood it all right (he would have been a perfect ass to sit down, as things were) when Saulputty had fled.

Then something happened. We were steering straight for an oust-house, and then, just as Simpkins was dishing up the shepherd's pie, we biffed it!

Our Saucy Sally had legs, and she went on.

"That is one of the beauties of the contraption," said Uncle Benjamin. "You see, you leave your troubles behind."

Perhaps Simpkins was faulty at the wheel, but, anyway, the Saucy Sally was simply

wicked at taking corners—she mostly took them with her, which is unorthodox.

A policeman ran after us, and said he wanted our names and numbers, and where we were born, and why, or some rot like that, but want had to be his master. Uncle Benjamin said this was a non-stop run to the Lakes, and it did not matter about little things. He said that bold pioneers were always misunderstood at the start, but that the day would come.

We camped for the night in a meadow, and the way the sheep scuttled when we settled down was pretty to see. A man in a gaberdine too large for him came and looked at us, and seemed sort of fascinated by the bit of a cottage which was hanging on our hind gear, but he did not stop.

"These poor countryfolks are very benighted," said Uncle Benjamin, as he shaved himself in the morning. "They little know what potentialities of progress are locked up in this roomy conveyance. We have been too long slaves to the dull tyrant convention, Peter, my boy!"

I was longing for breakfast when we were hailed from the port-side by a red-faced chap on a fiery chestnut.

"What the blazes do you mean by damaging my sheep?" he asked.

He said this to me. I called Uncle Benjamin, thinking he might know the answer. But Uncle Benjamin merely told Simpkins to put on full steam, and away we went, with the merry old equestrian prancing alongside of us like an escort.

Then he gave it up, and fell away behind. You can't keep level with a Saucy Sally when she sniffs the cattle from afar. It was a beautiful morning. We swept on across country in fine style.

"Roads! What are roads?" exclaimed Uncle Benjamin, helping himself to a third rasher.

"They are things to walk on, uncle," I said politely.

I will say it was pretty country, but not quite as pretty after we had done with it, and somehow the people seemed to get more and more savage in their manners as we pushed on.

"We are but waking them up, Peter, my dear lad," said Uncle Benjamin. "This is the march of the higher civilisation. Now, just see how we take that wood."

Well, we certainly did take a good slice of the wood with us. I don't know what the lord of the manor would say. There were chunks of ground clinging to the Saucy Sally, almost enough to establish a small estate somewhere, and—

[EDITORIAL NOTE.—At this stage Peter, usually lucid in style, is over-inclined to be flippant as to the privileges of personal property, becomes hopelessly involved. His story is a dream—a Wells-Verne dream, with a touch of Dan Leno and Wilkie Bard!

He relates, with some air of truth, how the Saucy Sally headed due north and "fetched up" the moors. He also refers to the growing hostility of the country people, which culminated in the craft being surrounded in a lonely district and attacked.

He is still more hazy when he speaks of a headlong flight after the Saucy Sally had plunged into a sheet of water. He describes, with painstaking detail, how he rescued his uncle and Alonzo, and then went back for Simpkins. He tells of a furtive tramp back home, in which they were buoyed up with the hope that they could not be traced. Personally, however, I don't believe the Saucy Sally ever really existed, although, as is well known, Mr. Benjamin Todd is a fervent believer in the introduction of houses which can be shifted from place to place in accordance with the residents' desire for change of air and scene.—H. W.]

EDITORIAL CHAT.

For Next Monday :

OUR GREAT EXTRA-SPECIAL CHRISTMAS NUMBER!

For details see below.

A READER'S MAGAZINE.

Cecil J. Price, of 2, Delaval Road, Whitley Bay, Northumberland, wants me to give his little paper, "The Scouts' Own," a notice in this column, and I do so with pleasure.

But first I should like to point out to readers generally that it is merely foolish to expect any amateur magazine to compete in size and attractiveness with papers such as the MAGNET and "Gem." The smaller the circulation of a paper, the smaller the paper must be if it is to pay expenses. There are limits to the size of a paper of the very biggest circulation. Publishers are not like the Irishman who lost a halfpenny on each article he sold, but made big profits through selling such a number!

Our friend Price's magazine consists of eight pages and a pink cover, each page a little over 8 by 5 inches. It is well printed in the same type as the short stories at the end of the MAGNET are set in. And I really think that it is the best value at the price of any amateur journal I have seen lately. I know something about what printing costs, you see. Some of my readers who have written to me complaining of the smallness of fellow-readers' attempts in this line evidently don't.

The price is twopence. There is an Editorial page there are some short articles, and there is a school story which occupies three and a half pages. You can read the whole issue in a few minutes. But it is absolutely useless for anyone to buy these amateur papers to read as one reads a popular journal with a big circulation. They are not meant for that. They are to amuse and help a little friendly circle of would-be writers; and in doing that they fulfil a useful purpose.

I do not recommend "The Scouts' Own" to those who grumble because the MAGNET has only 16 pages. They would call it "a swindle," which it emphatically is not. But I do recommend it to those genuinely interested in amateur journalism. Price will send a specimen copy for 2½d.

MORE GRUMBLES.

It is not a Disgusted Coleman this time. It is a reader who is quite civil and very keen, yet who manages to get about as far wrong in a short letter as well may be, and who does not give me the chance of answering him by post. After all that I have said on that score, a demand for an answer in these pages is distinctly off. But I am answering, as his grumbles may be of interest to others.

"Why should the footlines be cut out?" he asks. And, he says, "There is plenty of room for them on the pages."

He is wrong. The size of the page is not the size of the forme in which the type goes, and we are using this forme to the last possible line. As the dear Coleman might say, "Fronti nulla fides."

"Could we not manage to have a coloured cover every week like other periodicals?" We couldn't. We dropped the coloured covers because we couldn't. And very few people miss them. What do they matter?

"After the war will the MAGNET and 'Gem' be 28 pages again?" Can't say. Our tame prophet has joined up, or is on Dartmoor with the conchs, or has got into the House of Commons—or something! Anyway, I have lost track of him. The head commissioner assures me that he is not hiding in the coal-cellars; and the cashier says he no longer rolls up on Fridays for his salary. We have an astrologer on the premises—but that's another story, and I don't believe his stories; and I'm no prophet myself.

Seriously, how can anyone be expected to say what will happen after the war? No one knows how far the present prices will be maintained. Not in my lifetime do I look

to see things as cheap again as they were in July, 1914.

"Why not cut out altogether the 'Extras,' and have a full page of Editorial Chat, with the illustration at the top, as we used to?"

My hat! I simply dare not cut out story-matter for the benefit of my Chat! Think of the names I should be called! My dear fellow, half of you don't read the Chat, and half the other half disagree with pretty much all I say in it. And, personally, I don't remember the day when there was a full page of Chat. Those were easier-going days than these, the days of the 32 pages, and the Chat was given a full page, but I cannot recall its filling that page.

Never mind! This correspondent means well, I am sure.

NEXT WEEK!

GREAT CHRISTMAS NUMBER!

Price Twopence.

Contents:

THE GREYFRIARS CHRISTMAS PARTY!—A double-length complete story, by FRANK RICHARDS.

THE GREYFRIARS WHO'S WHO?—A compendium of information about the characters in the stories.

THE GHOST OF WHARTON LODGE!—By FRANK RICHARDS.

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DON'T MISS IT!

Your Editor